

British Theatre Guide

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A Midsummer Night's Dream

William Shakespeare, re-imagined for anyone aged 6 and over
Regents Park Open Air Theatre
(2008)

Re-imagined it might be, but they are still using the original text, and this scaled down version of *The Dream* is a wonderful way to introduce young children to Shakespeare. In the open air, away from the confines of the classroom, and with the visual aspect in front of them, it makes the text much more accessible, and with its scheduling mostly during term time it has attracted visits from many school parties. Just the same, I would think that aiming for understanding by six year olds is a bit ambitious. My young guests were aged nine and ten and, although they wanted no explanations to interrupt their concentration on the performance, they did admit afterwards that they had not fully understood all that was going on. If I had had the opportunity, taking them through a synopsis of the story beforehand would have been a help. Following the plot was not made easy with only six characters constantly doubling up on parts, and a quick explanation before each scene could well have clarified the action. For instance, it was not immediately obvious that Puck was supposed to be invisible when he is teasing the mortals, and why is he putting the love potion in Demetrius eyes?

All the same everyone, even the very young children, remained (for the most part) silent and engrossed, and that included the school parties not usually noted for their tranquillity.

The introduction caught their attention from the beginning, especially Bottoms name which started a few giggles (schoolground humour never changes!) and the characters (the Mechanicals) were introduced, including three boys from the audience a very confident Wall, an amused Moonshine, and a very regal Duke of Athens who read his lines extremely well. Needless to say these children received more enthusiastic applause than the actors never work with children or animals they say!

Rachael Cannings set is a large, vaguely Victorian nursery, and the characters have become mechanical toys, often emerging from the huge toybox centre stage. Demetrius and Lysander are now toy soldiers in very smart uniforms, one blue and one red, which is a help for identification, and their movements are jerky with limbs still working uselessly when they fall over. Hermia (Laura Donnelly) is a pristine and pretty musical box ballerina, and Helena (Annette McLaughlin) a rag doll, flopping dejectedly when unloved.

A hardworking, jovial and lively Bottom (Dale Superville) keeps the fun going with his antics, and a blue-haired jester-like Puck is performed athletically by Matthew Hart, occasionally joining Ben Joiners Oberon in a beautifully balletic interweaving dance. The fight between rivals Helena and Hermia was enjoyed by the children something they could really relate to.

Dominic Leclercs production goes with a swing, and at only seventy minutes long there is no time to be bored.

Well worth seeing in fact more than once, and I hope they will repeat the experiment another year but a little explanation beforehand for children who are not familiar with the story would be advisable.

Reviewer: [Sheila Connor](#)