

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## A Midsummer Night's Dream

William Shakespeare

London Theatre Company

Bridge Theatre

2 June–23 August 2025

Nicholas Hytner's acclaimed [2019 production of \*A Midsummer Night's Dream\*](#) returns to The Bridge in this spirited revival. It is a promenade production with the stalls audience roaming the flat floor in which multiple sections will rise to make action visible, played out on a variety of bedsteads to emphasise the dream, as fairies cavort acrobatically overhead on hanging silk swings. Bunny Christie's design works wonderfully, its technical challenges brilliantly handled by the stage crew.

It opens with an emphasis on the dark side of the story. A chorus and thumping drumbeats precede victorious Duke Theseus's arrival, while defeated Amazonian Queen Hippolyta is paraded as prisoner in a glass cell, underlining the duress under which he will marry her.

In moments, we are deep into the story as Nina Cassells's Hermia is threatened with death or life as a celibate votary if she won't abandon Lysander, the man she loves, and marry Demetrius, the man whom her father has chosen. Her dowdy grey dress and headscarf (like those worn by the nun-like chorus) hint at the *Handmaid's Tale*-like status of women in Theseus' Athens.

Switching from the court crowd to common folk, amateur actors preparing a play to offer the Duke on his wedding day, there is a change of mood to cheery chaps led by Felicity Montagu's gentle Mrs Quince with enthusiastic support from Emmanuel Akwafo's overeager Bottom. He's a handful to handle: he wants to do everything, but he's a big softie (and very funny); in no time, he has won the whole audience over.

Out in the forest and into the fairy world, we are back to confrontation: King Oberon and Queen Titania are fighting over who shall have a young orphan boy in their retinue. Their discord has upset the seasons. It is now not unusual to mirror the antagonisms in Athens and in fairyland by doubling the roles of Theseus / Oberon and Hippolyta / Titania, but Hytner's production goes further. Theseus may set the scene with "Ill met by moonlight," but all the lines relevant to the boy and the use of the love drug that follows are switched, and Puck is no longer attendant on Oberon but has Titania as mistress. It *she* who now makes him in love with "a monster" and also suggests Hippolyta taking revenge upon Theseus, with more justification than Oberon had. If you know the play, I don't need to explain; if you don't, I won't spoil the fun when this gets royal fairy and Bottom into both bed and a bubble bath.

Human lovers Hermia (Nina Cassells) and Lysander (Divesh Subaskaran) flee through the forest to escape Athenian law, trailed by Demetrius (Paul Adeyefa) with his former fiancée, tormented Helena (Lily Simplkiss), at his heels. It is now Titania who instructs Puck to interfere by applying the love drug to re-pair them (with disastrous results that have to be righted) and David Moorst is an engagingly magical Puck, very much his own man, holding back, tongue-in-cheek bragging of his high speed before disappearing suddenly.

All four young lovers are played with great spirit. The townsmen put their play on with such sincerity, you laugh at them lovingly. The regal pair are royally confrontational—though rather than being embarrassingly demeaned, Oberon seems to have enjoyed the experience.

With a company some of whom are reprising their roles from 2019, some making their professional stage debuts, the story is clearly told and the verse well delivered, though perhaps a little more lyricism could have been allowed without sounding cliché. There are some modern interjections that a purist may not like, but they are audience friendly and work as theatre in a production that brings action, acrobatics, lighting and music, dance, broad gesture and intimate exchanges together, integrating all its elements with immaculate timing. Despite the story's dark shadows, its a show full of laughter. Who knows how these fictional lives will turn out? But their audience go home happy.

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)