



Society : Beaufort Players  
Production : A Midsummer Night's Dream  
Date : 18 July 2014  
Venue : The Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, Ealing W5 3EB  
Report by : Zena Wigram (District 2)

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## Report

Beaufort Players undertook a challenge in tackling Shakespeare, and particularly one with the option (of which you took full advantage) of quite so many cast members. And how lovely to see so many people taking part! The play was a most appropriate choice for very nearly midsummer's night, and on one of the hottest nights of the year. Possibly the heat affected the pace, with much of the verse being more measured than sprightly, but the cast didn't otherwise seem to notice, although my guess is that some of them were very hot in their beautiful costumes, particularly those in wigs.

'Dream' is one of the plays I know best, having done it both at school and at drama college, and I was looking forward to seeing your interpretation. Director **Jane Quill** made a wise choice in sticking to tradition almost entirely, other than having almost no dual-casting, which I expect meant that she, Assistant Director **Rachel Thorn**, and Producers **Tania Hunt** and **Alan Robinson** had their work cut out with the logistics of rehearsing so long and complex a play.

The directing team had clearly spent time with the actors working on their emotional reactions to the situations, and everyone was believably involved and responded well to one another with some super acting and clearly-drawn relationships. Unfortunately, not enough of the rehearsals had overlapped – and perhaps this is where dual-casting would have been useful - because too few of the actors had taken note of the (deliberate) mistakes in Quince's prologue. The joke there is that Shakespeare makes him stop in the wrong places, and therefore his verse doesn't make sense. "Our true intent is. All for your delight we are not here. That you should here repent you the actors are at hand" etc. (Theseus even points it out: "periods in the midst of sentences".) But this joke fell flat because so many other cast members made the same mistake during the rest of the play, ignoring the punctuation and pausing at the end of each line instead of only where Shakespeare (who knew what he was doing) put commas and full stops. As a result, some sentences didn't really make sense (which I think was the reason for some of the missed lines), and scenes often lacked pace. Despite this, it was an enjoyable evening and one audience member told me this was the first time he'd 'really understood' the play, which I think is a very pleasing compliment.

With so big a cast I'm afraid I can't give detailed notes on everyone's performance, so please forgive me if I'm brief.

**Séin Ó Muineacháin** was a lovely commanding Theseus, getting meaning from every line, and clearly attracted to his Hippolyta, **Jayne Bowman**, though I felt she could have looked a bit happier at the prospect of getting married, and she had a tendency to shuffle about and to pull at her skirt: if you've got great legs, just show them off! To lead their ladies, Elizabethan gentlemen held their hands low, just in front of and to the side of their hips, and allowed their ladies to place their hands on top: the unattractive and uncomfortable 'chicken-wing' look is a modern interpretation. I admired the quick cueing in of **Chris Burns** as crusty Egeus – he was also a convincing Quince later, with a good contrast in character. Later Philostrate (**Eileen Laird**) gave a lovely clear introduction to the play, full of meaning and with super facial expressions.

**Gemma Robinson** was a very attractive Hermia, and I felt she really knew what each line meant as she spoke it, which was lovely – though perhaps she could have been a little more miserable at the discussion with Lysander of her three distasteful alternatives. Her awakening from her nightmare was splendid. Her handsome Lysander (**Craig McCrindle**) gave a very solid performance, despite one or two minor glitches – "Do you marry him" is a sarcastic put-down, not a question! – and a slight tendency to shuffle his feet on the grass. **Thomas Cobb** (Demetrius) had a great line in sulk and was suitably anti-Helena, though I felt he could have worked on a bigger contrast in his manner after the potion: he was still a trifle aggressive even in his adoration. Presumably it is because he is tall that he has a tendency to stand with his head poked

forward, which isn't as attractive as standing straight could be, and also not very helpful for supporting his voice. The two boys did some super physical struggling over Helena, at the same time keeping themselves appropriately static and fairly quiet so they didn't pull focus from the girls – my congratulations. **Veronica O'Sullivan** (Helena) worked hard on her emotions and I particularly liked her soliloquy straight out to the audience. She struggled with the poetry, though, and needed to work on getting more light and shade in her voice. Try not to hold on to your skirt unless you really need to – clutching it to you makes you look a bit awkward.

Quince led a party of suitably clumsy mechanicals, who were lots of fun throughout, and particularly enjoyable in their play. Flute / Thisbe (**Russell Gillman**) had a splendid falsetto and ham responses, and there was good work by Snug (**Elaine O'Sullivan**), Snout (**William Baldwin**) and Starveling (**June Burgess** with a great tantrum as Moon). Just bear in mind you need to speak more loudly when talking upstage - particularly when moving on the squeaky rostra. **Matthew Tylanakis** gave a clever and well thought through performance as Bottom, with super physical humour and a lovely accent. There were great reactions from the other mechanicals to his alternative head (which was a really excellent prop/costume – I'm not sure who to credit) and congratulations to him for managing to talk so clearly through the new teeth.

The fairy's entrance in Act II scene 1, with the very rapid tripping rhythms leading into the poetry of Puck's explanation of Oberon and Titania's disagreement, is supposed to be a tremendous contrast to Quince and Bottom's clumsy prose at the end of Act I. Sharing out that introductory verse between all the fairies, with gaps between each line, meant their entrance was no more fluent than the previous scene. Some of the fairies do indeed have very little to say, and I assume the idea was to even things out a bit, but I wasn't convinced by the result. All the fairies **Sophie Buda** (Peaseblossom), **Sarah Turner** (Cobweb), **Eileen Laird** (Moth) looked delightfully unusual while still very attractive, and gave super reactions to Bottom and Titania, particularly **Diana Dishley's** disapproving **Mustardseed**. Their song to Titania was well sung (there was one particularly fine voice – was that Eileen?), with a lovely balance from the backing track.

**Kate Martin** made a suitably mischievous Puck with a touch of malevolence and a delightfully complex relationship with Oberon. I enjoyed the physical comedy, though it was a pity that there tended to be a move, then a line, then a move, rather than speaking through the gyrations to keep the pace going. Pace was also a problem with Titania; **Amy Jackson** was tremendously attractive and had lovely clear delivery, but she tended to pause at the end of each line, which wasn't always appropriate. Oberon (**Piers Garnham**) looked tremendous, and sounded super, giving a really sure and solid understanding of the text, although he (very) occasionally swallowed the ends of lines. When he wasn't speaking he was still totally engaged in what he was watching.

Oberon and Titania's dance was clever, but I felt the Bergomast dance started out as an amusing joke but then lasted far too long, particularly at the end of a long evening: 16 bars would have been quite enough.

**Tania Hunt** had sourced appropriate props throughout. Make-up by **Julie Stevens**, **Rosanna Nicholls** and **Jessica Short** was generally good: in particular, Oberon and Puck looked amazing, and I really liked Thisbe's clumsy face, but the very dark extended eyeliner was not enormously flattering to Gemma (and didn't match Veronica's), and her eyebrows needed to be darker to match her wig. Veronica desperately needed some hair grips to hold the very distracting hair back from over her face.

The production looked fabulous throughout – full credit to **Alan Robinson**, **Thomas Cobb** and **the Beaufort Builders** for the beautiful fairy glade, with a casual (but sturdy) boulder at the side, and several useful acting levels, grassed over and lit in different ways for different scenes. It was a shame that some of the rostra creaked when people moved on them, which was a bit distracting. The banks for Hermia and Lysander were far enough apart, visible during their dialogue, while leaving room for performance around them, and there was clever use of the heights for the girls' argument. The cast made good use of all the acting space, and the multiple entrances and exits both backstage and through the audience (though I wasn't sure why the mechanicals dispersed at the end of Act I to meet again later by all going off the same way). However, it was a shame that when people ran noisily off through the audience they kept going quite so loudly – after a few paces and the start of the next line they needed to quieten down rather than continue the elephantine thumping all the way out of the auditorium. The fairy lights, the twinkling shadows and the multiple different places in the forest were excellently managed by **Pete Balls**. Talented **Krystyna Kobiak** had made a wide variety of attractive and well-fitting costumes, with super contrasts between the Athenians, the mechanicals and the fairies, and tremendously clever 'torn' duplicate costumes after the four lovers' adventures. **Roger Dishley** managed amusing sound effects for Puck, and an eclectic and enjoyable

assortment of music beforehand and in the interval. The cleanly laid out programme by **Russell Gillman** and **Krystyna Kobiak** had matching cast photos and a really beautiful front cover.

Thank you for your hospitality, for the welcome from **Roger Dishley** and **Elaine O'Sullivan**, and for an enjoyable evening. I look forward to Thomas Cobb's culinary offering in November.

Zena Wigram  
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