



American Players Theatre

# A Midsummer Night's Dream

HOT SHEET

## A Note to Readers:

Welcome to American Players Theatre's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Hot Sheet. The Hot Sheet is designed for students, educators and patrons who would like to know more about an APT production but have little time to prepare beforehand. The Hot Sheet is neither a scholarly paper nor a Cliff Notes version of the play. Rather, it is an easy guide to the story, themes and characters of the 2008 APT production. See you up the hill!

## Our Story Begins...

The city of Athens prepares for the wedding of its great hero, Theseus, to the Amazon queen Hippolyta. Dances are to be danced and plays to be performed, but wealthy Egeus is having trouble with his daughter Hermia. She is in love with the wrong man, Lysander, and Egeus has promised her to Demetrius. Brought before Duke Theseus, she is commanded to marry Demetrius. If she will



Carlín Johnson, Carey Cannon, Kelsi Wermuth, Christopher Peltier and Emily Simoness

(Photo by Zane Williams)



Michael Huftile as Oberon  
(Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Oberon**

**"I know a bank where the wild  
thyme blows."**

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not, she must face death or the nunnery. Resolved to love Lysander, Hermia plots with him to run away from Athens. They share their plans with Hermia's best friend Helena, who is hopelessly in love with Demetrius. Helena decides to tell Demetrius of Hermia's flight and as he follows Hermia, she follows him.

Meanwhile, carpenter Quince and his fellow workmen begin casting a play to enter in the wedding day competition. It will be dramatization of the classical story, "Pyramus and Thisby".

They decide to rehearse in the forest, the same forest into which our young lovers have escaped. In that forest, Oberon is king of the fairies and Titania is queen. Under the watery moonlight they fight for custody of a young orphan, born in India to a mortal attendant of Titania's. Their brawling disturbs the universe, but Titania will not give the boy up. Oberon vows revenge. He orders his henchman Puck to find a magic flower that can cause a sleeping person to "madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees."

The play proceeds from there guided and misguided by love and magic.

# ALLUSIONS

Although APT's production is placed in contemporary Greece, Shakespeare set his tale in Greece before the Trojan War. Most of the characters in the play speak at some point about Greek myths and legends. Here are a few of the references:

**“Pyramus and Thisby”:** Originally found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. These young lovers lived in ancient Babylon in adjoining homes. Their parents forbid the relationship forcing the couple to plan an elopement. Thisby arrived at the rendezvous but was frightened away by a lion. Upon his arrival, Pyramus discovered Thisby's veil stained with blood. Assuming the worst, he killed himself in his grief. Thisby returned, found Pyramus dying and killed herself.

**Hercules (Heracles, “Ercles”):** This son of Jupiter (Zeus) was known for his extraordinary strength, displayed in the many physical challenges found in his twelve labors. He also had bouts of madness, so his role, for Elizabethans, invited overacting.

**Daphne and Apollo:** In the Greek myth, Apollo falls in love with Daphne and plans to have her despite her reluctance. She is pursued by him through the woods until, as he is about to attack her, she prays for relief and is turned into a laurel tree.

**Hero and Leander:** (“... like Limander, am I trusty still.”) Flute probably means Leander, a romantic hero who swam the Hellespont to meet his lover Hero. He drowned on one of these nightly swims. In this passage Flute pairs “Limander” with Helen rather than Hero. It is possible that he may have meant Helen of Troy.

**The Man in the Moon:** Some say it is a man leaning on a fork (on which he is carrying a bundle of sticks picked up on a Sunday). Another translation says that the man is Cain with his dog and thorn bush (the bush symbolizes the thorns and briars of the fall from grace, and the dog represents the foul fiend.). Finally, according to Hermetic tradition, the lantern, cloak and staff are the three symbols of initiation. They are needed to guide souls past the temptation of illusory fires by the roadside, so that they may go straight to the higher goal.

# THEMES

**Love's Difficulty:** “The course of true love never did run smooth.” The theme of love's difficulty is often explored through the motif of love out of balance—romantic situations in which a disparity or inequality interferes with the harmony of a relationship. The prime instance of this imbalance is the asymmetrical love among the four young Athenians—a simple numeric imbalance in which two men love the same woman. One woman has too many suitors, the other has none. The play has strong potential for a traditional outcome and the plot is in many ways based on a quest for internal balance; that is, when the lovers' tangle resolves itself into symmetrical pairings, the traditional happy ending will have been achieved. Somewhat similarly, in the relationship of Titania and Oberon, an imbalance arises out of the fact that Oberon's coveting of Titania's Indian boy outweighs his love for her. Later Titania's passion for the ass-headed Bottom represents an imbalance of appearance and nature: Titania is beautiful and graceful, while Bottom is clumsy and grotesque.

**Dreams:** As the title suggests, dreams are an important theme in the play. This sense of illusion and gauzy fragility is crucial to the atmosphere of the play as it helps render the play a fantastical experience rather than a heavy drama. Dreams are linked to the bizarre, magical mishaps in the forest. Hippolyta's first words in the play evidence the prevalence of dreams: “Four days will quickly steep themselves night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time...” The theme of dreaming recurs predominantly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which they are involved: “I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream,” says Bottom. Lysander says “My lord, I shall reply amazedly, / Half sleep, half waking; but as yet, I swear, / I cannot truly say how I came here.” Lysander and Bottom are unable to fathom the magical happenings that have affected them as anything but the result of slumber. Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams, in events occurring without explanation, in time losing its normal sense of flow and the impossible occurring as a matter of course; he seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, “If we shadows have offended / Think but this, and all is mended, / That you have but slumber'd here / While these visions did appear. / And this weak and idle theme, / No more yielding but a dream...”

## 2008 Production Photos



Marcus Truschinski as Puck and Michael Huftile as Oberon  
(Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Puck and Oberon**  
"My gentle Puck, come hither..."



Jonathan Smoots as Bottom and Carey Cannon as Titania  
(Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Bottom and Titania**  
"...I love thee."



(Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Ensemble**  
"Stir up the Athenian youth to merriment."



Matt Schwader as Lysander and Tiffany Scott as Hermia  
(Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Lysander and Hermia**  
"The course of true love never did run smooth."



(Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Fairies, Bottom and Titania**  
"I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee."



Steve Haggard as Demetrius and Carrie A. Coon as Helena (Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Demetrius and Helena**  
"I am sick when I do look on thee."



Brian Mani, Paul Hurley, Jonathan Smoots, David Daniel, Darragh Kennan and Andrew Truschinski as The Mechanicals  
(Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**The Mechanicals**  
"Is all our company here?"



Steve Haggard as Demetrius, Michael Huftile as Oberon, Matt Schwader as Lysander and Tiffany Scott as Hermia (Photo by Carissa Dixon)

**Demetrius, Lysander and Hermia as Oberon watches**  
"Get you gone you dwarf!"

# MANY THANKS!

**APT would like to thank the following for making our program possible:**

Alliant Energy Foundation, Inc. • Chuck & Ronnie Jones APT Children's Fund at the Madison Community Foundation • Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission with additional funds from the American Girl's Fund for Children, the Evjue Foundation & the Overture Foundation • IKI Manufacturing, Inc. • Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company • Sauk County Arts, Humanities Historic Preservation Committee • The Evjue Foundation, Inc.,  
the Charitable Arm of the Capital Times

## AND OUR MAJOR EDUCATION SPONSORS



**The Alexander Charitable Foundation – Leslie and Patrick Arendt**



This project was also supported in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.



American Players Theatre's production is part of Shakespeare in American Communities: Shakespeare for a New Generation, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.  
Contributions as of July 25, 2008