

TheRep (Capital Repertory). Albany, NY  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare.  
Directed by Maggie Mancinelli-Cahill.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

*“The course of true love never did run smooth.”*

Director Maggie Mancinelli-Cahill has turned one of William Shakespeare’s funniest plays into an hysterical comedy that turns the play, and us, up on its heads with our heels in the air. This is not painful; it is joyous. Unexpectedly she has reversed some of the play’s motives and characters who ordinarily are affected one way now affect others instead. With a handsome cast, an elegant set, a major moon and some very modern music she pulls the play, with its 16th century language smack into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, pausing to enlighten us with Marx Brothers tactics and broad-based buffoonery. Can you tell I liked it? I more than liked it. I loved it!



Joshua DeMarco, Kyle Garvin, Oliver Wadsworth, Shayne Cameris (understudy),  
and Gabrielle Bazinet Douglas; Photo: Doug Liebig

There are four pairs of lovers. Basically. Hermia and Lysander are in love. Helena loves Demetrius who wants Hermia. Theseus loves Hippolyta who he has captured in war. Titania loves Oberon but is upset with him over a disputed child they both want to claim. In addition Pyramus

and Thisbe fall in love and fairy royalty adores an ass, a donkey who doesn't realize he is an ass. That's a whole heap of lovers in one single play. But love isn't everything in this "Dream."



Ellen Cribbs & Raya Malcolm;  
Photo: Doug Liebig



Ellen Cribbs & Ethan Botwick;  
Photo: Doug Liebig.

Instead there is the social drama: workmen, common and ordinary, who fancy themselves an acting troupe fit to play classic drama at a royal wedding. There are rival groups of fairies out to defeat one another using magic and mystery. There is an Amazon Queen trying not to assume defeat at the hands of a Greek ruler. And there is a flower, a flower with power to possess minds.



Yvonne Perry and Chauncy Thomas; Photo: Doug Liebig

Had enough description to intrigue you? Well, let me tell you one more thing: Mancinelli-Cahill had brought into this major melange of mustique a new element: sexual reversal. Literally, everything old is new again.

The company of players is superb. Yvonne Perry and Chauncy Thomas play Hippolyta and Theseus and also Titania and Oberon. They each make both roles work although Perry's very strong Titania is her best work and Thomas' Theseus is more powerful than his Oberon.. David Girard delivers a strong and single-minded Egeus, Hermia's father, and also plays Snug's lion with the finest gentle roar I have ever heard.



Forefront: Chauncy Thomas, Raya Malcolm and David Girard  
Background: Josh DeMarco Yvonne Perry and Gabrielle Bazinet Douglas  
Photo: Doug Liebig

Oliver Wadsworth is the best Bottom since James Cagney, nuanced, over-bearing, ego driven and outrageously funny. When his Bottom offers to play all of the roles in the Mechanicals play it is clearly a sincere offer, one we assume he could actually deliver. As his friend and organizer, Peter Quince, the company has given us Kevin McGuire who makes the most of the role. His marvelous voice resonates and shakes the stage with authority. Flute, who

plays Thisbe is played beautifully by Jovan Davis whose height never gets in the way of his female impersonation. Taylor Hoffman is a terrific wall with a finely delivered monologue.

Robin Goodfellow, the fairy commonly called Puck, is performed by Kyle Garvin who does well with the role. If “puckish” is a descriptive you’re familiar with then you will understand Garvin’s performance in the role. The chorus of fairies all do well, particularly in their movement around Brian Prather’s beautiful and versatile sets.

The quartet of young lovers are the center of the play and they all give the play what it needs in spades. Raya Malcolm is a beautiful and dangerous Hermia. This woman can most definitely act. As her rival and best friend Helena, Ellen Cribbs make a major impact in her role. She has a perfect mode of delivery of Shakespeare and makes every phrase as modern and immediate as possible. Ethan Botwick brings strong reality to Lysander and when, bewitched, he alters his affections he does it with a wonderful sense of honesty. Demetrius is played by Tamil Periasamy who brings a glamorous sense of character to the role. The hardest of the four young lovers to make real, he manages to show us the physical underneath the emotional and it works.

Maggie Mancinelli-Cahill has let her imagination take her and this production to many new places. Feminism, never intrusive but yet basic to her concept, forces the alterations to Shakespeare’s concept. Even with the shift, which comes about naturally, she still delivers the play the author wrote, just with a new vision, a new reality. She is aided by Prather’s setting, by the quirky costumes designed by Sera Bourgeau, wigs designed by Michael Dunn, sensitive lighting design by Shelby Loera and perfect sound design by Jane Shaw. There is enough dance to justify the fine talent of Freddy Ramirez and fight choreography by David Girard. A totally winning technical team and a great director deliver a perfectly swell production.

Capital Repertory Theatre rejuvenates one of the most over-produced Shakespeare plays just in time for his birthday and presents it in the most memorable fashion possible/ If you feel as I do, that you’ve seen it often enough, try it one more time, please. I’m very glad I did.

+ 04/19/2021 +

**A Midsummer Night’s Drean** plays at theRep, 251 N. Pearl Street, Albany, NY through May 7. For information and tickets call 518-346-6204 or go on line at [capitarep.org](http://capitarep.org).

