

A synopsis of the TNT /ADGE production of
Shakespeare's comedy
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
Directed by Paul Stebbings



The battle between the Amazons (women warriors) and the Greek men. Theseus, Duke of Athens, wins with the help of the mysterious supernatural figure of Puck. He captures the Amazon Queen, Hippolyta. She expects to die but Theseus releases her and offers her his hand in marriage.

The Court in Athens.

Duke Theseus longs for his marriage day, Hippolyta not as enthusiastic. Egeus enters, an old warrior and respected aristocrat. He is angry. His daughter, Hermia, refuses to marry the man he has chosen for her (Demetrius). Instead Hermia is in love with Lysander. Egeus presents the three young lovers to the Duke. Egeus demands that unless Hermia abandons Lysander and agrees to marry Demetrius she shall be killed.

This is the Law of Athens. Theseus admits that is the Law and says that Hermia must obey her father or die, or worse still become a Nun and never see another man. Hermia refuses to obey. She loves Lysander and she loves her. Demetrius tries to persuade her but nothing will change her mind. Lysander cannot understand why Egeus hates him, he is an aristocrat like Demetrius. He even tells Theseus that Demetrius has been engaged to one Helena, who loves him, but Demetrius has foolishly rejected Helena for the sake of Hermia.

Theseus gives Hermia and Lysander a few days to change their minds and leaves.

Alone now, Hermia and Lysander agree to a plan to run away from Athens and marry in secret. Helena arrives. She is an old friend of Hermia. Foolishly, Hermia tells Helena of her plan. Helena runs off to tell Demetrius and betray the young lovers. Hoping that this will make Demetrius grateful. Helena still loves Demetrius.

A house in Athens.

Mrs Quince (a drama teacher) has gathered together a group of amateur actors to present a play to celebrate Duke Theseus's marriage to the Amazon Queen. The actors are local craftsmen. They are all appalling actors but full of enthusiasm for their play: the tragic love story of "Pyramus and Thisby". (Very similar to Romeo and Juliet). The leading actor is called Bottom. He is full of self-importance and tries to take all the roles. But Quince is in charge as he wrote the play. Quince casts the play and tells the actors, Snug, Flute and Bottom, to meet him in the forest outside Athens for their next rehearsal.

A wood or forest near Athens.

Puck, the underground spirit - a type of Pan or minor devil, captures a fairy. The fairy tells him of the struggles and conflict in the fairy world. The King (Oberon) and Queen (Titania) of the Fairies are fighting over a beautiful Indian youth. The result of this fierce battle for possession is discord in Nature itself, with summer storms, floods and ruined farmland.

Titania and Oberon enter and argue. Titania storms off with the Indian boy and Oberon is left alone with his servant, Puck. Oberon wants revenge. He orders Puck to find a flower which has been charmed by Cupid (the boy god of Love). When crushed into the eye, this flower will make anyone fall madly in love with the first creature they see. Puck goes to fetch the flower. Titania will be the victim.

All the following scenes are in the wood until otherwise indicated.

Demetrius enters the Wood looking for Hermia and Lysander to stop them eloping and marrying in secret. He is followed by Helena who had hoped for some advantage. But Demetrius is just as determined to reject Helena as ever. They argue and Helena is humiliated. Demetrius loses his glasses. Oberon watching the scene is outraged at Demetrius's cruel and ungentlemanly behaviour. He resolves to punish Demetrius.

Puck returns with the flower. Oberon tells him to administer to Titania and Demetrius. He hopes that Demetrius will then fall in love with Helena and he will gain his revenge on Titania too.

Titania's forest home.

Titania sings and dances with the fairies and the Indian Boy. Puck steals up on her and presses the flower against her sleeping eyes. Then Puck sees Lysander and Hermia. The two lovers are lost in the wood. Exhausted they lie down and sleep at a modest distance from each other (despite Lysander's preference to sleeping closer together). Puck mistakes this modesty, and believing Lysander to be Demetrius smears the sleeping man's eyes with the magic flower. Helena stumbles across Lysander in the forest, he wakes and sees her. Falling madly in love with Helena. She is alarmed and confused at his behaviour and runs away, but he pursues her. Hermia is left alone, sleeping in the forest. She wakes and in a panic realises that her true love, Lysander, has gone. Is he dead? Killed by Demetrius or wild animals. She races off to search for him.

Quince and the actors rehearse the love tragedy in the forest. Bottom as usual is grabbing all the attention. Puck observes their rehearsal and is amazed how terrible it is. When Bottom goes behind a bush to prepare for an entrance as the character, Pyramus, Puck grabs him and uses magic to transform his head into that of a donkey (or ass). Bottom does not notice the change but the other actors do, and when he emerges from the bush they run away in terror from the half man half animal, Bottom.

Bottom staggers through the forest and singing to himself he wakes the Queen of the Fairies. Titania instantly falls madly in love with him. Puck is delighted with his fantastic revenge and reports back to Oberon that the plan is working better than could have been expected. The Queen of the Fairies is in love with a monstrous ass.

Titania and her fairies transport Bottom into a wonderland of delight.



Interval (Sometimes played without).

Meanwhile Demetrius is still in the forest and meets Hermia. Hermia is convinced that Demetrius has killed Lysander, Demetrius hates Lysander and wants Hermia. But Hermia rejects all his advances. Oberon, who has watched the scene, realises that Puck has charmed the wrong Athenian lover. To make amends Puck smears Demetrius' eyes with the love juice, hoping that when he wakes he will see Helena. Which is exactly what happens. Suddenly Demetrius and Lysander are both in love with Helena, not Hermia. Helena is amazed and believes neither of them, thinking it is a trick set up to humiliate her. Hermia enters. She is relieved that Lysander is not dead, then amazed and hurt when he says he no longer loves her.

The four of them chase through the forest. Their clothes are torn and their nerves frayed. Hermia tries to pick a fight with her old friend Helena and the two men are again rivals in love.

Oberon watches the scene and seeing love's confusion where he had planned only justice and happiness, tells Puck to prevent the aggressive lovers from hating each other and also remove the charm. His servant obeys the King. The exhausted lovers collapse and the spell is lifted.

Meanwhile Titania is entertaining her donkey headed lover in the depths of the dark forest.

But because he is half animal it is all a fantasy of her eyes, this union cannot work. Oberon sees her stupidity and takes pity, releasing her from the spell. Besides, now she is infatuated with Bottom she has forgotten the Indian boy, the object of their quarrel. This pity completes the chain of generosity and kindness with which Oberon cures the love sick world.

Theseus and Hippolyta are hunting in the forest. Their dogs are chosen for their fine voices rather than their hunting skills. They stumble on the sleeping lovers. They wake, unsure if they have dreamt. But the dream has changed them and now Lysander loves Hermia and Demetrius loves Helena. The world is in balance and in balanced love. Egeus protests that the law of Athens is against this union and demands his daughter's punishment. But Theseus sends him away. Neither a father nor a law can defeat true love.

Bottom too is released and his human head returned. He staggers into Quince's house. Quince, Snug and Flute were in despair. They thought the play would never go ahead as no one could replace their star performer, Bottom. But Bottom saves the day and returns to the cast. They complete their preparations to celebrate the Duke's marriage.

THE DUKE'S PALACE

The play is presented to pass the time between the wedding dinner and bed. It is a terrible play but charming and entertains the Duke and his new wife. The story of the play:

Pyramus and Thisby are in love. Their marriage is forbidden by their families, they can only meet in a garden divided by a wall. Through a small hole in that wall they have carried on their romance, only able to speak no touch. They run away, agreeing to meet at a tomb.

Thisby arrives at the tomb first and is attacked by a Lion. She runs off and escapes but not before dropping her coat, stained with her blood.

Pyramus arrives and thinks the coat proves that Thisby has been eaten by the lion. He kills himself. Thisby comes back and finds Pyramus dead and kills herself. The play is supposed to be tragic but is, of course, high comedy. At the same time the play warns Theseus and the lovers of the dangers of love. Their lives too could have ended in tragedy if Egeus or the Law were obeyed or they had all killed each other in the forest. (or even killed themselves as they often threatened to do). Love is so powerful and illogical that anything can happen.

But the play is only a play. The lovers are amused and distracted, night falls and the newly married couples go to bed. The fairies emerge, led by Oberon, and bless their unions in a dance of fertility and the desert blooms with flowers. Puck sweeps all before him and reminds the audience that it is all a play, a dream and that they are shadows.

"And so good night unto you all."



"I never knew Shakespeare could be so entertaining." CNN TV.

"Thanks to the intelligent direction and the faultless, sometimes tempestuous, sometimes touching ensemble, the use of the original version is easy to understand. Great applause from the audience for a great performance". Badische Zeitung

'Epic and ambitious work which stretches musicians and actors alike. TNT's complex structures and multi-layered symbolism often make great demands on the audience too; for while the company acknowledge the bland expectations of a screen saturated audience they make no intellectual or artistic allowances for it. They are always entertaining and, far from isolating themselves in obscure elitism, they connect with their audience in a most intimate and sensitive manner." *The Guardian (London)* on TNT theatre