

## **A Midsummer Night's Dream**

The Stage, 9 June 2010

Kevin Berry

Audacious thinking from Chris Monks has the cast for his A Midsummer Night's Dream dressed as if for a PG Wodehouse weekend romp, all white ties and flapper frocks. The fairy costumes having perhaps been found in a hamper by a family retainer. With another imaginative leap, Monks has the lords and ladies of Athens opening and closing proceedings with a fiery tango.

Partner dancing is a recurring motif in the confrontations between the four young lovers. The scene in which Helena (Florence Andrews) is eagerly wooed by both Lysander and Demetrius (Pete Ashmore and Kieran Buckeridge) is wonderfully inventive theatre. The reactions and physical entanglements are pure comic joy, and Naomi Said as the scorned Hermia is not to be messed with.

Attention to physicality and movement makes this a good looking production. Clare Corbett's Puck is ever lithe and quick, as if released from a bottle. She and Kraig Thornber's Oberon stop and start and steer the young lovers with emphatic gestures. Yet the feeling that things are out of kilter in and around Athens, that strange forces are at work, does take a while to register. Essential dialogue slips by, barely noticed.

Claude Close, always a welcome sight at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, makes as fine a Bottom as this reviewer has seen. His fellow Mechanicals are all vividly coloured.

The romantic and comic antics take place in an almost bare but richly lit garden. Jason Taylor's atmospheric lighting underscores the magic and the mystery and he creates enticing shadows.