

Faringdon Folly

Review: A Midsummer Night's Dream

A MIDSUMMER *Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare was performed in the grounds of Sudbury House Hotel; a joint venture between Faringdon Dramatic Society and the Faringdon Branch of the British Heart Foundation. The play has been described as 'Shakespeare's happiest comedy' and is particularly suited to performance out of doors. When fairies and sprites take an interest in human affairs confusion abounds. The rain was coming down quite steadily when I got there, but people were already there, seated ready for the performance, dressed in windcheaters and raincoats with blankets over their knees and holding umbrellas. Some were eating sandwiches, one couple had wine in plastic cups, and another had hot soup - perfect for the weather! Ten minutes or so after the start of Act One, the rain had stopped and the sun came out.

Director Carolyn Taylor set the play in the 1920s with the ladies in dresses and hats styled from that era, costumes by Lynda Bates, Joan Lee and Jeni Summerfield. The fairies' costumes looked like they had been crafted by leaves and flowers from the forest.

Lysander (Adrian Wells) and Hermia (Verity Roberts) determine to flee Athens and get married outside the reach of this harsh law. They tell Hermia's friend Helena (Karen Irving) their plan. Helena is in love with Demetrius (David Oakes) who is promised to Hermia, and tells him of the planned escape. They follow Hermia and Lysander into the wood, but Demetrius protests he loves only Hermia and tries to send Helena away.

Meanwhile a troop of rustic folk are planning an entertainment for Theseus' (Simon Wisbey) wedding. It is to be a play of the story of Pyramus and Thisby. They decide to go to the wood to rehearse.

In the wood, all is not well among the fairies. Oberon (Dominic Bullock) and Titania (Janie Eyre Brooks) the Fairy King and Queen are at odds because Titania has taken Oberon's favourite page to be her servant. Oberon plans his revenge with his henchman Puck (Debbie Lock), whom he sends to find a flower that contains the magic from Cupid's arrow and makes anyone fall in love with the first thing or person they see upon waking, if the juice is poured into their sleeping eyes. When Puck decides to be mischievous, what could possibly go wrong?

During the heaviest spell of rain Titania had her longest speech and she kept going and was word perfect; the fairy children were sitting on the soggy stage and still acting and reacting to Titania the way they had rehearsed - the fabulous fairies carried on and then the sun came out.

Well done to Carolyn as director, all the cast and crew. An excellent performance by all involved and my total respect to you all for keeping going when that rain got really, really heavy. Weather besides, I thoroughly enjoyed the play, and thanks to their excellent acting, I understood it (though I'm not much of a Shakespeare fan).

Review by A Spectator