

Flights of enchantment

Project in Motion's Midsummer Night's Dream is an aerial and terrestrial delight

Review by **David Salcido**

Las Cruces Bulletin

I have a confession to make. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is not my favorite Shakespearean play. In fact, it doesn't even fall into the top 10.

I know. Somebody revoke my Bard Card, but, before you do, please understand I am not the only thespian on the planet who sees this work as Shakespeare light. As comedies go, it's no "Taming Of the Shrew."

Which is probably why I am so elated that the latest incarnation of the bard's most famous comedy has been given a new lease on life via a brilliant production currently unfolding at The Gin, 403 N. Compress Road, home to one of the area's most ambitious and unconventional dance troupes, Project In Motion.

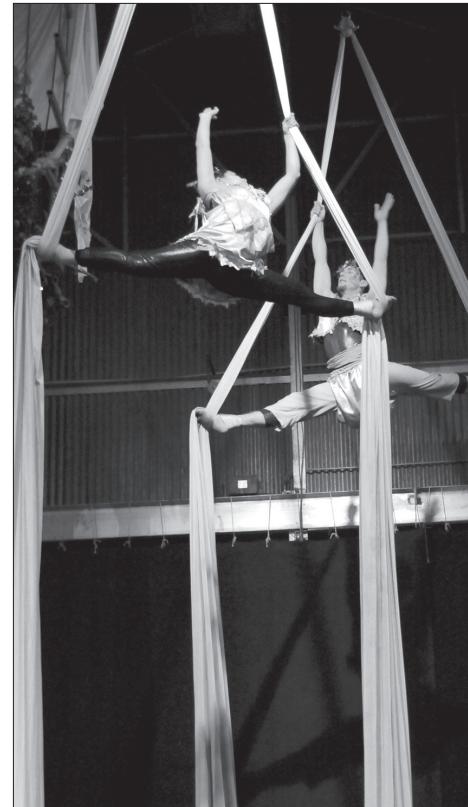
It is here that artistic director Hilary McDaniel-Douglas and guest director from Kansas State University, David Ollington, have re-imagined the tale of mischievous faeries, mercurial love and rude mechanicals into a non-stop promenade of magic, movement and merriment.

To begin with, casting key members of the aerial dance troupe in the faerie roles is so ingeniously obvious it borders on the sublime. From the pastoral opening scene to the giddy terpsichorean finale, each segment is seamless in its placement; almost as if the bard himself had envisioned the interludes that would lend the production a breathtaking and other-worldly quality.

One pas de deux in particular, featuring veteran members of the dance company Stephen Pohuski and Lauren Mendoza as the faeries Mustardseed and Peaseblossom, is so gracefully articulated, with intertwining ascents and gravity defying drops, that there are moments when you will believe these faeries have actually taken flight.

Combine these instances of aeronautical ease with a pitch perfect cast of terrestrial actors and you've got the makings of a resplendent performance that will not soon be forgotten. Eric Young, fiercely handsome and effortless in his delivery, is a formidable Oberon. As a counterpoint, Britney Stout's Titania is sultry, seductive and radiant, whether she is lounging in her faerie bower or floating gracefully to the stage for her tête-à-tête with the transformed Bottom, played to comic perfection by veteran actor David Edwards.

Edwards is backed by a capable group of shameless clowns who turn the more



Las Cruces Bulletin photos by Steve MacIntyre
Peaseblossom, played by Lauren Mendoza, and Mustardseed, played by Stephen Pohuski.

farcical moments in the play into a slapstick marathon. The moment when they actually perform the play within the play for the Duke of Athens and his courtesans is a delightful bit of staging that is so perfectly timed one wishes for a rewind button, just so it could be viewed again in order to catch all of the subtle nuances.

Mark Steffen's officious Peter Quince, Chris Rippel's stutteringly nervous Snout/Wall and Kyler Breed's over-the-top Flute/Thisbe are standouts, but Sam Schoenfeld's Snug and Jean-Luc Hester's Starveling shine as the much-maligned moon and reluctantly fierce lion.

The problematic moments of this play, for me, have always been those in which the lovers are prominently featured. As written, and usually acted, the young paramours are vain, mean-spirited and, let's face it, annoying. I usually find myself wishing these scenes would end so that we can get back to the fun stuff.

Let me just say that I have had that pre-conceived notion knocked askew by a quartet of acrobatic and entertaining young talents. William Zimmerman and Julian Alexander, as the warring suitors Lysander and Demetrius, perform each confrontation like a well-choreographed dance, which is exactly what is intended. They strut and preen, roll and cavort, from one face-off to the next, while never missing a verbal beat.

Claire Koleske and Megan Thompson are comely and a delight to watch, with Thompson's Helena – a role I usually despise for her unending whine – so capably crafted that one can't help rooting for the poor dear. A wholly unexpected display of gymnastic trust between Thompson, Zimmerman and Alexander is so artfully infused and refreshingly original that I may never look at that scene the same way again. For the first time in more than 40 years, I found myself thoroughly enjoying the young lovers' episodes.

I would be very remiss if I didn't mention young Alex Zolnerowich, who is outstanding



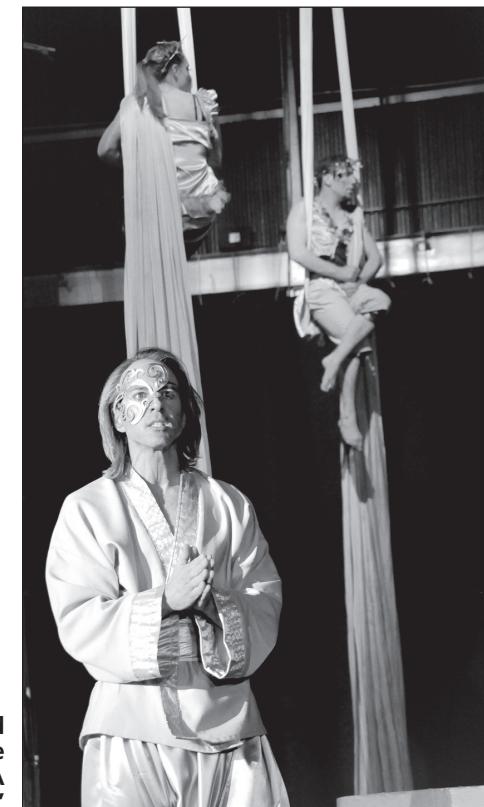
The fairies and the tiny fairies dance in the beginning of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," produced by Project in Motion, at the Gin Studios Sunday night, March 10.



Helena, played by Megan Thompson, Hermia, played by Claire Koleske and Lysander, played by William Zimmerman.

as the mischievous Puck. He gambols about the stage with a spritely bounce that is only made more effervescent by a boisterously infectious laugh. To discover that Zolnerowich had never even climbed a fabric until he arrived in Las Cruces from Manhattan two months before was a revelation. He holds his own alongside the aerialists, while his near-operatic pronouncements invoke exactly the kind of thrill one comes to expect from a strong and skillful Puck.

Because productions of William Shakespeare's works come and go, each with its own merits, it isn't often that my list of favorites will alter. This may have been one of those times. I liked this production so much, it's made me reevaluate my reasoning and that, in and of itself, gives it wings.



Oberon, king of the fairies, played by Eric Young, talks to the audience during a the performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Details

'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

When

7 p.m. Friday through Sunday
March 15-17

Where

The Gin Studios
430 N. Compress Road

Cost

\$10

Website

www.projectinmotion.com