"Dream" the night away with the Shakespeare Ensemble

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
MIT Shakespeare Ensemble.
In the Sala de Puerto Rico.
Remaining performances Nov. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

By BARBARA MASI

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he lunatic, the lover, and the poet are of imagination all compact. Silver moonlit nights, misty dreams half remembered, soft spirit whispers. Last night, I dreamt I saw MIT's Shakespeare Ensemble perform "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Director Derek Campbell's careful rework of several scenes and the clever transformation of fairies into Bottom's Players highlight the play's ambiguous line between dreams and reality. By making lines from the final act into the initial scenes, the audience is brought into the play by a different route than the usual procession of main characters. The play began with a fifth act scene in which Lysander tells Theseus of his dream. A fourth act scene followed, as a flashback: Theseus and Hippolyta, on their way to a hunt, discover the four lovers asleep in the woods, dreaming.

Repeating pieces of scenes from the beginning and end lend the play a circular movement with the disturbing feeling of a beginning and end lend the play a circular movement with the disturbing feeling of a recurring dream. A dream, that is, within Bill Fregosi's exquisitite set. Keeping with Ensemble tradition of absolute simplicity, Fregosi painted a forest of huge leaves and flowers which enveloped the actors in mystical hues of midnight blue and violet. Against this backdrop the sharp, geometric platforms of reality. Downstage was inhabited by silver-white costumed fairies, like sprites of the set, flush about like flies. They recede only when mortals come into view. Between scenes the fairies command the stage as if they had been there throughout, invisible to the mortals. And invisible to Bottom. In the Ensemble production, Nick Bottom (Oberon) strode through the woods talking to himself, it seems, about the play he is planning. But in Dream's text Bottom enters with his friends, Quince, Snout and company: here he is alone. Then one by one fairies appear. A hat plucked from air transforms the fairies into Quince (Bjorn Davis '89), Snug (Pat Gabridge '88), Flute (Joshua Lubarr '87), Snout (Anne La Flamme '88), and Starveling (Joseph Vander '89). The finest acting of the evening came from the unrestrained, inventive comedy of this group. The entry of Guiney's bold characterization of Bottom enlivened the show.

Carl Kraenzel '87 presented a cool, graceful King Oberon, and seemed quite in control of the text. Titania's (Andrea McGimsey '87) long speeches — sometimes an actor's nightmare — were lovely. As always, the Ensemble's fight scenes, this time among the four lovers, made for rich entertainment. The musical "landscaping," designed by Jane Coppock, wound its way through the evening: a tape of forest sounds, familiar music, and some exotic undefinables. You don't always hear of the background sounds, but they color every scene.

I have now seen Ensemble's most original interpretation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" two nights in a row and plan to go every night until it closes. I cannot think of a better way to dream away any evenings.

Carl Kraenzel '87 and Andrea McGimsey '87 as Oberon and Titania

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