

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Shakespeare's Globe, Wardour Castle Wednesday 26th May

“Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show, but wonder on till
truth make all things plain...”

Never has audience participation come as such a joyous shock. Some of the audience for A Midsummer Night's Dream at Old Wardour Castle on Wednesday were expecting a play with as much gravitas as merry solemnity. However, the Globe on Tour provided one of Shakespeare's most well-loved plays as a perfect blend of comic tragedy and tragic comedy. With the beautiful setting of the romantic 14th century ruined castle to play backdrop, fairies wearing tailcoats and masks and holding cigarette holders whilst wearing flashing LED wings played in a grove, whilst lovers Hermia (Hara Yannas) and Lysander (Mark Quarterly), Helena (Louise Ford) and Demetrius (Leon Williams) danced a merry spell under the influence of “Cupid's fiery shaft”. Oberon and Titania (Simon Merrels and Jasmine Hyde) teased out their quarrel with such aplomb that no mere mortal could resist their charm.

The Mechanicals had such a flair one couldn't help but laugh, which was emphasised by the “tedious brief scene“ with “tragic mirth” of their play set out for the Duke, and Bottom's (William Mannering) “dream that hath no bottom” – a heart rendering dream for all involved, full of jokes and braying. Bethan Walker who played Puck and Snug the joiner was a delight to watch; a saucy spirit decked out in sequins and an lion with a “gentle roar” she captivated the stage, and also the very ground beneath our feet! Dressed in cabaret style clothes, she weaved in and out of the audience ruffling a hair there, teasing out a smile here, and wandering as such Robin Goodfellow is wont to do. Walker's performance of “that shrewd and knavish sprite” was mischevious, lively and perfect. Complimenting the entire performance, and bringing out an achievement that anyone would be proud of.

When questioned, Mark Quarterly (Lysander/Francis Flute/Moth) called us a “warm audience” and praised Wardour Castle for its perfect setting, and though I must protest that we wouldn't have been so willing if their performance hadn't been so spectacular, I agree that the setting was just perfect, and our laughter rang out across the area, just to echo back at us, accompanied by bird song, as if to say “I'm laughing, aren't you?”

Charlotte Mortimer-Talman