

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Moonlight and mischief in Santa Cruz Shakespeare's delightful 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'



BY JANA MARCUS July 29, 2025

[Gift this article](#) [Email](#) [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#)



Santa Cruz Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a hilarious, crowd-pleasing comedy full of playful magic. This moonlit romp through love and mischief is a midsummer treat.

Santa Cruz Shakespeare's delightful new production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" leans into the play's riotous humor and fairyland trickery, inviting audiences to surrender to love's chaos for one deliciously strange night in the woods.

First performed around 1595, "Midsummer" has long been one of Shakespeare's most beloved works — thanks to its interwoven plots of romantic confusion as a magical, mysterious dream. It's a tale that reminds us how fragile and funny the line is between reason and desire — about the different ways love can manifest and its miscommunications — which is both the problem and the solution. Santa Cruz Shakespeare's production takes joy in every twist and turn of that journey.

The story begins in Athens, a city synonymous in the plot with law, logic, and order. A royal wedding between Duke Theseus and Queen Hippolyta is about to take place. But love, as always, complicates things. The Duke's daughter, young Hermia (Allie Pratt), wants to marry Lysander (Nick Rossi), but her father insists she marry Demetrius (Elliot Sagay). Trouble is, Demetrius is still in love with Hermia—while poor Helena (Lily Kops), Hermia's bestie, is hopelessly in love with Demetrius. In a bold move, Hermia and Lysander decide to elope into the forest. Helena spills the beans in hopes of winning Demetrius back, and before you know it, all four of them are chasing each other through the moonlit woods — a wild, unpredictable opposite of Athens—where identities blur, rules dissolve, and desire runs rampant.

What they don't know is that the forest isn't exactly empty. It's the domain of fairy royalty — Oberon (ML Roberts) and Titania (Paige Lindsey White) — locked in a magical lovers' spat of their own. Oberon enlists his mischief-making sidekick Puck (Justin Joung) to set things right, but Puck's love-potion antics only make everything messier.

And as if things weren't chaotic enough, a band of six well-meaning, but hilariously inept tradesmen — known as the Mechanicals — head into the same woods to rehearse a play for the Duke's wedding. Their earnest efforts quickly spiral into glorious, ridiculous mayhem.

Directed by Paul Mullins, "Midsummer" has many moving parts, and he keeps the storytelling crisp and the pacing brisk. Mullins draws clear emotional throughlines from Shakespeare's tangled web of characters, allowing each storyline room to unfold while maintaining momentum.

Among the lovers, Lily Kops as Helena gives us equal parts wounded, wild, and funny, while Nick Rossi's Lysander and Elliot Sagay's Demetrius add warmth and sincerity to the romantic chaos. But it's Allie Pratt as Hermia, who rounds out the quartet with a standout performance that is both hysterical and filled with fireball physicality. She is a force, with sharp comedic instincts, especially during the Act II skirmish of misplaced affections.

In the fairy realm, Justin Joung brings a lively, impish intelligence to Puck, anchoring the show's supernatural mischief. His physicality and timing add an extra layer of magic to every entrance and exit. Paige Lindsey White's Titania is majestic and sensual, with ML Roberts' Oberon offering a relaxed, irresistible charm (and a fantastic costume to boot!). Shelby Denise Smith (Peaseblossom), Alex Cook (Cobweb), Ciarra Stroud (Mustardseed), and Charlotte Boyce Munson (Moth) round out a sprightly and stylized fairy ensemble.



(Left to right) Shelby Smith (Peaseblossom), Kavin Pugazhenth (Moth), ML Roberts (Oberon), Justin Joung (Puck), Lincoln Best (Changeling Child), Paige Lindsey White (Titania), Alex Cook (Cobweb) and Ciarra Stroud (Mustardseed) Credit: rr Jones

Hold on to your glass of wine in Act II, as the six Mechanicals finally perform their play-within-a-play for the royals. The chaos led by the scene-stealing Mike Ryan as Nick Bottom is riotous comedy that will have you laughing until it hurts. Mike Ryan is a comedic powerhouse; his character blusters with ego yet remains grounded in delightfully sincere cluelessness. His transformation into an ass (both literal and metaphorical) plays with a gusto that Ryan does so well. And, he does it with the help of Francis Flute (Jono Elland), who is told by the Mechanicals director, Peter Quince (Desiree Rogers), that he must play the part of the wife. The result is hilarious, and Elland's timing is impeccable.

Rounding out the Mechanicals in the uproarious play-within-a-play are Daniel Harray (Snout), Tyler Nye (Snug), and Melissa Wolfklain (Robin Starveling)—they earn steady laughs throughout, culminating in the sidesplitting, mangled rendition of "Pyramus and Thisbe."

Visually, the production is both cohesive and imaginative. B Modern's costume design merges mid-20th-century classic silhouettes with playful, mystical fairies adorned in glittering, organic textures. Wigs by Sharon Ridge and headdresses by Heather Macdougall are innovative and breathtaking, enhancing Puck and the fairy visuals in a whole new way.

Marcella Barbeau's lighting design makes full use of the Grove's natural surroundings, bathing the forest scenes in purple hues and soft moonlight. Paired with subtle sound cues and atmospheric movement, the show walks the line between dream and reality with elegance.

Though cloaked in comedy and misrule, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" reflects Santa Cruz Shakespeare's 2025 season theme, "No One Is Alone." Every character, whether mortal or magical, discovers the limits of solitude and the necessity of human connection. The lovers find clarity only after confronting one another; the fairies resolve their quarrels through compassion; even Bottom, transformed and isolated, is ultimately welcomed back into the fold. The play gently reminds us that confusion, vulnerability, and even foolishness are softened—and often redeemed—through the presence of others.

It's no surprise that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is the most frequently produced play in Shakespeare's canon. With its fast-paced plot, broad physical comedy, magical elements, and vibrant characters, it's an ideal entry point for those seeing their first Shakespeare production. The language is poetic but accessible, and the play's universal themes—love, jealousy, transformation, and belonging—are easy to connect with. Whether you know the play by heart or are seeing your very first Shakespeare production, this staging is a jubilant reminder that love is messy, magic is real, and there's nothing quite like a midsummer night at the Audrey Stanley Grove.