

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare, directed by Paul Kay and Joy Hellyer
Stagecraft Theatre, Gryphon Theatre, 22 Ghuznee Street, Wellington till 6 June 2009

Reviewed by Ewen Coleman 27 May 2009

Of all Shakespeare's plays that lend themselves to having fun, his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is probably the most appropriate, and in this Stagecraft Theatre production - directed most inventively and creatively by Paul Kay and Joy Hellyer - fun is certainly the operative word.

Set in the 1980's to the music of Michael Jackson, Madonna and many others of that time, when aerobics was all the rage, this is a production that from the outset has set itself up as a highly-energised fun-filled show that, while somewhat irreverently playing around with Shakespeare's themes nevertheless keeps the dialogue intact. That it works is to the credit of cast and directors in that the endless amount of creative antics and gimmicks makes it as entertaining a Shakespearean play as you're ever likely to see.

Young stud Theseus (Matt Bentley), is about getting it on with Hippolyta (Jasmine Embrechts). However before anything can happen and much to the annoyance of Egeus (Rodney Bane) a group of four lovers take off to the woods. First Hermia (Kirsten O'Regan) trots off with Lysander (Benjamin Priest). Then Demetrius (Martin Brown) chases after these two with Helena (Melanie Camp) in tow. At the same time the Rude Mechanicals are going through their paces in an aerobics class prior to preparing a play for Theseus's wedding – *Pyramus and Thisbe*. At the same time Oberon (Stephen Walter) is convincing Puck (Reuben Brickell) to help him in his advances on Titania (Michelle Jordan).

While the play follows Shakespeare's original, the insertion of classic 1980's song and dance routines and the addition of some incredibly inventive business like video rewinds makes the production anything but Shakespearean. And the inventiveness and creativity doesn't stop with the actors as the set - one of the most original seen at the Gryphon in a long while - the lighting and costumes – all wonderfully authentic '80's – add considerably to the overall sheer enjoyment of watching this production.

And while some of the performances verge on the manic and somewhat over the top, and inaudible shouting is often the norm, the energy and enthusiasm of the cast in bringing the style of presentation to life is boundless. An added invention which worked exceedingly well was having the punk rock-like fairies athletically weaving their way in and out of the production, which added much to the ethereal nature of the play.

There were many gems in this production, often side-splittingly hilarious, which the large cast excelled in bringing to life, and while there are too many to name some stand-out performances were Stephen Walter's Oberon, Rebecca Parker's Peter Quince, Alan Carabott's Bottom and Reuben Brickell's Puck, which along with all the other fine performances made this a very memorable production of one of Shakespeare's classics.