



Photos by Rosalie O'Connor.

Story

Act I

Couples gather in the forest outside of Athens. Theseus, Duke of Athens and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, are soon to be married. At her father's request, Hermia is betrothed to Demetrius, who is in love with her. She refuses to marry him as she is in love with Lysander, but is ordered by Theseus to obey her father's command. Helena, infatuated with Demetrius, can't understand what charms Hermia possesses to have so completely captivated Demetrius.

Actors Bottom, Flute, Snout and Snug meet in the forest to rehearse a play that will be performed at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. With their entourage, Titania and Oberon, King and Queen of the Fairies, quarrel about the Indian Boy. Oberon is angry with Titania because she refuses to give him the boy and they leave without resolution. Oberon gathers his court. Wishing revenge on Titania, Oberon orders Puck to bring him the flower pierced by Cupid's arrow, which causes anyone coming under its influence to fall in love with the first person their eyes behold. Oberon and Puck observe Demetrius and Helena quarreling. Helena will do anything to win the love of Demetrius.

Fairies gather around a sleeping Titania. They wake her, dance and then lull her back to sleep. Meanwhile, the actors rehearsing the play are dysfunctional and cannot agree on how the show is to be performed. Oberon grabs Bottom and puts an ass's head on him. Oberon leads Bottom to where Titania is sleeping and squeezes the flower's potion onto her eyes. She wakes and falls madly in love with the ass. Feeling pity for Titania's pathetic love for the ass, Oberon uses the flower again to release her from the spell.

Demetrius and Helena return, quarreling. Oberon orders Puck to mend the situation and use the flower to make them fall in love. Lysander and Hermia fall asleep in the forest. Puck, eager to carry out Oberon's order, mistakes Lysander for Demetrius and squeezes the flower over Lysander's eyes. Helena happens upon Lysander who wakes and becomes physically enamored by her. Hermia wakes alone recalling her distressing dream of being wrapped in snakes. Demetrius enters and declares his love for Hermia. Hermia, exasperated because she has no feelings for Demetrius, searches for Lysander. Oberon observes the lovers and realizes Puck's error in mistaking Lysander for Demetrius. Demetrius falls asleep and Oberon squeezes the potion into his eyes. Helena and Lysander enter and wake Demetrius, who falls in love with Helena at first sight. Meanwhile Hermia is shocked when Lysander declares he no longer loves her. A fight ensues between Demetrius and Lysander, both vying for Helena's affection. Oberon and Puck interfere casting a deep fog over the lovers who fall asleep in the confusion. When they wake, Demetrius is in love with Helena and Lysander with Hermia.

Act II – Wedding Celebration

The play, which enacts the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe, two young lovers who die during a clandestine meeting, is performed in celebration. The three weddings take place: Theseus and Hippolyta, Demetrius and Helena, Lysander and Hermia. When the celebration ends, Oberon and Titania, now reunited and at peace, retreat back to the land of the fairies.

The Music of Felix Mendelssohn

Dates: Born February 1809 in Hamburg, Germany and died November 1847 in Leipzig, Germany

Nationality: German

Style/Period: : Early Romantic Period

Famous Works: *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Elijah, Songs Without Words, Italian Symphony, The Hebrides Overture*

Bio: Mendelssohn made his public debut in Germany at the age of nine, when he participated in a chamber music concert accompanying a horn duo. He had a talent for composition from an early age and wrote 12 string symphonies and a number of chamber works between the ages of 12 and 14. In 1819, he joined the Singakademie music academy and began composing non-stop. At Singakademie, he also became a conductor, but continued to compose prolifically. At 16, Mendelssohn wrote *String Octet in E-Flat major*, a significant work that marked the beginning of his compositional maturity.

Mendelssohn is widely regarded as one of the most-celebrated musical figures of the early Romantic period. In his music, Mendelssohn mostly utilized Classical models and practices while also initiating key aspects of Romanticism – the artistic movement that prioritized feeling and the imagination over rigid forms and traditions.

Mendelssohn became familiar with Shakespeare by reading German translations as a boy, and in 1827, at age 17, he was inspired to write a piece capturing the atmosphere of Shakespeare's comedy. The piece, a concert overture, quickly became a popular favorite throughout Europe. Mendelssohn returned to Shakespeare in 1843 at the request of Prussian King Frederick William IV, an admirer of the overture, who wanted a set of incidental music for an upcoming production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mendelssohn crafted 14 short pieces based on themes and moods from the earlier piece. The complete work was first performed with the play on October 14, 1843. Mendelssohn's new creations, such as the *Song with Chorus*, a lullaby for the fairy queen Titania, and the *Wedding March*, written to accompany the multiple weddings at the end of the play, recaptured the magical spirit of the overture. The complete set also includes a nimble fairies' scherzo, a haunting nocturne rich with horns, a buoyant clowns' dance, and a farewell finale. The best-known movement is perhaps the *Wedding March*, which is often played in modern wedding ceremonies.

Take-Aways

- What is the story of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* about? Who are the main characters? Who is the protagonist? Who is the antagonist?
- What do you think is the main conflict of the story?
- After seeing the ballet, make a chart that lists the characters with words that describe their movements and role in the story. Create acrostic poems from these words.