

A Midsummer Night's Dream

SYNOPSIS

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The play is set in Athens. Egeus wants his daughter Hermia to marry Demetrius, but she refuses because she and Lysander are in love. Hermia's friend Helena is in love with Demetrius, who used to love her but does not any more. Under Athenian law, Duke Theseus gives Hermia four days to obey her father or else she will be executed or sent to a nunnery. Hermia and Lysander run away together into the woods, where the law does not apply. Helena hopes Demetrius will be grateful to her for telling him where the lovers have gone, and follows Demetrius when he pursues them.

In the woods, Oberon and Titania, King and Queen of the fairies, have quarrelled because Titania has refused to hand over an Indian changeling boy to Oberon. Their quarrel has caused disturbances in the weather. To get revenge, Oberon tells the mischievous Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, to put the juice of a magic flower on Titania's eyes so that she will fall in love with the first creature she sees when she wakes up. Overhearing Helena's complaints about Demetrius, he also orders Puck to put the juice on Demetrius' eyes.

Unfortunately, Puck mistakenly puts it on Lysander, who then falls in love with Helena. She thinks he is just making fun of her. To correct the mistake, Puck puts juice on Demetrius' eyes, but now he falls in love with Helena too. The boys fight and the girls quarrel. Meanwhile, a group of workmen under Peter Quince are rehearsing a play to perform at the wedding of Theseus to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Puck puts an ass's head on the chief actor, Bottom, and when he wakes the sleeping Titania she falls in love with him.

Eventually everything is put right, the true lovers can marry and the workmen put on their extraordinary production of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. At the end Puck assures the audience it has all been a dream.

Media:

DVD:

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1935), dir. Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle, with Mickey Rooney and James Cagney
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1964), dir. Joan Kemp-Welch
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1968), dir. Peter Hall, with Ian Richardson and Judi Dench
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1969) by Jiří Trnka (Czech puppet version)
A Midsummer Night's Dream (BBC TV Shakespeare 1981), dir. John Gorrie
A Midsummer Night's Dream by Benjamin Britten (1981) dir. Peter Hall (British opera)
A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy (1982), dir. Woody Allen
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1984), dir. Celestino Coronado
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1995), dir. Adrian Noble
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1999), dir. Michael Hoffman, with Kevin Kline
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1999) (ballet to music by Mendelssohn)
A Midsummer Night's Rave (2002) dir. Gil Cates Jr (adapted to the rave and drug scene)
Shakespeare Retold: A Midsummer Night's Dream (2005), dir. Pier Wilke (adaptation by Peter Bowker set in a holiday park)
Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 4 (2007) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Richard III*

Not available:

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1969) by Jiří Trnka (Czech puppet version)
'Pyramus and Thisbe' from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1964) with The Beatles
(available on YouTube)

CD Audio:

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)
The Fairy Queen by Purcell (opera)
Incidental music by Mendelssohn and Orff

[Michael Mitchell]