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Frontmatter

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**Cambridge School
Shakespeare**

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Edited by Linda Buckle

Series editors: Richard Andrews and Vicki Wienand

Founding editor: Rex Gibson



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Contents

Introduction	iv
Photo gallery	v
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	
List of characters	1
Act 1	3
Act 2	27
Act 3	57
Act 4	101
Act 5	119
Perspectives and themes	150
The contexts of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	153
Characters	156
The language of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	162
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> in performance	166
Writing about Shakespeare	174
Writing about <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	176
Timeline	178
Acknowledgements	179





Introduction

This *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is part of the **Cambridge School Shakespeare** series. Like every other play in the series, it has been specially prepared to help all students in schools and colleges.

The **Cambridge School Shakespeare** *A Midsummer Night's Dream* aims to be different. It invites you to lift the words from the page and to bring the play to life in your classroom, hall or drama studio. Through enjoyable and focused activities, you will increase your understanding of the play. Actors have created their different interpretations of the play over the centuries. Similarly, you are invited to make up your own mind about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, rather than having someone else's interpretation handed down to you.

Cambridge School Shakespeare does not offer you a cut-down or simplified version of the play. This is Shakespeare's language, filled with imaginative possibilities. You will find on every left-hand page: a summary of the action, an explanation of unfamiliar words, and a choice of activities on Shakespeare's stagecraft, characters, themes and language.

Between each act, and in the pages at the end of the play, you will find notes, illustrations and activities. These will help to encourage reflection after every act and give you insights into the background and context of the play as a whole.

This edition will be of value to you whether you are studying for an examination, reading for pleasure or thinking of putting on the play to entertain others. You can work on the activities on your own or in groups. Many of the activities suggest a particular group size, but don't be afraid to make up larger or smaller groups to suit your own purposes. Please don't think you have to do every activity: choose those that will help you most.

Although you are invited to treat *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a play, you don't need special dramatic or theatrical skills to do the activities. By choosing your activities, and by exploring and experimenting, you can make your own interpretations of Shakespeare's language, characters and stories.

Whatever you do, remember that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be acted, watched and enjoyed.

Rex Gibson

Founding editor

This new edition contains more photographs, more diversity and more supporting material than previous editions, whilst remaining true to Rex's original vision. Specifically, it contains more activities and commentary on stagecraft and writing about Shakespeare, to reflect contemporary interest. The glossary has been enlarged, too. Finally, this edition aims to reflect the best teaching and learning possible, and to represent not only Shakespeare through the ages, but also the relevance and excitement of Shakespeare today.

Richard Andrews and Vicki Wienand

Series editors

This edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* uses the text of the play established by R.A. Foakes in **The New Cambridge Shakespeare**.

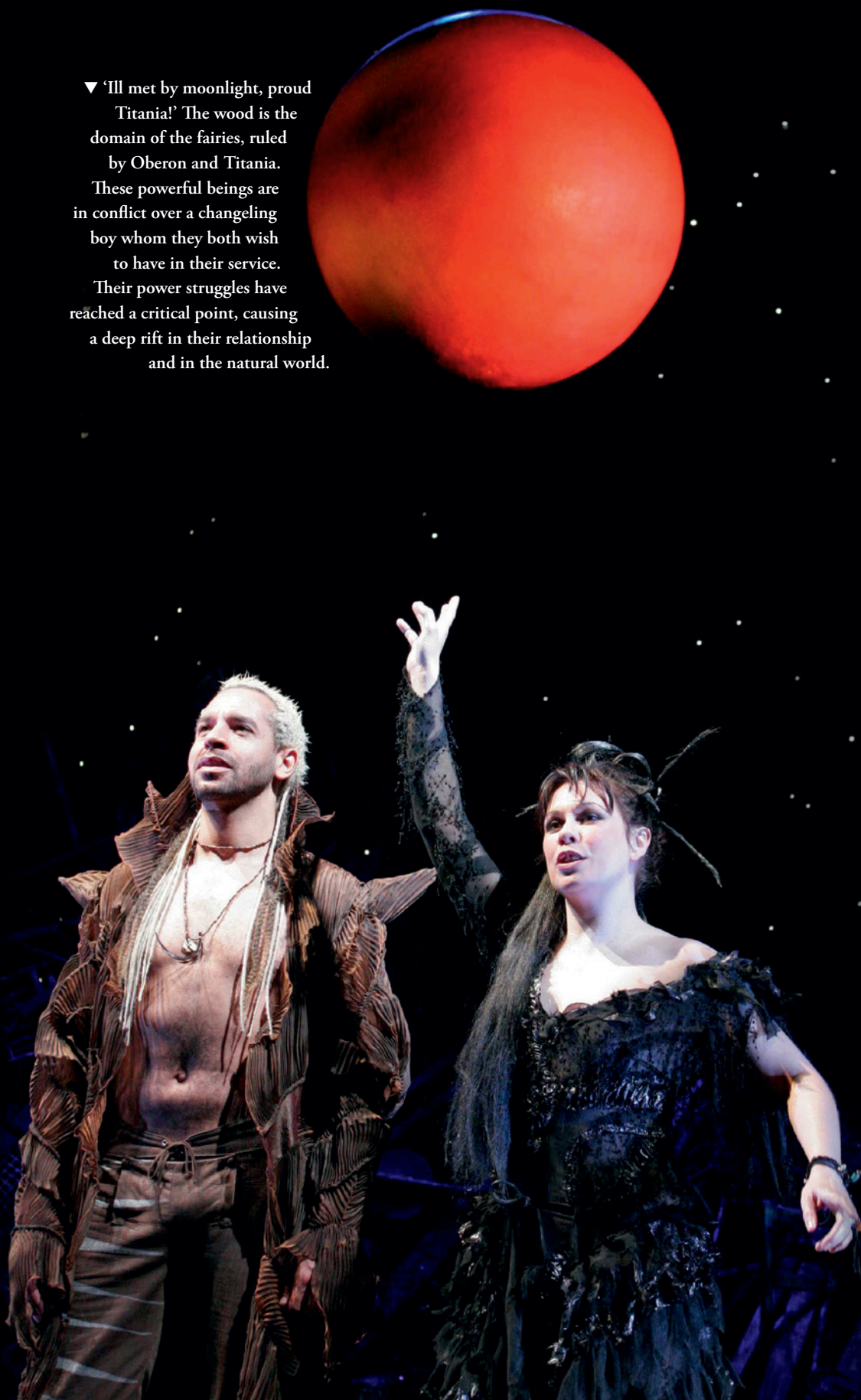
Theseus, Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, are anticipating their wedding. Their plans are interrupted by Egeus, who is having a problem with his daughter, Hermia. Egeus wants to marry Hermia to Demetrius, but she is not co-operating because she is in love with Lysander. Egeus appeals to the duke to support him with a legal judgment, and Theseus decides that Hermia must abide by her father's wishes. Her punishment for disobedience will be a death sentence or a lifetime spent in a nunnery.



The 'course of true love never did run smooth'. Lysander and Hermia plan to avoid the harsh Athenian law and meet in the wood at night, then to elope and marry. Will this solve the problem, or will the jealousy of Demetrius and his ex-love Helena, who plan to follow them, spoil everything?

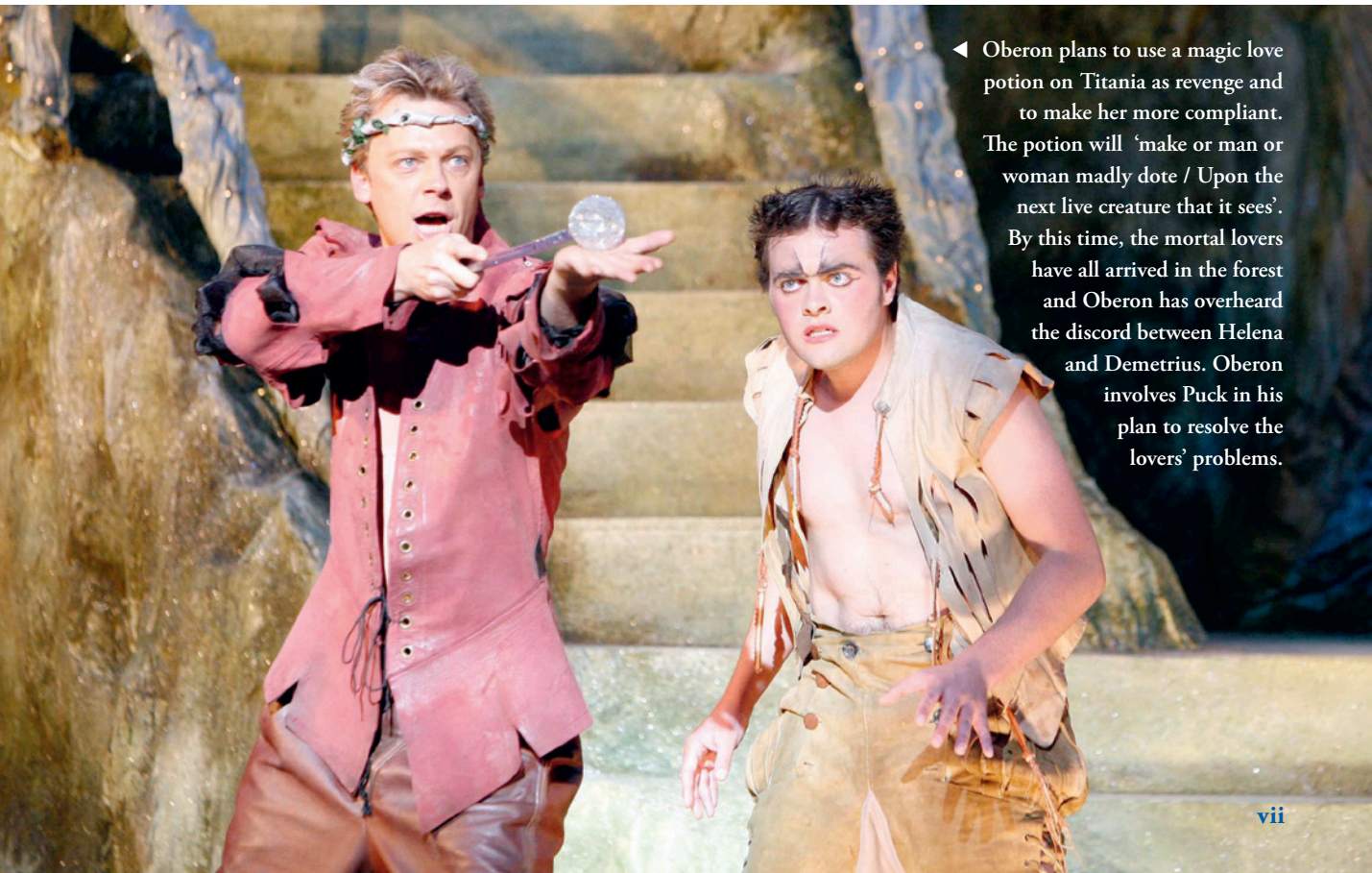


▼ 'Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania!' The wood is the domain of the fairies, ruled by Oberon and Titania. These powerful beings are in conflict over a changeling boy whom they both wish to have in their service. Their power struggles have reached a critical point, causing a deep rift in their relationship and in the natural world.





▲ The Mechanicals, a group of working men, are rehearsing a play in the wood that night. Their dramatics are decidedly amateur and Puck, Oberon's meddling fairy servant, does not think much of them: 'What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here?' Puck mischievously puts an ass's head on Bottom, the individual with the most bravado.



◀ Oberon plans to use a magic love potion on Titania as revenge and to make her more compliant. The potion will 'make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees'. By this time, the mortal lovers have all arrived in the forest and Oberon has overheard the discord between Helena and Demetrius. Oberon involves Puck in his plan to resolve the lovers' problems.



Newly transformed into an ass and alone in the forest, Bottom sings to raise his spirits. His awful voice wakes Titania, who immediately falls in love with him: 'O, how I love thee! How I dote on thee!'



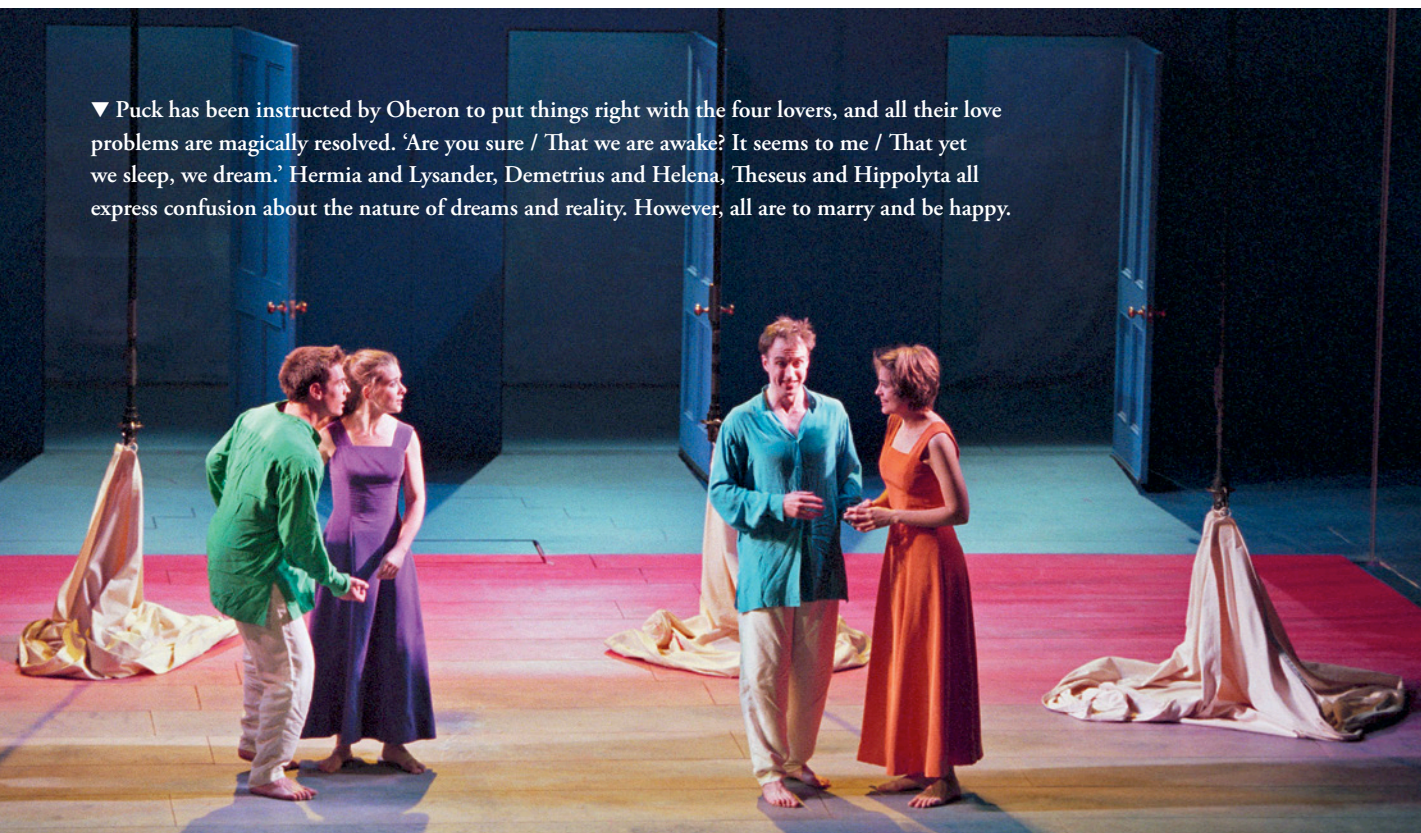


▲ In attempting to sort out the lovers' tangle with the magic potion, Puck inadvertently makes things worse. Under the influence of the potion, Lysander abandons Hermia and transfers his affections to Helena. Scenes of jealousy, abuse and rage ensue.

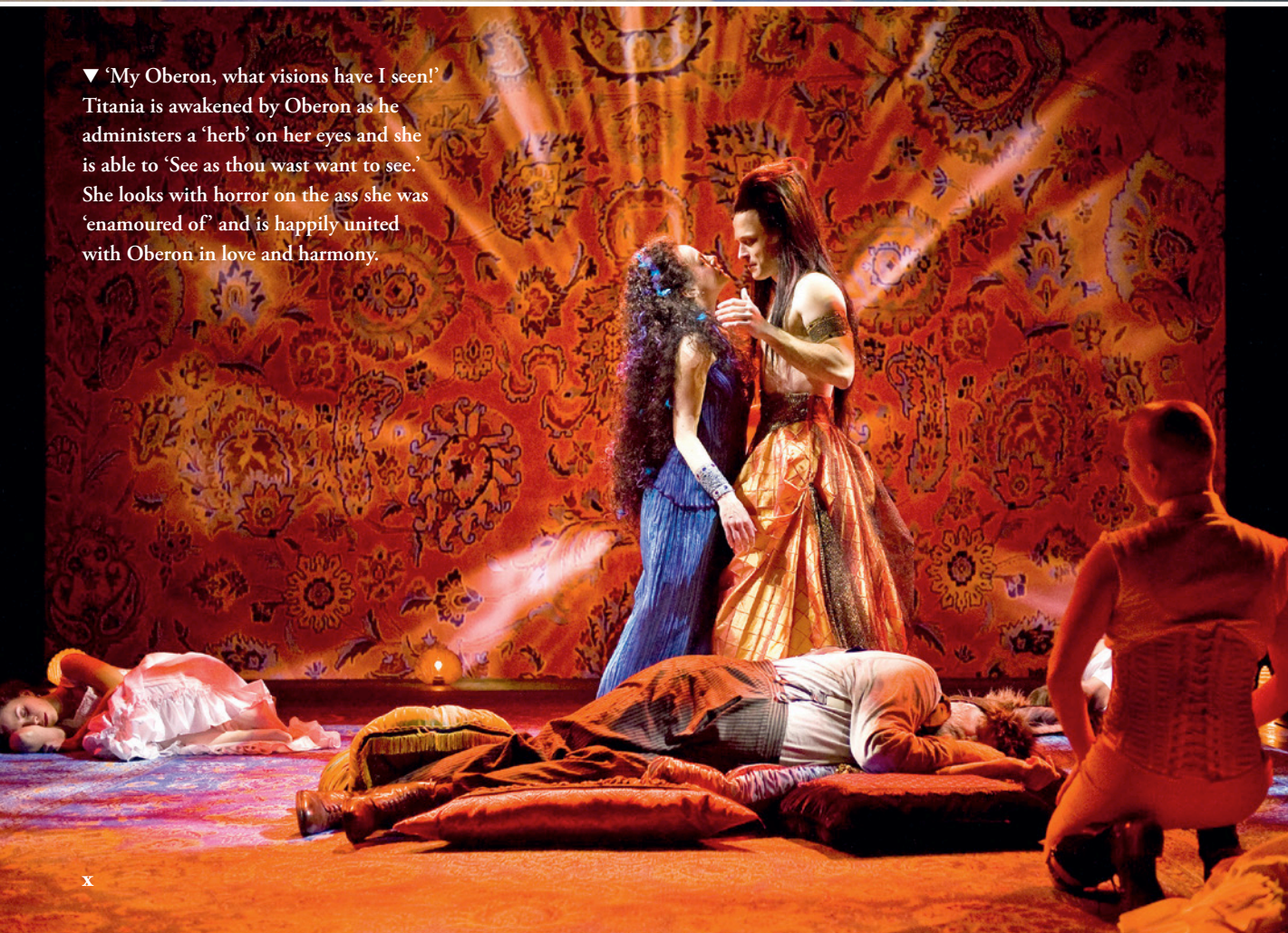
▼ 'Lord, what fools these mortals be!' Directors often make the most of the confusion, anger and hurt to present a crazy world in which love has gone badly wrong.



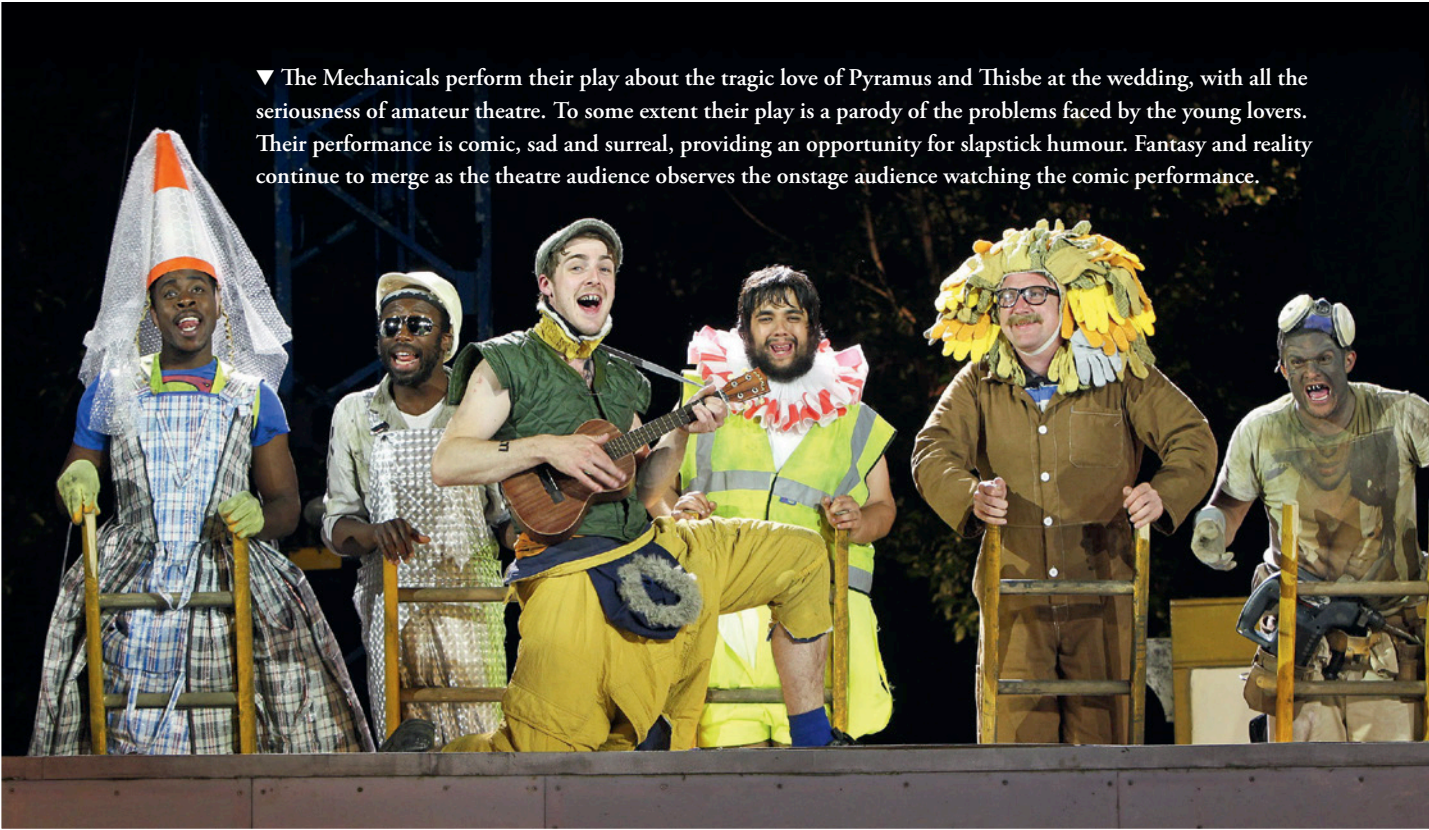
▼ Puck has been instructed by Oberon to put things right with the four lovers, and all their love problems are magically resolved. 'Are you sure / That we are awake? It seems to me / That yet we sleep, we dream.' Hermia and Lysander, Demetrius and Helena, Theseus and Hippolyta all express confusion about the nature of dreams and reality. However, all are to marry and be happy.



▼ 'My Oberon, what visions have I seen!' Titania is awakened by Oberon as he administers a 'herb' on her eyes and she is able to 'See as thou wast want to see.' She looks with horror on the ass she was 'enamoured of' and is happily united with Oberon in love and harmony.

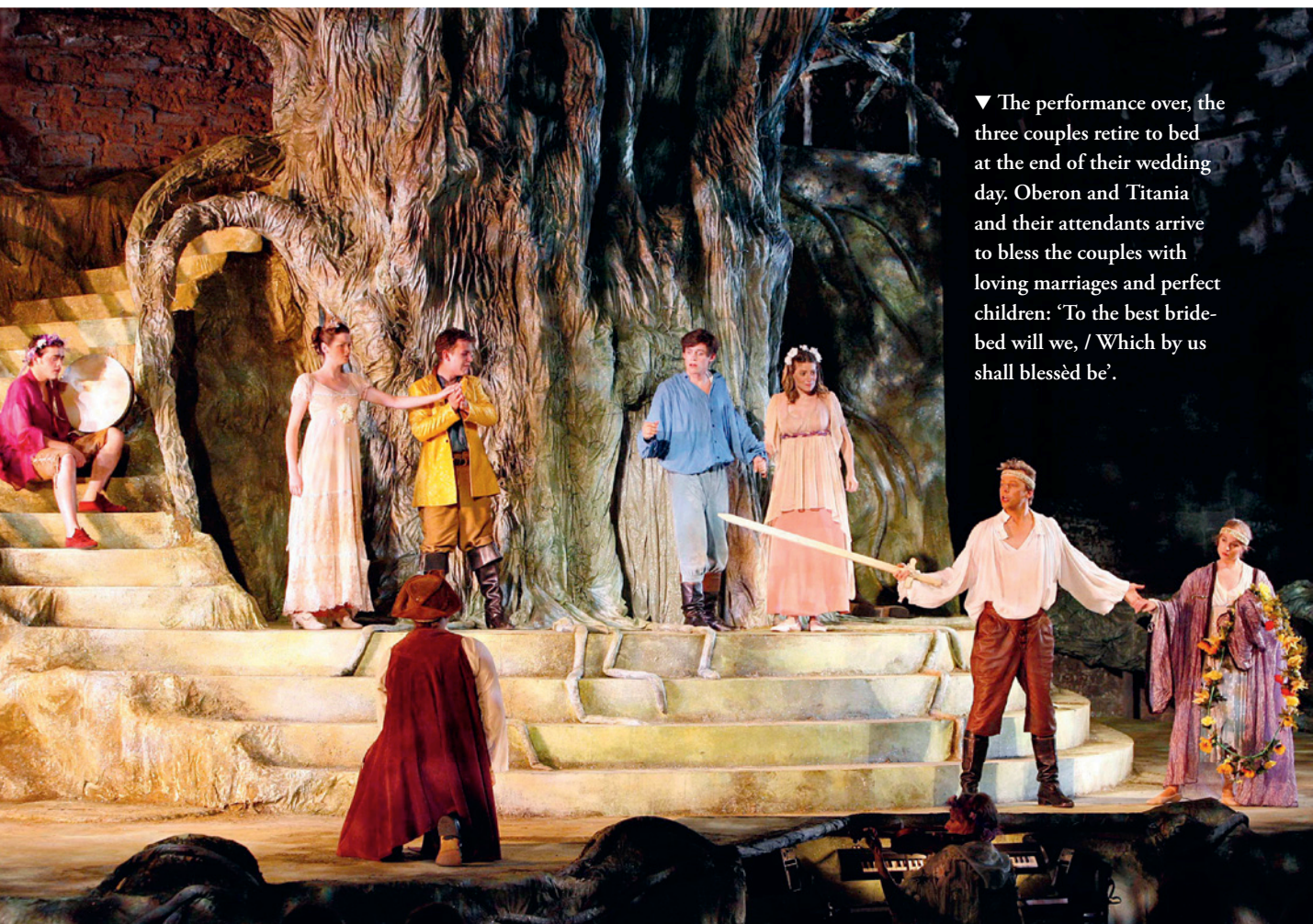


▼ The Mechanicals perform their play about the tragic love of Pyramus and Thisbe at the wedding, with all the seriousness of amateur theatre. To some extent their play is a parody of the problems faced by the young lovers. Their performance is comic, sad and surreal, providing an opportunity for slapstick humour. Fantasy and reality continue to merge as the theatre audience observes the onstage audience watching the comic performance.



▼ 'This is the silliest stuff that I ever heard.' The audience of newlywed lovers watch the Mechanicals' performance, wide eyed with disbelief.





▼ The performance over, the three couples retire to bed at the end of their wedding day. Oberon and Titania and their attendants arrive to bless the couples with loving marriages and perfect children: 'To the best bride-bed will we, / Which by us shall blessed be'.

▼ Shakespeare gives Puck the final word. He asks the audience for a round of applause: 'Give me your hands, if we be friends, / And Robin shall restore amends.'

