

Act 1 by Luis Cotto

GREETINGS and WELCOME to this audio description of today's performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a production of the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company at the Parkman Bandstand on the Boston Common. I'm Luis Edgardo Cotto, part of your Audio Description team for this performance, along with Lali Haines and Tanja Milojevic. We'll begin with background on this production, followed by descriptions of the set, staging, costumes, and cast.

ABOUT AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Commonwealth Shakespeare Company is proud to partner with **Think Outside the Vox (VOX)** to provide Audio Description services for Blind and Low-Vision patrons. Audio Description is a live narration of the visual elements of the show: sets, costumes, actions, and transitions. You'll hear this description through your headset, allowing you to follow both the onstage dialogue and our narration in real time. This pre-show includes descriptions of the environment, character appearances, and major visual elements to help you follow along with confidence once the show begins.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is directed by CSC's Founding Artistic Director, Steven Maler. In this 30th Anniversary production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* presented by the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, youthful spirits flee to a whimsical realm of liberty and longing. This rendition of the Bard's celebrated comedy reimagines the setting as a vibrant, neon-drenched festival with the loose, radical-expression spirit of Burning Man and the pulse of an all-night rave, where societal constraints vanish, giving way to the flowering of individual identity. The atmosphere vibrates with melody, bass, and playful chaos as Puck (played by Nick Cearley of The Skivvies) and a spectral fairy ensemble orchestrate the movements of destiny. Acting like ethereal curators of fate, they alter the course of affection with a single touch of magic. Each part of the festival landscape is alive with the potential for change and the magnetic energy of human connection.

STAGING – ACT ONE: THE COURT

The stage is dominated by a towering wall of weathered gray, vinyl banners, nearly three stories tall. Across the surface, oversized white letters repeat the phrase, "LORD WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE," layered so the words overlap and fade into one another. The structure is framed by silver scaffolding,

with a narrow opening at the bottom center hinting at something more behind the wall.

In front of the structure, the set consists of two levels: the main stage, which spans about 35 feet, and a shorter platform that lies about three feet above the stage, allowing for a lot of jumping back and forth between the two. At the far right, there is a set of stairs that connects the stage level to the platform, *and, at the far left, a slide which goes into a shallow pen enclosed by a low railing*. The stage is connected to the audience by a central metal ramp that spans about four feet wide. The ramp is used throughout the production as characters run through the audience, onto and off the stage. The set has an industrial, unfinished appearance, with exposed rigging, steel supports, and textured surfaces.

SET TRANSITION – FOREST

Fairies eventually rip the vinyl wall down to reveal a giant heart-shaped structure built into the scaffolding, washed in hot magenta and pink light. The outer frame is similarly traced in warm bulb lights. A second, smaller heart glows inside it in cool pink neon tubing, giving the whole shape a layered, doubled look. Centered on both hearts is another slide which leads down to the middle level of the structure. A disco ball catches the light from the upper right corner of the rig.

On the left side, the scaffolding rises via stairs to two levels: a small recessed platform at the top ... a rooftop terrace just large enough for a couple actors, and at mid point, stairs lead to the slide which spills down toward the front of the set. At the base of the slide is the aforementioned penned area, or ball pit.

COSTUME OVERVIEW

COURT

The Athenian court appears in coordinated black formal attire inspired by military dress. Tailored coats with high collars, gleaming gold buttons, and gold sashes lend a ceremonial air, while the women wear sculptural black gowns with modern silhouettes. The monochromatic costumes present the court as disciplined, elegant, and imposing.

Theseus wears a long black trench coat with gold buttons and a peach sash belt with a gold brooch around his waist. Hyppalita wears a form fitting black leather tuxedo top with a deep scoop neckline, gold metal belt, peach silk cape, wide gold metal cuffs, and black pants. Egeus wears black glasses, a long gray sport coat buttoned up, and gray pants. Hermia wears a black dress that cuts off at the knees. Lysander wears a grey button down shirt under a darker vest. Demetrius wears a short sleeve black quarterzip with beige pants and a puka shell choker

necklace. And Philostrate wears round framed glasses, a black shirt that billows at the chest with a black sport coat with metal straps at the wrists and waist.

FOREST

The forest fairies appear in a riot of color, texture, and fantasy. Their costumes combine neon fabrics, iridescent materials, faux fur, sequins, mesh, and patterned bodysuits. Bright pinks, greens, blues, yellows, and metallic fabrics glow beneath the colored lights. Hair is equally bold—spiky wigs, tousled bobs, vivid dyes, and glittering accessories create wildly individual looks.

Many wear whimsical headpieces with flowers, feathers, ears, horns, or insect-like antennae. Heavy makeup in luminous colors, face paint, and sparkling accents exaggerate their features. Some costumes suggest woodland creatures with furry arm warmers, tails, or wing-like details, while others evoke insects, birds, or fantastical beings. No two fairies are dressed alike, but together they create an eclectic, playful community that feels untamed, theatrical, and otherworldly. The Fairies individual costume allude to their names (Fairy, Moth*, Cobweb, Peaseblossom, & Mustardseed) in form.

Titania - Titania appears in an ethereal, futuristic costume that glows with color and light. She wears a shimmering, sleeveless dress patterned like cracked stained glass or mirrored mosaic in iridescent blues and silvers. Tiny colored lights flicker beneath the translucent fabric, making her seem illuminated from within. A long lime-green feather boa threaded with glowing lights and flowers drapes over her shoulders and trails around her body. She wears matching mosaic wrist cuffs, a spiky iridescent crystal-like crown, and a short pale pink bob wig. Fishnet tights and sparkling makeup complete her playful, otherworldly appearance. In Titania's final appearance she wears a multicolored cloak with glittery strands and colorful patches, mirroring Oberon's robe.

Oberon - Oberon is dressed in regal attire that blends royal ceremony with bold contemporary fashion. He wears a large, gold, jewel-encrusted captain's hat above a neatly trimmed beard. His long, flowing robe combines black and gold with strips of brightly colored patchwork fabric and *metallic fringe cascading from the shoulders and sleeves*, creating movement as he walks. Beneath the cloak, flashes of bright red satin trousers are visible. Gold jewelry accents the look, giving him the commanding presence of a king while maintaining the production's vibrant, eclectic fairy aesthetic. His magnificent cloak is made of patches quilted on from costumes from previous Commonwealth Shakespeare productions.

CAST

These are the descriptions of the cast in their own words:

De'Lon Grant, an African-American male in his early 40s with broad shoulders and short cropped black hair with short cropped salt and pepper beard. De'Lon plays the roles of Theseus and Oberon.

Nora Eschenheimer, a 5'8 woman with an athletic build, green eyes and short strawberry blonde hair tied in a bun. Nora plays the role of Hippolyta and Titania.

Brooks Reeves, a white cis, mostly balding ginger man in his forties. Brooks plays the character Egeus and Starveling, a member of the Mechanicals.

Nick Cearley, a 5'7" white male with brown hair, brown eyes and a mustache. Nick plays the role of Puck and Philostrate.

Puck goes shirtless and androgynous, his cropped salt-and-pepper hair spiked upward, and a thin mustache over his lip. Playful face paint marks him like war paint for mischief: a yellow streak down the bridge of his nose, smudges of powder blue and pink at the cheekbones. The same free-hand color spills down his bare torso, a pink X and open heart sketched over his chest, a bright blue star at his stomach, loose blue squiggles trailing along his side and arm. A glittering, chainmail-like harness drapes over his shoulders like epaulettes, and a silver studded cuff bands one forearm. At the waist, a wide black belt cinches over a strappy black kilt built from layered leather straps and buckles, and knee length black leather boots giving him the look of a roguish, glammed-up trickster. Puck carries with him a ukulele which he uses to enchant his victims in the production.

THE LOVERS

Meghan Carey is a light-skinned, 5 ½ ft woman with long brown hair. Meghan plays the role of Hermia. In the FOREST, Hermia wears a beige straw cowboy hat, hot pink earrings and necklace, a jean tube top, a peach furry vest, hot pink fishnet sleeves, and jean shorts and cowboy boots.

Jaime José Hernández is a Latino in his mid-twenties, with short dark hair and a shaven beard. Jaime plays the role of Lysander.

Annika Burley is a fair white cis woman in her mid-twenties with brown wavy hair and blue-green eyes. She plays the role of Helena. In the FOREST, Helena wears green goggle-like glasses, green crop top with matching sweatshirt, green spandex shorts and a blue and purple fabric string skirt.

Jack Greenberg is a medium-height, white cis man in his early twenties with short brown hair and thick eyebrows. He plays the role of Demetrius. In the forest Demetrius wears a steam punk like duster, with a helmet, goggles and shorts.

THE MECHANICALS

Karen MacDonald is an older, white woman with shoulder-length blonde-grey hair up in a bun and green eyes with large red square-framed glasses. Karen plays Petra Quince, leader of the Mechanicals.

Paul Melendy is a tall, white male in his mid-forties with dark brown salt-and-pepper wavy hair, thick eyebrows, and a pencil-thin mustache. Paul plays Bottom, a member of the Mechanicals, *Paul plays Pyramus in the play within the play, and the Puck-transformed Donkey.*

Alex Leondedis is a tall white cis man in his mid-twenties with brown hair and a brown beard. He plays Snug, a member of the Mechanicals, and the Lion in the play within the play. *He wears a beige muscle tank with a jean collar and wrist cuffs, brown overalls, and an orange tool belt.*

Michael Broadhurst is a white cis man in his early forties, bald with a greying strawberry blond beard. He plays the role of Francis Flute and the fair maiden Thisbee in the play within the Play. *He wears thin framed glasses, a backwards white baseball cap, a floral embroidered jean vest, an orange scarf tucked around his neck and jean pants.*

John Kuntz is a white cis gay man in his fifties with dark hair and a soul patch. He plays the role of Snout as well as the WALL in the play within the play. *He wears a white baseball cap and gray worker jumpsuit.*

Brooks Reeves appears again as Robin Starveling, a member of the Mechanicals. *He wears a maroon top hat with string and a giant sewing pin, a dark bowtie, a necklace made of multiply sized buttons, a white button down, a dark vest made of ties, and gray dress pants.*

THE FAIRIES

Bella Grace Harris is a person with fair skin. Bella plays the fairy named **Fairy**. Fairy wears a short straight platinum hair wig with multicolored pink, orange, and purple lights, vibrant two-tone eyeshadow and lipstick, green floral earrings, a small black tie, a butterfly-signed yellow pink and blue cut-out shirt and sleeves with a blue Ikea bag zip-up strapless dress.

Evan Danyliw is a white cis 19-year-old with brown straight hair and brown eyes. Evan plays the fairy **Moth**. He wears a pink and purple short straight hair wig, pink framed square pointy sunglasses, pink and green faceprint, green bodysuit with an alien body design, flowy sleeves, green, white and black woven belt, and white pants.

Alexandra White is a tall white woman in her twenties with long auburn, curly hair. Alexandra plays the Fairy **Cobweb**. She wears a green wig with braided spacebars and baby bangs, a blue shiny tank top dress, and a cream shirt cut out with gill-like openings. Mimicking cobwebs.

Dani Grace Nissen is a white woman in her mid-twenties with light blue eyes and medium-length, wavy, dark blonde hair with bangs that frame her face. She plays the Fairy **Peaseblossom**. Peaseblossom wears a platinum blonde wig with curled hair and bangs, a white mesh light-up bow, a light-up multicolored necklace, a pink dress made of mesh florals, neon green corset and green shiny arm sleeves.

Nicolas Bolton is a cis-straight male in his early twenties with short dark brown hair, and an athletic build. Nicolas plays the Fairy **Mustardseed**. Mustardseed wears a rainbow furry round hat with lights in it, yellow framed oval glasses, a pair of dark goggles around his neck, a mesh mustard yellow tank top, and green pants.

Act 2 by Lali Haines

We'll begin with background descriptions of the staging and scenes, then an overview of costume changes as well as additional details that should serve to help fill out the frenetic and fast paced action of act 2.

We pick up where we left off, in the forest of fairies. The action then transitions back to Athens for the wedding celebrations which includes a special performance by the Mechanicals of their Play Within a Play!

THE FOREST

The stage is once again dominated by a large suspended heart-within-a-heart outlined in bright colors. The heart includes both steady neon bar lights as well as white flashing globe lights. The colors, patterns and effects of lighting change to reflect the shifts in mood and dynamic.

THE WEDDING

During the wedding scene, the central large heart is filled in with a large cloth backdrop, with the words "The course of true love never did run smooth" repeated in large block font over the watercolor rainbow ombre fabric.

THE PLAY WITHIN A PLAY

This bawdy romp centers on Pyramus and Thisbe, and is enacted on the medium height platform with a simple patched-up curtain as backdrop. The couples form the audience, seated on the floor of the lowest platform atop beanbag chairs, their backs to us. Physical comedy, double entendres, silly props and racy sight gags abound.

COSTUME OVERVIEW

Forest - As before, the Fairy Forest scenes are costumed in a steampunk eighties style marked by pops of neon colors.

Titania - wears a shimmering flowing pink robe, large spiky glittering headband over short blond hair, over-the-knee silver boots and a short silver minidress made up of small metallic scales.

Puck - is bare chested with dark brown gladiator skirt with metallic details, black boots and metallic epaulets draped across his shoulders and upper sternum.

Oberon - Oberon continues in regal attire with a large, gold, jewel-encrusted captain's hat, flowing patchwork cloak, red satin trousers and gold jewelry.

Hermia - over the course of the second act, loses her faux fur coat to reveal brown cowboy boots, a tiered ruffled multicolored skirt and strapless top and long neon pink fingerless gloves.

Demetrius - appears in long gray cargo shorts and black tee shirt, black loafers.

Helena - wears a green grassy tank top, skirt composed of long vertical scarves of fabric loosely draping to her knees and midcalf black boots.

Lysander - sports a neon orange tank top, cuffed acid washed denim jeans and low black boots.

The Fairies - wear thematic costumes each with pops of neon color, festooned with feathers, ruffles, single gloves, neon or fishnet tights, some with miniskirts and corsets, and others with loose tee shirts and harem pants. Their hair ranges from blonde to red to neon, in short, tousled styling, some with oversized hats or bows for adornment.

Wedding

The wedding is themed to British perfection, à la racing day at Ascot.

Hippolyta wears a floor length liquid gold Grecian style gown, a chiffon gold cloak loosely draped over her shoulders, with gold boots and simple gold headband.

Theseus sports a royal purple suit featuring a collarless jacket emblazoned with a gold curlicue pattern over his left shoulder, gold cummerbund and gold band encircling his head.

Hermia wears a neon green fascinator, a small flat rakishly angled and elaborate hat, with pale pink dress with pink and beige floral appliqués.

Lysander is in a pale lilac suit with collarless jacket and gold buttons.

Helena wears a neon pink fascinator, seafoam green dress with pale pink floral appliqués.

Demetrius is in a bright Kelly green suit with beige appliqué work over his left shoulder.

Play Within a Play -The play itself is acted rather woodenly, with Pyramus moving robotically at times. The blade Pyramus carries is comically oversized, childishly made and clumsily wielded. The wall between the houses of Pyramus and Thesbe has a gap (referred to as a chink), represented by an open circle of Snout's hand.

These costumes are homespun, whimsical, and humorously interpretational:

Pyramus (Bottom) sports a red feather-festooned golden gladiator helmet, white tunic resembling an ancient Grecian chiton, with white patterned boxer shorts peeking out, bare legs with lace-up simple leather sandals. Overlying the tunic is a small sandwich-style leather vest embellished with shoulder armor and 6-pack abs made from yellow beer cans

Lion (Snug) wears a Lion hat, long, shaggy mustard-yellow coat with wide lapels, a rust-orange patterned shirt, cinched at the waist with a tasseled cloth sash. Yellow gloves cover the hands, and the look continues down through brown trousers to mustard-yellow shoes, keeping the golden, tawny palette head to toe.

Thisbe (Francis Flute) is fitted with a long blonde wig with bangs, full length short sleeved dusty rose dress with white lace collar, thin gold bands around the sleeves, and small white neck scarf referred to as a Mantle. His black trousers can be seen peeking through from time to time.

The Wall (Snout) sports a two sided cardboard sandwich board painted as a red brick wall in the front and a black and gray tomb marker on the back. He creates the gap, or "chink" in the wall using his hand held out in front of him, through which Pyramus and Thisbe can speak

Moonshine (Robin Starveling) wears dark gray trousers, patterned blue and gray vest with a silver lame tuxedo jacket with tails, and a brightly sequined silver motorcycle helmet. He carries a lantern (referred to by the old English term lanthorn) in his left hand, a white dog puppet in his right hand, and wears a small garland of leaves and thorns around his neck.

Petra Quince is all in black, with flowy wide leg pants, a loose tunic top with cape like sleeves, and a large gold brooch on her left lapel. Her blonde hair is piled high on her head and she sports fun red eyeglasses

THE FINALE

The fairies now appear with beautifully lit white wings, gauzy iridescent and translucent, with rainbow colored lighting on the outside and inner lights of white.

Oberon once again wears his quilted patchwork cloak, and for the first time we see Titania in a matching floor length robe, equally brilliant and dazzling.

MAGIC AND SPELLS

Oberon and Puck make use of specific devices and movements to cast their spells.

The herbs and magical plants used to enchant the lovers are represented by a small globe of brightly colored gemstone-like lights. Pieces of this light can be broken off and used individually. Puck, who remains invisible to the humans, employs mimicry and casts his voice pretending to be first Lysander then Demetrius, causing mayhem as each tries to find the other. Puck gently blows on the lovers' faces to cause them to enter deep sleep. He continues to use his ukulele to sing and enchant.

CLOSING

Thank you for joining us for this pre-show description. During the show, we will describe key visual moments live through your headset. We'll pause during loud soundscapes and resume when dialogue or key visuals return. If you're having issues with your headset... Please move the device higher and out of pockets. The transmitter is located behind the audience and needs a line of contact not through your body. If you are still experiencing issues, raise your hand and an usher will come to you and swap out your device. We hope this performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* brings you as much joy and transformation as the forest itself. Enjoy the show.