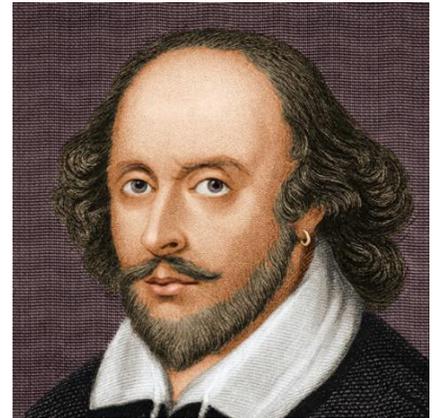


A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Shakespeare's best-loved romantic comedy comes to life in this enchanting ballet, created by former Royal Danish Ballet dancer Oskar Antunez. The ballet draws movement inspiration from Felix Mendelssohn's captivating musical score while closely following William Shakespeare's lively story: a contest of wills between the King and Queen of the Fairies, complicated by two mismatched pairs of human lovers and a band of amateur actors.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

William Shakespeare was an English playwright, actor, and poet. He was known as the "Bard of Avon" and often is referred to as England's national poet. He is frequently referenced as the greatest dramatist of all time. His works are known throughout the world and have been used as inspiration in many forms of art, including ballet.

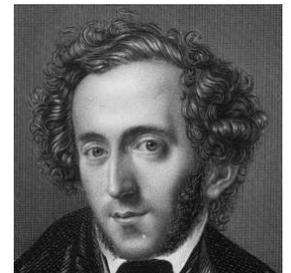


William Shakespeare

Shakespeare wrote a total of 37 plays over the course of two decades from 1590-1613. His plays are broken into several categories including histories, tragedies, comedies and tragicomedies. Some of his most well-known works include *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This last play is considered one his most masterful comedies and is also one of his earlier works, theorized to be written around 1595/96.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Felix Mendelssohn was a German composer, pianist, organist and conductor of the early romantic period. At two separate times he composed music for Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Initially in 1826, he wrote a concert overture inspired by the play. Nearly two decades later, in 1842, he wrote incidental music for a production of the play. This incidental music includes the popular *Wedding March*.



Felix Mendelssohn

Ballet Productions

Many choreographers have been inspired to create ballet versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 1876, the choreographer Marius Petipa – known for ballets including *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker* – created a ballet using Mendelssohn's score for the Imperial Ballet of St. Petersburg. In 1962, George Balanchine created a well-known version of the ballet, which was his first full-length ballet production. Oskar Antunez, formerly of the Royal Danish Ballet, created the version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that you will see performed by Ballet Nebraska.

A Midsummer Night's Dream Synopsis

Act I, The Mortals

We find ourselves in ancient Greece where **Theseus, the duke of Athens**, is to be married in four days to **Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons**. In celebration of their wedding, he orders a magnificent party be prepared. However, some other lovers in the city are not as happy as their ruler.



Theseus and Hippolyta



Hermia and Lysander



Demetrius and Helena

Hermia and **Lysander** are a young couple in love. Unfortunately, Hermia's father has granted **Demetrius** permission to marry her. When Hermia refuses to marry Demetrius, her father brings his case to Theseus and demands that the law be upheld. According to the law, Hermia must either marry the man her father chooses (Demetrius), be sent to a nunnery, or be put to death.

Faced with these unhappy options, Lysander and Hermia plot to leave the city so they can marry each other. They agree to meet in the woods outside the city telling only **Helena**, **Hermia's friend**, of the plan. As it happens, Helena is desperately in love with Demetrius and in an attempt to get on his good side tells Demetrius of Hermia and Lysander's plan. At the end of the night we have Helena chasing after Demetrius who is busy chasing after Hermia and Lysander.

Act I, The Fairies

That same night, the fairies are gathered in the woods at the court of their rulers **Oberon and Titania, king and queen of the fairies**. There is conflict in the air when Oberon demands Titania give him her **changeling child** to be his page boy. Titania refuses as she loves the boy like a son. Quite upset by her refusal, Oberon plots with his mischievous servant, **Puck**, to play a trick on Titania.

Oberon sends Puck to find a purple flower that has been struck by Cupid's arrow. When placed on the eyes of someone sleeping, the juice of the flower has the power to make the sleeper fall in love with the first creature he or she sees upon waking. While waiting for Puck to return with the flower Oberon observes the chase between Helena, Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander. Oberon immediately feels sorry for Helena and her unrequited love for Demetrius. When Puck returns, Oberon instructs him to also use the flower on Demetrius so he may fall in love with Helena.

Puck finds a sleeping Titania in the woods and places some flower juice in her eyes hoping she will fall in love with an unsuitable creature when she awakens. Then he vanishes to find the young lovers. Instead of finding Demetrius and Helena, Puck runs into Lysander and Hermia. Mistaking Lysander for Demetrius, Puck places some juice in the young lover's eyes. At this moment Helena, in pursuit of Demetrius, rushes in and awakens Lysander. Upon waking, Lysander immediately declares his love for Helena and chases after her. Hermia wakes up moments later to discover Lysander is missing and runs off in search of him.

Meanwhile, a group of amateur actors have gathered in the woods to practice a play they have prepared for the upcoming wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. Puck, the prankster, transforms the head of the foolish actor **Bottom** into the head of a donkey. Puck then leads the donkey toward the sleeping Titania.



Top: Oberon (left) and Titania (right)
Bottom: Puck (right) and his fairy friend, Fee

Act II

Titania wakes up and instantly falls in love with the donkey-headed actor Bottom and immediately orders that her fairies attend to his every need.

Meanwhile, Oberon has now realized Puck's mistake with Lysander. Puck tries to fix it by dropping some love juice into the eyes of a sleeping Demetrius. As he leaves, Helena rushes in followed closely by Lysander who is still madly in love with her instead of Hermia. Demetrius wakes up and instantly declares his love for Helena just as Lysander did earlier. Hermia enters and is confused as two men who were in love with her are now in love with her friend Helena. The exhausted lovers fall back asleep as Puck and Oberon sneak in to remedy the situation.



Bottom and Titania

In the morning, the lovers are discovered by the hunting party of Theseus and Hippolyta. They awaken and are now matched in happy pairs as Hermia and Lysander are back in love and now Demetrius and Helena love one another too. Theseus gives both couples permission to marry and all 3 couples plan to get married that day.

Back in the woods, Oberon lifts the spell on Titania, who is shocked to wake up next to the donkey-like Bottom. A very bewildered Bottom, restored to his human form by Puck, returns to Athens just in time to save the play. Bottom and his troupe present an entertainingly awful production much to the merriment of the wedding guests.

After the play is over, the bridal couples retire to their suites. The fairies bless all of the couples and their marriages. Oberon and Titania's fairy kingdom is once again united. Puck's final appearance suggests to the audience that perhaps the entire situation was nothing more than a midsummer night's dream.

Themes Explored

Love

Although love is a central theme in the story, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is at

its heart a comedy rather than a romance. Shakespeare uses the story to poke fun at the annoyances of love and what can happen when love is out of balance. For instance, with the four mortals the audience sees them fall in and out of love with one another so quickly due to magic that it causes quite an emotional roller coaster for the characters. In the case of Oberon and Titania, the audience sees what love causes us to do out of spite or jealousy.

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

– Lysander, in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Appearance Versus Reality

Shakespeare explores the idea that things are not always as they seem in various ways throughout the story. First and foremost, the entire story is set up to leave the audience wondering if it actually happened or if it was all just a dream. Shakespeare does this by having the characters constantly fall asleep. Dreams can often times seem very real when we are in them but once we wake up we realize that our "reality" wasn't real at all.

Second, he places a play within a play in the storyline. The audience watches a group of actors on stage pretending to be actors on stage performing a bad play for their duke and his new bride. This interesting element brings to light the reality that what the audience is watching isn't real at all although it certainly feels real while watching it.

Lastly, with the addition of fairies and love spells, Shakespeare weaves magic into a seemingly very real story about four lovers. By adding these characters, he has the audience jump between what could very well be a real life event to stories that you might find in fairy tales.

What You'll See in the Theater

A ballet performance is similar to other “live” performances such as a symphony concert or a stage play. But it also has its own customs and traditions that help make your visit to the theater special. Although each production may handle things slightly differently, here’s a general guide to what you can expect:

Before the show, people come in, find their seats, and get settled. The signal that the ballet is about to start will be the dimming of the lights.

The curtain will not go up right away; instead you'll hear music called the overture. It's a preview of the music that will be heard during the performance. It helps viewers forget about their outside distractions and get into the mood to enjoy the ballet.

Once the overture ends, the curtain will rise and the dancers will begin the performance. One thing you'll notice right away that makes ballet different from a movie or a stage play: *Dancers almost never talk onstage!*

Instead of using speech, a ballet tells its story through movements, gestures, and facial expressions. This may seem like an odd way of telling a story—but if you think about it, it's perfectly natural. After all, you often watch your friends' movements, gestures and facial expressions to help you understand what they are saying and how they feel (can you think of a few examples?) So if you watch the performers carefully, you'll find you have no trouble knowing exactly what's going on in the ballet.

Changes in the music and the lighting also help you follow along in the story. You'll notice how the music changes to match what's going on in each scene, and how they lighting changes from one scene to the next, helping to create a mood that matches the action.

Most story ballets are divided into “acts,” which are like chapters in a book: After one chapter ends, the story continues in the next chapter. When the first act ends, the lights on the stage may fade out and the main curtain may come down—but that doesn't mean the ballet is over! This is just a short *pause* while the performers get ready for the second act. The pause will last only a couple of minutes, so just relax in your seat until the next act begins.

(Longer ballet performances often have one or more intermissions. These are longer breaks—usually 15 or 20 minutes—in which the lights come up in the theater and the viewers can walk out into the lobby to stretch their legs and talk about the performance with their friends. The program booklet will tell you which breaks are pauses and which are intermissions.)

You'll know the ballet is over when the music finishes and the lights fade out on the stage. But there's still one more important moment to come. The lights on the stage will come up again and the dancers will face the audience, step forward, and bow to thank the audience for attending. Often the dancers who had the most prominent roles will bow separately, and finally the whole company will bow together. After the final bow, the curtain falls and the lights come up in the theater, signaling that the performance is over.



At the end of the show, the audience thanks the performers with applause, and the performers thank the audience by taking a final bow.

Be in the Know

Ballet was invented to entertain kings and queens, princes and princesses. Today, of course, everyone is welcome! But it's fun to be “in the know” about its customs and etiquette:

- **Do** make sure you are ready to sit and enjoy the show in plenty of time before it starts. Try to take care of getting a drink, a tissue, bathroom breaks, etc., *before* you come to the theater.
- **Don't** chew gum, or bring food or drinks of any kind to the theater. Also, texting, taking pictures, or using cell phones isn't allowed during the show.
- **Don't** leave your seat during the show. The theater will be dark, and it's hard to get around. If it's an emergency and you absolutely have to get up, check with your teacher or chaperone.
- **Do** laugh if the dancers do something funny. They like to know they're entertaining you!
- **Don't** talk during the show – not to your neighbor or to the dancers. There's a lot happening onstage, and you don't want to miss something important! There will be lots of time after the show to talk.
- **Do** applaud (clap) if you want to show the dancers you liked what you saw. If you've been to a stage play or to the symphony, you may have been told that you should applaud only at the end. *But ballet is different:* it's perfectly okay to applaud *any* time you see something you think is really, really good!

Visit balletnebraska.org to learn more about ballet, about our performers, and about our future productions.