Mystery, enchantment found in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’

By Christa Hill
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Mysteriously magical, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” attracts the attention of the audience through its eerie, yet enchanting, aura, where fantasy intermingles with the reality of infatuation and true love.

Dark, glittering, evil fairies seem to flow across the forest floor as though they were flying.

Truly, this is a spectacular show. Director Patricia Cook took William Shakespeare’s celebration of love and interpreted it as a sometimes humorous, sometimes strange dreamland where anything is possible at the hands and spells of sinister fairies.

The story begins with a young Athenian girl, Hermia (Mary Stripling), whose hand in marriage is pursued by two courtiers, Lysander (Mike Wiseman), her true love, and Demetrius (David Wilterson), the selection of her father, Egeus (John Deaver).

The court of Athens is preparing for the double wedding scheduled for the next day of the Duke of Athens, Theseus (Alan Nelson) and his bride, Hippolyta (April Evans). The court threatens Hermia’s life lest she marry Demetrius. However, unlucky and unloved Helena (Jeanne Sanders) is involved in a desperate chase for the greatly annoyed Demetrius.

To avoid the perils of the Athenian court, Hermia and Lysander plot to meet in the forest at night and elope. Knowing their plan, Helena tells Demetrius so that he will search that night for Hermia in the forest. Once in the forest, Helena thinks, her chances of capturing Demetrius’s love will improve.

But, to their surprise, the forest is where the fairies (Leigh Glaze, Kris Kasemiervis, Janie Wilkerson, Laura Henry, Jason Richards, Matt Reimer and Derek Telschow) intervene with reality. The lovers step into the world of curses and magic spells and become victims to the wicked games of the devious fairy Puck (Matt Beckham).

The lovers aren’t the only ones affected by Puck’s deception, however. Even the Queen of the Fairies, Titania (Kristen Osterlind), falls under a spell and becomes infatuated with a half-man/half donkey, the magical effect of another of Puck’s wicked hexes.

The results of Puck’s games are soon discovered by Oberon (Jeff Benton), King of the Fairies, and become subject to his judgment and authority. The ultimate fate of the lovers comes into question as the day of the wedding draws near.

Evil deception does not dominate the show, however. Comedic relief is often found in the scenes of a group of novice entertainers (Swanson, Jeff Jones, Russ Taylor, Narci Tovar, and Matt Dunn) and their playwright (Brent Whitted), who work comically to prepare a play for the wedding in Athens.

The acting in this show strongly reflects individual talent and interest. Beckham’s portrayal of Puck is particularly outstanding as he leaps and maneuvers. Stripling’s portrayal of Hermia is also noteworthy. Through her bodily expressiveness and the intriguing vocal manipulation of her lines, the audience actually feels the joy of her heart in love and the pain of it broken apart.

Shakespeare’s script and Cook’s translation of it onto the stage are highly entertaining, but it should have been left at that. Altering Shakespeare is a difficult and, obviously, risky task.

Fortunately, the opening and closing of the show are infected with the addition of a modern Baylor student character (Brandi Wilshire) and an ambiguous roaming man (Steve Peters). Their roles are weak and confusing, and they detract significantly from the vigor of the overall production.

The audience may become annoyed at their drawn-out and distracting appearance and may feel they produce such a poor ending that it may cause the play to lose its otherwise well-deserved standing ovation.