

Hohenloher Zeitung vom 20.07.2002

TNT Theatre Britain showed Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in the original version in the Stadthalle Neuenstein

## Tragical-comical news from the battle of the sexes

By Michael Dignal

Nothing in Shakespeare is straightforward. As there are always comical sprinklings in his tragedies, so the model comedy "A Midsummer Night's Dream" shows tragical elements – the most tragic of them being extremely funny. This and much more was shown by the exciting and entertaining performance by TNT Theatre Britain in the Neuenstein Stadthalle.

Director Paul Stebbings begins with what Shakespeare takes for granted: The battle between Athenian prince Theseus and Amazon queen Hippolyta. Their armies clash wildly, but with Theseus' victory, enmity suddenly converts to love.

With this the theme is prepared and we are in the middle of the play with plot lines entangling, disentangling and tying themselves into knots. At the time of Theseus' and Hippolyta's wedding, Hermia shall marry Demetrius. For her refusal she is threatened with death, and so flees into the forest with her lover Lysander, pursued by Demetrius and his unrequited lover Helena. But there Oberon, king of the elves, quarrels with his queen Titania. An explosive mixture then, that is defused by Oberon's servant, the forest spirit Puck.

How Lysander and Demetrius woo first Hermia, then, fooled by Puck's magic, Helena ("My love is more than his")\*, how amid furious pushing and pulling the gals turn into hyenas and the lads into idiots, how Titania allows herself to be swindled and Oberon loses control at times, all that is brought on stage with downright acrobatic doubling, a lot of wit and tempo, with music and finely honed choreography. Uniforms and combat boots, glittering fabrics and flowers, are enough to signify the respectively martial or magical background.

But the main attraction is the screamingly funny troupe of Athenian mechanicals, rehearsing a play for the Royal wedding and finally performing it as a fabulous parody of Romeo and Juliet. Their star, Bottom the weaver, with his noisy conceit and literally knockdown death scene, alone is worth the price of admission.

At long last, after much open fun, concealed seriousness, fierce emotions and sparkling magic stand a triple wedding, a reconciled elfin royal couple and so the message: Reason and fantasy, like women and men, are just seemingly irreconcilable. Thanks to the intelligent direction and the faultless, sometimes tempestuous, sometimes touching ensemble, the strict use of the original version becomes a minor issue. For even without a deeper knowledge of the text one is carried along unresistingly by the lively realization. Great applause from the audience for a great performance.

Photo caption: Sometimes funny, sometimes touching, but always thrilling: William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in Neuenstein.

\* English in the original text

## Emotional Entanglement

### **TNT Theater Britain "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Lenzburg**

*The realm of the elves is wet and warm at Schloss Lenzburg. The performance was supposed to take place in the open. Due to a poor weather forecast, TNT Theatre Britain had to perform on the stage in the sold-out "Rittersaal".*

Jennifer Khashouri

The heat threatened to turn the "Midsummer Night's Dream" into a steam-bath nightmare. Thanks to the eminent theatrical achievement of TNT Theatre Britain, the audience soon forgot their streaming sweat and became entranced by the ironic entanglement of heated emotions.

Amazons and Greeks fight furiously. But instead of bow and arrow, the Amazons enter the stage armed with bow and fiddle. With the help of their music they manage to subdue the men. But only for a short while. For soon Theseus, the Athenian King, uses the troll Puck's supernatural powers. In this way he is able to capture Hippolyta, the Amazon queen, so he can marry her.

British director Paul Stebbings, in his original as well as transparent production, successfully weaves the relations of power between men and women as a serious motif into the scenic pictures. In the fairy world as well as the mortal world the characters never appear ridiculous, in spite of the play's ironies. Ridiculous are only those who are meant to be: The players' troupe of the play within the play. This troupe is rehearsing "Pyramus and Thisbe" for Theseus' and Hippolyta's wedding.

### **Spirited Irony**

A danger of the production is the doubling of parts. For those who play mortals play the spirits and trolls as well, who are responsible for the lovers' entanglements. Thus the actors and actresses are in danger of losing their credibility. But the ironic refraction works every time. The professional actors manage to jump from the surreal mortal world into the magical fairy kingdom and back into the parts of the simple actors at court. The "Midsummer Night's Dream" irony is spiritedly realized. Love remains undeciphered, irrational and, unfortunately, random.

With the "Midsummer Night's Dream", Shakespeare's most famous comedy, TNT Theatre Britain is touring Germany, France, Norway, Austria, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland. The troupe (Christian Flint, Shona Holborow, Mark Prince, Glyn Connop, Suzanne Marston and Jackie Drew) performs in castles, or rather, weather permitting, in castle gardens as was customary in Shakespeare's time. The guest performance in Schloss Lenzburg garnered thundering applause from the sold-out hall.