



BWW Reviews: The Troubies' A MIDSUMMER SATURDAY NIGHT'S FEVER DREAM

by Ellen Dostal



There are no fewer than nine different productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* playing in theatres around the Southland this summer but I can guarantee that none of them will

be done up quite like the Troubies' A MIDSUMMER SATURDAY NIGHT'S FEVER DREAM at the [Falcon Theatre](#). Combining Shakespeare's text with iconic Bees Gees songs from the "Saturday Night Fever" disco era, and adding an abundance of improvised jokes, over-the-top sight gags, and plenty of audience participation, they once again celebrate the mischief that inevitably transpires on a Troubie stage.

Most of Shakespeare's familiar plot happens in Act I. After an ominous prologue by trickster Puck ([Matt Walker](#), who also directs) and a brief set-up of characters, we escape to the woods where the real action takes place. Here Faeries play tricks at the expense of four Tolucean lovers. Helena ([Beth Kennedy](#)) loves Demetrius ([Joseph Leo Bwarie](#)), Demetrius loves Hermia ([Katherine Malak](#)), Hermia loves Lysander (Tyler King), and no one loves Helena...that is until the Faerie King Oberon ([Matt Merchant](#)) orders Puck to use a magical flower to tilt the scales in Helena's favor. When Puck anoints the wrong lover's eyes it becomes merry mayhem for all, including Oberon's Queen, Titania ([Monica Schneider](#)), on this mercurial midsummer night.

At the same time, a band of amateur actors, consisting of [Rick Batalla](#) (Bottom), [Rob Nagle](#) (Flute), [Lisa Valenzuela](#) (Starveling) and Mike Sulprizio (Snout), rehearses a play to be performed before the duke. More about them later.

Walker is an impish Puck, more ominous than usual, who resembles bat boy (yes, the one from the musical), with his shirt pulled up over his head revealing tiny little green horns and a unitard-clad body that snaps across the stage like a rubber band. He can save an inflatable tree from sudden death, execute a booger bit that makes the entire audience groan for five minutes, and still continue to call the shots like the true ringmaster that he is.

Malak's Hermia is a saucy little maid who curtsies every time her name is spoken aloud. When her dream becomes a nightmare in the woods she has a freakishly funny psychotic episode that leans to

the macabre as she drags herself across the floor, wild-eyed and shuddering, her face caught in the glow of the footlights. It's a hilarious choice and her full throttle commitment to the joke makes it even funnier.

Kennedy is endearing as her nerdy girl BFF Helena and though it's clear why she's the odd woman out (lime green elastic waist pants and a [Martina Navratilova](#) wig are only the beginning), her determination to win over Demetrius keeps us rooting for this underdog all the way. Plus, she has an easy command of the text that brings fresh colors and a disarming honesty to Helena's often-recited speeches.

The Troubie secret weapon this time around, however, is [Joseph Leo Bwarie](#) as Demetrius. His boy band creation in long blonde locks definitely knows how to glamour the audience, both with his big brown eyes and with his gorgeous tenor voice. He should, since he toured as Frankie Valli in *Jersey Boys* for almost five years. He's a ringer for the "Saturday Night Fever" sound and captures all the nuances needed for the reimagined catalogue of Bee Gees hits.

You want more to laugh at? Try Oberon's bare-chested shake weight addiction, Helena and Hermia's Three Stooges fight, Puck's Princess Leia/R2D2 riff, or Theseus' ([Morgan Rusler](#)) dead serious line delivery while wearing gold rimmed platform heels and a perfectly coiffed brunette ladies wig.

What does that leave for Act II? A completely hysterical version of the tragedy, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, presented by the Rude Mechanicals at the wedding of Theseus, Hippolyta, and the now reunited couples that makes up for some uneven pacing and repetitive choreography in Act I. While not all of the first act's jokes land, stay tuned for a brilliant comeback in Act II, beginning with Puck's spin on Shakespeare's verse in iambic pentameter.

Enter [Rick Batalla](#) playing Pyramus in a Marvin the Martian get-up that made me laugh out loud. Thisbe is [Rob Nagle](#) - much "More Than a Woman" - who has stolen [Miss Piggy](#)'s voice and wrapped it delicately in a shy little milk maid's basketball-sized bosom. Oh, the things that happen to this poor couple destined to meet at the chink of a wall. Oh, the comedy that ensues when a funny man and a straight man know how to work a scene just right.

Valenzuela's Starveling is now a thickly-accented Latino worker who moonlights selling oranges under the freeway and 'hangs the moon' in this play-within-a-play as I'm sure you've never seen it before. Sulprizio's wall gag will require that you keep a close watch on any extraneous body parts to fully comprehend the joke.

Yes, it's a *Pyramus and Thisbe* worthy of its own complete act and when everybody dies at the end, it's still not over. From there we jump to the afterlife and the company's big number "Disco Inferno," followed by a very funny epilogue to the dream and an audience & cast dance off onstage to "How Funky Can You Get."

If your parents kept a trunk full of dress-up clothes for the kids from their disco days it would contain the kind of retro pieces and sparkly theatrical staples that [Sharon McGunigle](#) uses to create *Midsummer* a la Troubie style. Set designer Jeffrey McLaughlin's Jackson Pollock-inspired floor is an especially eye-catching collage of color. [Eric Heinly](#)'s band makes sure everyone is "Stayin' Alive."

Tickets are hard to come by for the show as this one was almost sold out before it even opened. If you miss it at the Falcon, you can catch it at [La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts](#) July 12 - 14, 'cause after all, it isn't summer without the Troubies.

Pictured above: From top: [Katherine Malak](#), Tyler Cook, [Beth Kennedy](#) & [Joseph Leo Bwarie](#). Photo by Chelsea Sutton.