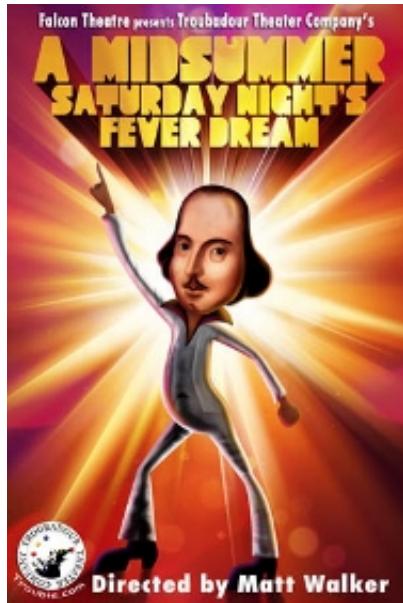


Los Angeles Theater Review: A MIDSUMMER SATURDAY NIGHT'S FEVER DREAM (Troubadour Theater Company at the Falcon Theatre)

by [Ella Martin](#) on June 9, 2013

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MADCAP MIDSUMMER

To say that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is oft-produced would be an understatement. The 1595 text is very much in the public domain, free and available to anyone with an interest in putting it up. Here in Los Angeles, there are already three productions running this summer, with at least two more set to open by July. Most theatergoers have seen the play once, and most theater artists wind



up seeing it many more times, supporting friends and family members in a variety of productions, whose execution frequently ranges from okay to practically unforgivable. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the Starbucks of the Shakespearean canon — it's a habit, and you can get your fix on almost any corner.

How exciting, then, to partake in Troubadour Theater Company's (the Troubies) lively, inventive, and satisfying concoction currently playing at the Falcon Theater: *A Midsummer Saturday Night's Fever Dream*. Part Shakespearean text, part *Saturday Night Fever*, and part straight-up hallucination, they have created a sassy musical theater extravaganza that scampers gaily across theatrical genres while rattling audience complacency.

This dream kicks off with a lullaby: A sing-along to Peter Frampton's "Show me the Way," led by a fabulously-dressed Lisa Valenzuela (who is later de-glammed and almost unrecognizable as Starveling, a



mustached member of the Mechanicals).

What better way to get ready to watch a show than by singing disco and waving your arms back and forth en masse as though you're at some kind of religious revival?

Thus primed for the adventure, audiences are treated to a fantastically irreverent, undeniably clever reinterpretation of the classic. Director Matt Walker steps forward in costume to reveal that yes, as the title suggests, this evening's performance will combine *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the bouncing, libido-infused disco beats of the 1970s. And so, with bright lights, thrusting hips and loud rock music from the "Hot Band," led by Eric Heinly, it begins.

The Lovers are frisky and ready to boogie. Katherine Malak's Hermia is a sultry, ferocious little tease, whose confident, unquestionable hotness stands in stark contrast to awkward-best-friend Helena's... notness. As Helena, Beth Kennedy is pitifully unappealing; her solid physical comedy chops are paired with an



emotional authenticity that allows her to skirt the potentially whiny and annoying undertones of the role. Kennedy's Helena is an enthusiastic third wheel, made painfully clear when she attempts to join Hermia and Lysander as they flee, to which they respond by explaining there is only room for two in the forest. Her performance is further supported by her costume: bad hair, glasses, an aptly unattractive owl vest paired with a button down, ruff-topped white blouse and terrifically terrible elastic-waistband, no-belt green pants. Hers are just some of the brilliant pieces by costume designer Sharon McGunigle, who deserves as much credit as Matt Walker for unifying the many elements of this demented masterpiece of a production. As rivals for Hermia's hand, Tyler King's boy-next-door Lysander and Joseph Leo Bwarie's intensely egotistical, 1970s-man-prissy, blonde-shagged-do Demetrius are another good pair. All are excellent singers and dancers to boot; if anything, one wishes Bwarie in particular, (who reminds us that he played Frankie Vallie in *Jersey Boys*) had more singing to do.

The Mechanicals, in their mundane yet commedia dell'arte perfect janitorial jumpsuits, are wonderfully present throughout. Rick Batalla does great work as Bottom, and manages to give him a wonderful degree of intelligence. Without revealing too much, Rob Nagle's Flute-as-Thisbe is terrifying, archetypal, and may



as well be the theater's answer to the question *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* Valenzuela's passion as Starveling-Moonshine is actually moving, and Mike Suprizio's Snout-Wall is wonderfully understated.

The Faeries are fabulous, too — from Monica Schneider's capable, sparkling Titania, with her ever-present entourage, to Walker's devilish, goofy, sometimes kind of gross Puck. Matt Merchant, through sheer physical presence, brings a hulking manliness to Oberon, in spite of the glittering silver jumpsuit.

You'll see one or two vulgar things you'd maybe rather not. Here and there an ad-lib goes on for too long and starts to feel less like an intentional bit and more like an extended inside joke. The Troubies are offering



a program that is both faithful to the basic plot and wildly adulterous to any subtler emotional intentions, but they do so with such expert thoroughness and loving inclusivity of the audience that allowances can be made. Dancing with the cast in the triumphant finale, the thought might cross your mind that there is no other way to live.

The talent and commitment of the ensemble is undeniable, their exuberance contagious. Matt Walker and the Troubies have succeeded in closing the gap between those looking to enjoy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and those looking to enjoy *A Midsummer Night's Dream...* again.