

'Midsummer Night's Dream' eye-appealing

Performances of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" continue through Sunday at Varner Studio Theatre at Oakland University in Rochester Hills and through Thursday, May 25, at the Wallace Smith Theatre at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills. For ticket information call OUC's Center for the Arts box office at 370-3013 or the Smith Theatre box office at 471-7700.

From the versatile set, subtly seductive lighting, color-synchronized costumes and rambunctious staging, director T. Andrew Aston's production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a visual pleasure. Oakland University's Center for the Arts joins with Oakland Commu-



Cathie Breidenbach

nity College to celebrate imagination and the convoluted course of love in this pleasing joint presentation.

Devotes of Shakespeare sometimes revel in his language to such a degree that reverence for his famous words dominates the play and hobbles the movement of the plot. Not so in this production.

If anything, visual pleasures and energetic pacing seduce audience attention away from words. Occasion-

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ally haphazard articulation by players makes catching every syllable difficult, which adds to the subjugation of language to action.

wears a Three Stooges pageboy that makes him look more like slapstick than a likely lover.

Hermia's daddy may prefer Demetrius as suitor for his daughter, but if eyes beguile the heart, it's no wonder Demetrius doesn't stand a chance without a bit of fairy dust to help love along. Harry Carlson as Hermia's domineering daddy looks as if he's ready to play the part of an exasperated parent.

The four lovers play their tangled affections with skill, and in one free-for-all scene, they outdo themselves with splendid slapstick antics that fit Puck's observation, "What fools these mortals be."

Lysander tucks Hermia under his arm and carries her around while she flails in fury. Helena puts her hand on Hermia's forehead and holds

the angry spitfire at arm's length while Hermia quivers to get at her once-dear friend. Vigorous theater, full of delight.

Designer Susan Barrett deserves double praise for a set that not only captures the ethereal palette and delicate lighting of the fairies' woodland world but is simple enough to move easily from Oakland University's Varner Theatre to Oakland Community College's Wallace Smith Theatre where the play will also be presented.

LIGHTS PROJECT mottled leafy designs on elongated banners suspended from the ceiling to create an impressionistic forest as simple as it is effective. Except for a peach light that throbs when Oberon's polluxes are working their magic, the lighting succeeds through subtlety. That high tech light befits a gimmicky science fiction set better than the fairy world, but to quibble about a detail so small as a throbbing light is to nip at a production that is otherwise a visual delight.

Jerry Rathgeb as Bottom strikes a happy balance between being an egotistical jerk and a dear, bumbling man. Rathgeb's Bottom lacks the crude, porcine gestures some actors bring to the role. A ham he pulls off splendidly, but he plays a Bottom too civilized to fairly be called piggish.

His sidekicks, Morris Weiner as Peter Quince, Michael Curtis as Puck, Brian Young as Song, Leah Smith as Snout and Marketa Tate play their roles with the broad in-

most traditional for life/fairies. Tracy Wade makes a fine, light-footed Puck with an unconventional blue belly button. The most memorable thing about the fairy king and queen (Andrew John Young and Mary Monroe) are their dramatic, metallic costumes. With his moussed hair and diabolical eyebrows, Oberon brings to mind Jack Nicholson in much younger days.

The fairies (Mary Kay Geb, Yvonne Roscoe, Dawn Hamblin, Kathy J. Williams and Erika Wood) fill about like bothersome little sisters or pesky mosquitoes, hovering around the human lovers tickling and teasing them.

Their antics underscore the playfulness not only of the impish sprites, but of Shakespeare's magical play that makes sport of tangled human affairs, then mercifully unscrambles the confusion to celebrate the impending marriage of the happy couple.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.

Musical 'Cabaret' a slick show

Performances of the Avon Players production of "Cabaret" continue through Saturday, May 27, at the theater in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the box office at 656-1130.

"Cabaret" has a smashing script, and the Avon Players does justice to the lean, musical version of John Van Druten's play, written by Joe Masteroff.

Masteroff captures the spirit of wild, chic decadence many of the German painters of pre-World War II Berlin caught on their canvases. The Avon Players intelligently recreates the mood of the original stories by Christopher Isherwood, which are set in a Berlin on a verge of destruction.

Jeff Upchurch does a splendid job as the sardonic Master of Ceremonies. He is both jubilant and restrained, playing the sophisticated, lewd MC who introduces the acts at the Kit Kat Club, and by extension, tells us about the stages Germany sinks into on the way to Fascism.

A lifted eyebrow on the face of



Helen Zucker

this gifted actor gives the audience a world of information. Upchurch manages to imbue this demanding role with his own brand of wit.

SHEILA LYLE is Fraulein Schneider, the landlady who loves writers. Lyle is a resigned Mother Courage, a Brechtian survivor. She sensitively portrays a Schneider who will survive WWII, but at tremendous loss.

When she sings "A Pinesapple for Me," she is a happy matron who has found love. When she returns the crystal bowl and calls off her impending marriage, we know that her generous heart has frozen.

Fred Shulak is touching as Herr Schultz, the elderly, Jewish suitor who thinks nothing can happen to

him because he is "German." Schultz says his broken shop windows are the "acts of mischievous children," sings "Meeklike" endearingly at his engagement party, and moves to the other side of town when Fraulein Schneider, the realist, calls off their marriage.

Shulak gives us a Schultz who is too old to flee while there's still time. Stephanie Nichols is believable as Fraulein Kost, the blowy whore who knows all the sailors in town. Nichols is lusty, practical, a woman who can't tell one sailor from another, a whore who is a sign of the times.

TOM SMITH does an equally fine job as Ernst Ludwig, the genial Nazi who makes trips to Paris to collect money for the Party. Smith sheds from gentility to ugliness in a swift, final scene at the nightclub.

Kim Monterosso as Clifford Bradshaw, the earnest writer, opens his heart to Berlin and its people. He tells his girl, Sally Bowles, "everything's so tacky and terrible, it's wonderful."

What Nazism is about is slow to

down on Bradshaw, but when it does, he rises to the occasion. Refusing to run errands for the Nazis, he is beaten up. He understands "Mein Kampf," unlike the apolitical Sally. When his girl has an abortion because she wants to work at the nightclub, he buys a ticket home, understanding that the end of the world as he has known it has arrived.

Eileen Kent is a lively, talky Sally Bowles. Kent pours her heart into her songs, sashays out into the audience in shimmering gowns and is effective singing about her friend, Elsie in Chelsea. Bowles is a corrupt, lovely creature, and Kent conveys the message that she, like the Berliners, wants to live fast and die young.

The Kit Kat Girls are sexy and funny. The waiters are terrific and versatile. Jim Cann, Anthony Sherman and Chuck Thompson are agile in many roles. The costumes by Mary Coppenhagen are especially good. All that black lace!

Helen Zucker has many years' experience reviewing for newspapers and magazines in Michigan, New York and Massachusetts.

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