Special Thanks:

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This Week in the Arts

Performing Arts Center Mainstage
April 18-19, 25-26, 2014 at 7:30PM
www.edu/theatredance (360) 650-6146
April 27, 2014 at 2:00PM
Taunted by his queen over the custody of a changeling boy, Oberon plots to distract Titania by making her fall madly in love with the most hideous creature his henchman Puck can find. Also in the woods this night are ten mortals who have sought escape from the strictures of society only to find themselves caught up in an inadvertent brush with the fairy feud. Hermia has been given a choice between banishment or betrothal to Demetrius, and she has fled to this spot to make plans with her beloved Lysander. Pursued by Helena, with whom he has a “complicated” relationship, Demetrius sets out to track them down. Meanwhile, a band of six rustic craftsmen has unwittingly chosen the enchanted grove as the ideal spot to rehearse their “terrible and lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe,” which they hope to perform for the wedding of Theseus, Duke of Athens to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Before dawn, these lovers and players will find their lives forever changed by their foray into this sylvan realm of fantasy, art, and dreams.

To honor the centennial of Britten’s birth, this production is set in 1913, in a Grecian temple “folly” in the forest grounds of an English country estate. Inspiration for the visual design of the show has been drawn from the Art Nouveau works of Alphonse Mucha and Arthur Rackham, and choreography from the rise of the modern dance movement and The Rite of Spring, which had its tumultuous premiere in this year. Britten’s sumptuous instrumentation beautifully characterizes the three groups, portraying the fairies with ethereal strings, harp, and celesta, contrasted with more Romantic and lush writing for the lovers. The rustics sing in a vernacular, “folk” idiom, with the exception of their bel canto rendition (complete with mad scene) of Pyramus and Thisbe.
In earlier centuries, when children developed behavioral issues or inexplicable illnesses, people used to say that the fairies had stolen their real child and replaced it with a fairy in disguise. Here we follow the story of what happens to that human changeling after the fairies decide to keep him.

The flowers “Love-in-idleness” and “Dian’s bud” are thought to be the wild pansy viola tricolor and artemisia or the chaste tree, respectively. According to Shakespeare, Cupid was aiming his bow at Queen Elizabeth, the “Virgin Queen,” but missed and hit the white pansy instead, turning it purple and endowing it with love-potion-like powers.

The man in the moon story is from the middle ages—supposedly he got caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath and was sent to the moon as punishment. Traditionally he also has a small dog.

After Pyramus and Thisbe, the rustics perform a Morris dance. There is a famous story about Will Kemp (who was the first Bottom in Shakespeare’s company) doing a Morris dance for about nine miles from London to Norwich as a publicity stunt. Some Morris sides feature one performer dressed as a beast (hobby horse) or fool, whose job is to heckle the audience.

A puck is a specific type of mischievous woodland spirit who likes to play tricks on people, thus sometimes placatingly called Robin Goodfellow. There is a story that if the servants left a bowl of milk out for Puck, he would do them a good turn by showing up and sweeping the house for them overnight.

Titania is sometimes associated with Diana, goddess of the hunt and the moon. In Shakespeare’s story, she and Oberon are former lovers of Theseus and Hippolyta and have come to these woods specifically to be nearby for their wedding festivities.

As Titania prepares for bed, she asks the fairies for “a roundel and a fairy song.” It was thought that fairies would perform such round dances by moonlight, leaving patterns in the grass which became known as fairy rings.

At one point in the story, Bottom is so moved by his experiences that he attempts to quote a passage from the Bible (but, as usual, peppers his speech with rhetorical goofs.) “The original can be found in 1 Corinthians 2:9 “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”