



April 17, 2011

Dear Dr. D. J. Trela,

I had the privilege of serving as the American College Theatre Festival adjudicator on April 1st for Professor Janet Haley's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I am currently the Director of University Theatre at Central Michigan University. In the past, I performed for two seasons with the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival in Louisville and have directed four collegiate productions of Shakespeare. This letter is in support of Professor Haley's creative work on this production.

In general, this was a well-directed college production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The production as a whole had tremendous energy and the pacing was very good. I give Professor Haley credit for creating a situation where young actors understood the importance of the language and delivered it well.

The blocking in the scenes that take place in the woods was very good. The use of Titania's bower to create levels and hiding places was very effective. There was an excellent use of vertical space, having the fairies climb around on the bower, as well as on the side tree units. The staging of the scenes in the "interior" didn't work quite as well. Although there was a great deal of depth in the design of the opening scene, almost all of the action was staged along the proscenium line. Professor Haley did, however, make very good use of the depth to frame entrances and exits in the scene.

Professor Haley did an excellent job developing stage business and helping actors commit completely to the physical life of the production. She made very good use of the down right scenic unit and trap, which was especially effective in creating the magical illusion of Oberon's appearing and disappearing. There was also some very nice physical work, especially by Caleb Clark as Puck. His physical relationship with Oberon was very good and the business in the garbage can at the end of Act I was very funny. Some of the physical choices for the young lovers, when they were in the woods, were very good and cleanly executed. I especially enjoyed the moment when Hermia attacks Demetrius to get information. The moment seemed spontaneous and honestly motivated. The process of the young lovers losing their clothes was confusing to me. It was funny, but I didn't have any sense as to why it would be happening to these characters in this particular situation.

As in many highly conceptualized productions of Shakespeare, many elements worked very well and others seemed a bit out of place. The scenes in the donut shop and in the woods worked fairly well with the idea that this takes place in some Detroit-like city in the 1930's. The opening and closing scenes didn't work as well. Theseus, Hippolyta and Egeus don't quite seem to fit neatly into the concept. I was confused about what kind of position Theseus held; that he could make life and death decisions about the marriage choices of others. I was also a bit confused about how the history of Theseus and Hippolyta fit into the concept.

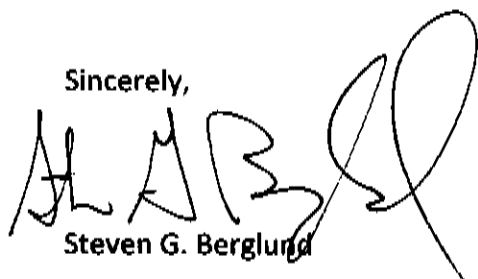
The final scene was staged well. The use of the candles created a wonderfully magical moment that complimented the tone that was created earlier in the production. The first act did not end as neatly. There was great business with Puck in the garbage can, but then he just left the stage. There may have been other ways to end the act in a way that would make the audience want to know what was going to happen next in relation to the dramatic action. The focus on Egeus and her situation at the end of the play seemed very inconsistent with the tone and mood of the rest of the show.

Professor Haley clearly understands how to communicate with actors. She was able to draw some fine performances from some very young actors. Jackie Maier, as Egeus, was effective with the language and had a clear sense that the stakes were very high for her character. Each of the actors playing one of the rustics did a good job creating highly individualized characterizations. The rustics were very committed to the action in their "performance" at the end of the show. There was a clear sense of their awe for the space as they entered. Brittany Reed made a strong vocal choice to play the Lion and Matt Coggin's characterization of Robin Starveling as a slow and elderly gentleman was interesting and consistently performed. Jessica Flemming, as Titania, had a wonderful voice and used it effectively in her performance. She also did a fine job "falling in love" with Bottom. The love seemed powerful and magical. Kenn Hopkins, as Oberon, also used his voice very effectively and was a very strong physical presence in the production. As Bottom, Jordan Climie was able to find the character's endless confidence. The fairies worked well together as a unit and their performance of the lullaby was excellent. Their singing was very magical and moving. The relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta was nicely developed during the performance of the rustics. I believed that they were enjoying the day and each other's company. Many of the moments of "magic" were well performed. Puck magically manipulating characters and Oberon putting characters to sleep were timed and acted well. While actors were obviously well coached and delivered interesting characters, at times, the comedy seemed overworked and overwhelmed the honesty of some moments and characters. Much of the show was very funny, but I think it could have felt cleaner and more controlled if a few of the pieces of comic business had been cut in order to highlight the better comic business.

Professor Haley obviously had a clear, unified vision of the production and was able to communicate effectively with designers. Titania's bower scenic unit was excellently designed. It was an interesting mix of found items that visually created a solid centerpiece for the scenes in the woods. It was also very functional in that it offered climbing opportunities, hiding opportunities and a variety of levels. The opening scene was very nicely designed and executed. I was impressed with how completely finished the scene looked. The detail in the marble and the variety of textures (marble, wood, glass) worked very well together to create the sense of a lavish building. The entrance upstage center functioned as a great framing device for entrances and exits. I appreciated almost all of the sound design choices. The sound effect when Puck exited was good and the sound of the drops from the magic flowers worked well. The costumes were appropriate for individual characters. The costumes seemed to fit well and allowed the actors to fulfill the very physical demands of their performances. I especially liked the costumes provided for Hippolyta. The richness of the colors and textures worked well for the character.

I was impressed by what Professor Haley was able to accomplish in this production. She took a complex script, put together a solid cast and helped them create clear, complete and humorous characters. She clearly controlled the production in terms of timing and pacing. She communicated effectively with designers to create elements that worked well together to clarify Professor Haley's conceptualization of the play. Professor Haley's direction of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is clearly equal to the high quality of directing expected of tenured faculty in relation to the many university theatre productions that I have adjudicated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. G. Berglund', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Steven G. Berglund

Director of University Theatre/Professor
Central Michigan University