

Theatre review: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Lyceum Theatre

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At first glance, it seems deliberately provocative, even perverse, to set Shakespeare's famous midsummer play in the depths of winter. And the frozen setting does, admittedly, raise a few questions, not least of which is why the rude mechanicals would decide to hold shivery rehearsals of their Pyramus and Thisbe play in an icy forest.

But this magical, joyous production by Matthew Lenton, who's also artistic director of Glasgow's Vanishing Point theatre company, soon sweeps all such confusions aside with its energy, its broad, often bawdy humour, and its big-hearted generosity. And in any case, Kai Fischer's elegantly wintry designs have a chilly beauty to them, with white-gowned fairies tossing snowflakes into the air, and blizzards threatening to engulf key moments.

Lenton uses a poignant framing device to indicate that what we're seeing is Bottom's dream, beginning and ending his production with scenes showing a subdued weaver at his ailing wife's bedside. And instead of hot-headed midsummer madness, Lenton's production seems more concerned with rebirth and renewal, reflecting the woman's hesitant recovery in a beautifully rendered evocation of spring as the play's multiple plot lines slowly disentangle and flowers magically sprout from the snowy stage.

Lenton's cast is strong, and Jordan Young steals the show as a youthful, over-eager and very funny Bottom – although Grant O'Rourke's Flute delivers a hilariously sobbing, and entirely unintelligible, speech as Thisbe in the mechanicals' play-

within-a-play. Flavia Gusmao's strong Portuguese accent brings an intriguingly otherworldly quality to Titania, queen of the fairies, but at times she's quite hard to understand. Ifan Meredith is noble but sometimes a bit flat as Oberon and Theseus, and Cath Whitefield is full of febrile energy as a restless Puck.

The four lovers, dressed primary colours like something out of *Star Trek*, are good at comedy, although Lenton sometimes lets their physical antics overshadow the subtleties of their verbal humour. But that's a minor quibble: this is a bracing, refreshing reimagining of the play, and one that balances comedy and pathos to remarkable effect.

[A Midsummer Night's Dream](#) continues at the [Lyceum Theatre](#) until 17 November

Photo: Douglas McBride