

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

The ballet, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is based off of the comedic play of the same name written by William Shakespeare in 1595/96. The ballet is performed in two acts. The first act follows closely the story of Shakespeare's play but the second act is more of a classical wedding celebration. The music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was composed by Felix Mendelssohn who had written the overture to the ballet when he was 17. It premiered on April 24, 1964 for The New York City Ballet's first season at the New York State Theater.

The ballet was choreographed by George Balanchine. Balanchine was a co-founder of the New York City Ballet and was its artistic director until he passed away in 1983. He had trained with the Imperial School of Ballet in St. Petersburg, Russia starting at the age of 10 and graduated at 17. Balanchine had a great influence on dance in the 20th century and is often thought of as the father of American ballet.

The story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is filled with kings and queens, fairies, love at first sight and of course a little magic. In the first act of the story we will meet three groups of characters. It begins with Theseus, the duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, his fiancée discussing their upcoming marriage. While they are discussing, Egeus who is a citizen of Athens enters the room with his daughter Hermia. Hermia is in love with Lysander and wants to marry him. But her father wants her to marry the Athenian Demetrius and he pleads to the duke to help him make his daughter do what he wants. Hermia is ordered by the duke to marry Demetrius or she will be punished. Because of this order, Hermia and Lysander decide they want to run away and elope. They confide to their friend, Helena, about their plans. Helena is secretly in love with Demetrius and she tells him of Hermia's plan to elope in the hopes that she will win his love. Hermia and Lysander head into the woods with Demetrius following them and Helena chasing after Demetrius.

In the same woods there are the two other groups of characters. One is a band of Athenian craftsman, also known as the Mechanicals, who are rehearsing a play they hope to perform for the duke and his bride. The other group is the fairies led by the fairy king, Oberon, and the fairy queen, Titania. Oberon and Titania are arguing about who is in charge of their page-boy. Oberon wants to make him a knight but Titania forbids that from happening. Angry, Oberon wants to teach Titania a lesson so he sends his servant, the mischievous and merry Puck, to find a magical plant to cast a spell on Titania. When the plant's liquid is squeezed onto the eyelids of someone who is asleep it will cause them to fall in love with the first creature they see when they wake up.

Oberon squeezes the juice into Titania's eyes as she sleeps. Puck had overheard the Mechanicals performing their play and he magically transforms Bottom's head into the head of a

donkey. When Titania wakes the first creature she sees is Bottom and she falls madly in love with him. Oberon has also decided to teach Demetrius a lesson as well. The fairy King had witnessed Demetrius and Helena fighting in the forest and it had disturbed him. He commanded Puck to use the magic plant on Demetrius to make him fall in love with Helena. However Puck confuses the two Athenian men and ends up using it on Lysander instead. Lysander happens to see Helena when he wakes, falling deeply in love with her and leaving Hermia. As the night goes on both Athenian men end up in love with Helena and this causes Hermia and Helena to get into a fight.

Observing the chaos that his love spell has caused, Oberon lifts the spell and puts the humans back to sleep. When the spell is broken, Titania is embarrassed for falling in love with Bottom and she and Oberon make up. The young couples awaken and decide that the events of the night had all been just a dream. Lysander and Hermia are together and Demetrius has realized that he is in love with Helena. The ending of the ballet is the big wedding celebration for all of the couples.