

QUEENS Chronicle

A fun midsummer's night in Queens

by Mark Lord

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Few things could be more appropriate — or pleasurable — than seeing “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” on a midsummer night, especially when it’s performed under the stars.

And, thanks to Hip to Hip Theatre Company’s Free Shakespeare in the Parks, now in its 13th season, you have ample opportunity to do so over the next few weeks.

The play, one of Shakespeare’s most delightful comedies, offering a glimpse into the absurdities of love, is being performed through



late August at various locations in the five boroughs, including several in Queens, as well as Long Island and New Jersey. It plays in rotating repertory with Shakespeare’s much darker “Richard III.”

“Midsummer” revolves around a quartet of young lovers and a group of actors rehearsing a play, all of whom venture into a forest outside Athens, where powerful fairies are also at war with one another. These three groups interact in various scenarios with some hilarious results.

Most humorous of all is the play within the play, a re-enactment of the Pyramus and Thisbe tragedy, which, in the hands of a half dozen inept actors (played by some very adroit ones!), becomes a laugh-out-loud farce, and a highlight of the evening.

The production, directed by S.C. Lucier, is in keeping with Hip to Hip’s tradition of presenting Shakespeare’s works in abbreviated form, running a fast-paced, intermissionless 90 minutes. It provides a wonderful opportunity to introduce young people — or anyone, actually — to The Bard.

Making it even more accessible is the pre-show Kids & the Classics, an interactive workshop that happens 30 minutes before each performance. At the July 24 opening, presented in the shadows of the Unisphere in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, fewer youngsters than usual chose to participate, suffering, no doubt, from stage fright. But those who did met some of the actors up close, and learned about stage directions, how actors elicit emotions from each other, and how the play’s themes of love, magic and confusion come into play.

According to the troupe's artistic director, Jason Marr, the performance marked the first time the cast actually ran the play outdoors, being forced by extreme heat and rain to move into more conducive rehearsal venues.

But not to worry: These are, for the most part, seasoned actors who seemed to be having a wonderful time performing for the crowd, which swelled to an estimated 200 as the evening progressed.

And they are cast without regard to age, sex or ethnicity, reflecting the diversity of this borough, the company's home base.

At the heart of this romp, as the four lovers who face innumerable challenges on their way to everlasting happiness, are Colin Wulff (Lysander), Sophia Parola (Demetrius), Rebecca Wei Hsieh (Hermia) and Leah Alfieri (Helena), all of whom do full justice to their respective roles.

Joy Marr earns the most laughs as the foolishly arrogant Bottom, who, for reasons too complicated to encapsulate here, is, at one point, transformed into an ass.

Tristan Land as Oberon, king of the fairies, and Katie Fanning as Titania, queen of the fairies, are strong presences, as is Kurt Kingsley as Puck, Oberon's jester, a mischief-maker who gets the final, touching words of the play.

Many of the actors portray more than one character, resulting in a touch of unnecessary confusion.

Sarah Constable's costume design, Robert Dutiel's set design, and, most especially, Meghan Rose's music add to the festive atmosphere.

For a full schedule of performances, visit www.hiptohip.org. Bring a blanket or lawn chair. No tickets necessary.