



## SFist Reviews: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at CalShakes

Probably like many of you, we've always liked the idea of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (and the title) more than the play itself -- at least what we remembered understanding about it from reading it in high school and watching the 1999 film with Kevin Kline, Michelle Pfeiffer, Christian Bale and Calista Flockhart. Whether it's the whole invisible faerie-people interacting with humans thing, or the spells being cast that change peoples' personalities thing, or the Elizabethan English thing, it's a play that needs to be directed well to keep everything clear and entertaining to a modern audience. Suffice it to say, if you even remotely like this play or have never seen it performed, CalShakes' latest production is the one to see.

The production seems so effortless and spare that we have a hard time putting our finger why it comes off so well. It's a great and harmonious ensemble of a cast, led by Keith Randolph Harris as Oberon/Theseus, Doug Hara as Puck, Patty Gallagher (who played Winnie in last month's *Happy Days*) as P.T. Quince, and the hilariously hammy Danny Scheie as a very gay Bottom. The two couples (in particular Avery Monsen as Lysander) are a talented and well-balanced foursome of young actors. The set by Brian Sidney Bembridge is like a gigantic blue parquet skateboard ramp, and the forest where half the play takes place is signified creatively by several steel ladders and a bunch of pillows on the floor. And the musical choices throughout, for the most part, are witty without being weird.

But we're pretty sure the bulk of accolades here are deserved by director Aaron Posner. Shakespeare's words sound musical, cogent and concise coming out of these actors' mouths, and it's a testament to the director's skill to keep the performers from using every opportunity to get lost in the poetry and lose the audience in the process. And every farcical and comical moment comes off without a single forced laugh -- the second-act play-within-the-play, as performed by the rag-tag community theater troupe (pictured, left) led by Gallagher as Quince, is particularly funny, but so is a clever, old-school magic moment between Puck and a single red LED light controlled in his hand which is a fellow faerie.

The weather looks to be holding out through the weekend, so we say grab a seat at CalShakes before the season's over. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, of all the productions they've done this year, is best seen on an outdoor stage, and of all the productions you're likely to see, we'd bet you won't forget this one.

