

THE
ROSE
BOWL
AWARDS
FOR AMATEUR
DRAMA & MUSIC

A Midsummer Night's Dream
By William Shakespeare

Presented by the Hanham Players
Adjudicated by Rebecca Thompson
9th May 2012

A fantastical 60's interpretation of Shakespeare's well-known comedy.....

Presentation

The iconic monochrome effect created a striking backdrop to your 60's set. Flats with eye-catching Lichtenstein pop art, drinks trolley and safe set the scene for the nightclub. Flats were turned, becoming brick walls, trashed with typically 60's graffiti for the 'underworld.' Sofa set the scene for Titania's boudoir. The simple yet striking set and higher level upstage provided plenty of opportunity in terms of blocking and movement.

Lighting/FX

A range of colours helped to establish the varying settings; the clinical white light for the club contrasted with the blue, mystical tones for Oberon and the reddish sultry shades for Titania's boudoir. Flashing FX during Puck's energetic mischief worked well, as did the single lantern in the gangster's hide-out. Lighting was well distributed and precisely cued. Smoke contributed to the seedy atmosphere, although was a little overused.

The range of 60s classics throughout the production added texture and ambience to the production.

Costume

I felt that you had had a lot of fun evoking this period in fashion. The black and white Mary Quant dresses, snappy suits, thin ties, flares and floaty shirts - all helped to create this distinctive era. Hippolyta's dominatrix look was striking in the second half, as was Egeus' uniform and Lysander's humorous reference to Lennon. Sequins and short skirts created memorable fairies.

Hats, hair and make-up all completed the scene – I particularly liked Titania's beautiful beehive!

Direction

You transported Shakespeare's well-known comedy into the world of the '60's. Athenian court, enchanted forest and craftsmen's guild were inventively translated into night club, red light district and east end gangster world, during a period when, as your notes states, aristocracy, artists and anti-heroes found common ground in the new-found freedom and possibilities of the era. In terms of design and staging there was a wonderful coherence about the translation of Shakespeare's characters – the upper class seediness of Theseus and his lover, hippy youngsters revelling in life and love, and the east end underworld represented by not-so-good fairies and the loveable gangsters. Although very open to presenting Shakespeare's plays in varying eras, I did have my doubts about this idea initially.... at times some of the scenes were more surreal than magic – and indeed some of the charm of the play was a little lost; however, overall the sensation of a dream was paramount and the main theme of the play, young love, was very effectively communicated.

Shakespeare's famous characters translated well into this period, giving players scope to present rounded and humorous portrayals. Bottom translated into a very memorable loveable rogue, and the requisite ambiguity of relationship between Oberon and Titania was well communicated in their seedy surroundings. There were some lovely contemporary touches of business – the opening of the safe, Puck handing out sweets – that contributed to both the humour and 60s ambience most effectively. Balance of play was a little uneven, but there was a strong sense of ensemble here and through good grasp of text and strong focus, pace was maintained throughout. On the whole, scenes were shaped effectively – some of the shaping of text during the fight scenes of the young people was a little lost, but there was great physicality here, and some very effective placing of the four players. The linking between scenes was very efficient. There was a creative use of stage – the SL thrust provided an intimate area for Titania's bower and gangster hide-out; the placing of observers during the final scene was a little awkward however, and their response was consequently lost.

Players had a good command of Shakespeare's language. They all attacked their speeches with energy and understanding – so that the meaning of the verse was clearly communicated. As a result pace rarely faltered...however there were

instances when clarity of diction and a sense of poetry were lost. Look for variety of delivery in Shakespeare's verse – the caesural is a key aspect of this; at times players just needed to point key words and phrases by pausing during longer speeches. This would have enabled your audience to digest some of the richness of the language and enabled you to communicate the sense of magic more fully.

Although the characterisation did overwhelm the lucidity of the verse, the essence of the story was very effectively communicated – and so obviously much enjoyed by your very appreciative audience.