

BREAKING NEWS

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A fanciful dancing dream

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Midsummer Night's Dream Motus O

At the Markham Theatre for the Performing Arts in Markham, Ont., on Saturday

On one of the stormiest nights of the year, Motus O attracted a packed house to the Markham Theatre to unveil the world premiere of its version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The 12-year-old company performs imaginative text-based physical theatre, and its formidable reputation rests on a series of acclaimed touring children's shows. This production, however, includes adults in its target audience.

The Stouffville, Ont.-based company is under the joint artistic directorship of James and Cindy Croker and Jack Langenhuizen. Motus O is also a family affair, with costumes by Cindy, props by James, and Croker and Langenhuizen names proliferating the production credits. The artistic directors worked with dramaturge Karen Rickers in adapting Shakespeare's beloved play, while the choreography is a collaboration with the company's five dancers.

For this ambitious production, Motus O has been augmented by 10 additional performers, and the result is a thoroughly entertaining mini-extravaganza. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is very cleverly constructed. There is just enough text to tell the bare-bones story, but not too much to be irritated by dancers voicing Shakespeare.

The basic set design is a drapery back wall for projections and light changes, and three roll-on pieces that look like flying saucers. The latter are war chariots, sleeping bowers, or ceremonial shields depending on need. The Motus eight play a multitude of roles, and it is a testament to the costume design that they are practically unrecognizable in these transformations. For example, Bottom and the Rustics all work at Peter Quince's car-repair shop, and are garbed in hilarious boiler suits, caps and nose masks. In a trice, these outfits can be thrown off in the wings, allowing the company to become fairies in skintight, decorated unitards, with fanciful masks and headdresses concealing their features.

If the pacing was a bit slow opening night, it was due to the complicated staging and is certainly correctable over time. Gilding the lily are the rhythm-driven, electronic original score by Spinfinity (Peter Jarvis and Paul Tedeschini), Bonnie Armstrong's magical lighting and Danny Wilson's inspired video/animation effects.

The parts of the play that are given over to dance are rendered very imaginatively. For example, *Dream* opens with the war between the forces of the Greek hero Theseus (Lincoln Shand), and Queen Hippolyta (Cindy Croker) and her Amazons, and it is truly bone-bruising physicality between the tunic-clad sexes. The entrance of the head fairy (Lisa King) is done via video. A Tinkerbell-like figure is seen whizzing around flowers and as her image zooms larger, King suddenly appears in person. The rest of the fairies come in on a swoop of hanging ropes employed in dizzying crisscross patterns.

The four lovers are mostly talk, but in amusing scenes Demetrius and Helena (Langenhuizen and Lara Bernstein) rip off their outer clothing in a fight, while Lysander and Hermia (Jonathan Lawley and Dahlia Steinberg) have theirs torn off in a wind storm. James Croker practically steals the show as Puck, earning waves of laughter with his quirky, quicksilver physicality. It took three years for Motus O to pull *Dream* together, but given the standing ovation at Markham, it will be touring this delightful production for years.