Brings Bard back to life

THE MONTREAL STAR
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Conservatoire Le songe d'ete puts fun back into Shakespeare

By LAWRENCE SABBATH

It may not be Shakespeare as taught in schools, but the campy production of Le songe d'une nuit d'ete which premiered last night at the Conservatoire d'Art Dramatique possesses an inner life of its own that makes for great fun.

For its final public offering of the season the Montreal branch of the provincial conservatory brought over Jaime Jaimes, an Argentine working out of Paris, to direct 10 graduating third-year students and a number of first and second-year students who complete the large cast required by the long, two-act comedy.

Jaimes does with A Midsummer Night's Dream what more directors ought to do with established classics. He opens it up in unexpected areas and in lively, entertaining ways to bring a sense of contemporaneity and fresh vision to a play familiar to most people.

To those unlucky enough never to have read or seen the original, Jaimes' delightful, witty spoof can only win new converts to ghe Bard, not that he needs any by this time.

None of the principal court characters have been changed by Jaimes. Here is Theseus, Duke of Athens, preparing for his wedding to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

Into their presence come two couples whose lives seem destined to interweave fatefully — Hermia, beloved of Lysander and Demetrius who is also enamored of Hermia but who is pursued by Helena.

Matters look black for Hermia when her unyielding father insists she marry Demetrius on pain of death.

Enter Oberon, king of the fairies and his queen Titania, along with a mischievous Puck and a retinue of male and female fairies.

Intertwined with these themes is a local troupe of amateur actors composed of Bottom, Snug, Flute, Snout and Starveling, all intent on performing the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta.

Jaimes has wisely decided not to try to compete with Shakespeare's gloriously poetic language. Instead, he has concentrated on the storyline and on a farcical spoof of the fantasy elements — the fairies and their magical potions.

Although Oberon and Titania enact their roles straight, their entourage consists of the wackiest fairies ever shown live.

Star of the entire show is Sylvie Gosselin as a devilishly adorable, brashly outspoken and hyper-charged Puck who beats her breast in true Tarzan style and explodes constantly in guffaws and giggles.

I had the impression that Jaimes pushed the volcanic chuckles overmuch until it became a nuisance, but Gosselin's impish, bravado charm managed to win out.

The sets by Nicolas Sologoub are very good, though he might find a way to employ simpler props to avoid so many stage hands scampering around for scene changes. His costumes have a Middle-East tone. Some are amusing while others, such as Helena's, are much too heavy.

The extravagant eye makeup by Jacques Lafleur is excellent in workmanship and effect. Alain Clavier's music, performed on stage, ranges from the tentative to snatches of songs that apparently require more work. None of the performers seem to have good singing voices, though it may be that the airs were not melodious.

Not everything works well in Jaimes' handling, despite a burlesqued rendering of the Pyramus and Thisbe court playlet that is a real howl.

I thought the third-year students acquitted themselves well and that the second- and first-year students evidenced want of adequate training. Mingling beginners with the experienced has too many drawbacks. It should be possible to choose plays that would obviate this.

The show runs to June 1.

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