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## **Family Plays**

William Shakespeare's

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM



Adapted into a  
one-act comedy by  
**Cecil Pickett**

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

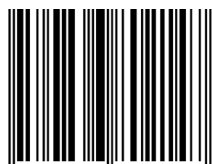
**Comedy. Adapted by Cecil Pickett. Based on the play by William Shakespeare.** *Cast: 4 to 7m., 6 to 9w.* In this one-act adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—winner of the Texas UIL state championship and a featured play at the Houston Shakespeare Festival—Cecil Pickett shows his knack for knowing what to include and what to leave out of the original Shakespeare text without jarring transitions, awkward changes of character, or disrupting blackouts. We see and clearly understand the family spat between Oberon and Titania and the manner in which this conjugal disagreement affects the efforts of a group of tradesmen rehearsing a play. We delight in the antics of the mischievous Puck. We laugh at the ineptness of the Rustics in trying to stage their play. We chuckle at Bottom's desire to play every role—and we howl with delight at Bottom's ass's head and Titania's infatuation with the monster. Pickett's adaptations are arranged with the play script on the right-hand page and corresponding detailed stage directions and suggestions on the left-hand page. Audiences fortunate enough to see a Pickett-directed play are always enthralled by the style, the grace, the charm and the choreographed movement. A sense of charm and grace are key in certain scenes: when Puck wafts glitter through the air to the tinkling accompaniment of bells, when Titania's fairies carry her in on a palanquin with choreographed style and when Oberon stops action with flowing gestures. This graceful style is especially effective when it is rudely interrupted by the boorish, earthy, plodding Rustics. *Approximate running time: 35 minutes.*  
*Code: MM3.*

## Family Plays

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A Midsummer Night's Dream

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(A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM)

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# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## *Cast*

### The Fairy Kingdom

**Titania**, Queen of the fairies

**Oberon**, King of the fairies

**Puck**, a wood sprite and henchman to Oberon

**Peaseblossom**

**Moth**

**Cobweb**

**Mustardseed**

} Titania's fairies

### The Rustics

**Bottom**, a weaver

**Quince**, a carpenter

**Snug**, a joiner

**Starveling**, a tailor

**Flute**, a bellows-mender

**Snout**, a tinker

Place: A mythical wood near a city-state, Athens

## ABOUT THE PLAY

Cecil Pickett taught drama at Bellaire High School in Houston for nine years. In five of those years his plays won the state championship in the world's largest one-act play contest. It was a success story that no other high school director anywhere had ever before achieved.

His success resulted from several factors. His ability to invent fresh, meaningful, clever movement and business for his actors gives his plays a charm and a smoothness which make them outstanding. The stage directions supplied by Mr. Pickett for this book reveal his creativity.

Another ingredient in his formula for success is his talent for adapting classics to contest length. Not everyone is capable of cutting a two or three hour play to 35 minutes. In fact, it really takes a playwright to do the condensation properly.

In this adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—one of Mr. Pickett's five state champions—he shows his knack for knowing what to keep in and what to leave out without jarring transitions, awkward changes of character, or disrupting blackouts. We see and clearly understand the family spat between Oberon and Titania and the manner in which this conjugal disagreement affects the efforts of a group of tradesmen rehearsing a play. We delight in the antics of the mischievous Puck, we laugh at the ineptness of the Rustics in trying to stage their play, we chuckle at Bottom's desire to play every role (how is it that sixteenth century British Shakespeare understood so well the trials and tribulations of twentieth century American directors!)—and we howl with delight at Bottom's ass's head and Titania's infatuation with the monster.

Upon seeing this enchanting miniature version of Shakespeare's comedy, audience members—and actors, too—will surely want to see the full play. Such is the hope of the author and publisher.

After his nine eminently successful years at Bellaire High School, Mr. Pickett was appointed to the drama faculty at the University of Houston, where he has continued to gain renown as a director.

In this adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the script has been shortened to one-act-play length for situations in which the full play cannot be used. This version concentrates on the rehearsal and performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe" by the Rustics and the peripheral involvement of the Fairy Kingdom.

Shakespeare was well aware that, to be successful, his plays had to entertain the Groundlings—the "common" people who paid a penny for

the privilege of standing for four or five hours on the dirt floor of the Elizabethan theatre. In his tragedies he entranced the people in the pit with witches, ghosts, sword fights, bloody murders, sex, mystery, and suspense. In his comedies he relied on slapstick and burlesque. Perhaps his most famous burlesque creation is the “Pyramus and Thisbe” scene performed by the “rude mechanicals”—the uneducated, uncultured laborers—in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

This adaptation suggests a set comprised of a few trees (the adapter used symbolic set pieces in compliance with the Texas one-act play contest rules), two or three tree stumps, a platform, and a trampoline concealed behind the platform so that Puck can make impressive leaping entrances (see Production Notes, p. 31).

There are many costume possibilities. Shakespeare is famous (or infamous) for his indifference to time and place. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, is set in a clime so far north that midsummer night (June 21-23) has no darkness—sunset blends into sunrise; hence, the reason for an all-night celebration. But all the excitement on this particular midsummer night is preparatory to the marriage of Theseus, “Duke of Athens.” Theseus was *king* of Athens in Greek mythology. The first dukes appeared in the Roman Empire—perhaps 1500 years after Theseus’ time. Peter Quince, Bottom, Flute the bellows-mender, and the other Rustics were guildsmen of sixteenth century England. And Oberon and Titania are names from Old French and Latin fairy tales. So the costumer has many options—ancient Greece, medieval Scandinavian, early French, Elizabethan England, or timeless Fairyland . . . among others. Mr. Pickett gives his costume choices in the Production Notes, p. 30.

Audiences fortunate enough to see a Pickett-directed play are always enthralled by the style, the grace, the charm, the choreographed movement. When Puck wafts glitter through the air to the tinkling accompaniment of bells; when Titania’s fairies carry her in on a palanquin with choreographed style; when Oberon stops action with flowing gestures, “charm” and “grace” are the key. And this graceful style is especially effective when it is rudely interrupted by the boorish, earthy, plodding Rustics.

Music—Shakespearean, Renaissance, or modern classical (see Production Notes)—is suggested as the curtain opens and elsewhere in the stage directions,

Following Cecil Pickett’s suggestions in the playbook and adding your own creativeness will produce a play of rare excellence.



## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

### *Stage Directions and Notes*

*[Numbers below correspond to numbers on the page opposite.]*

1. *There is lively music as the curtain opens. We discover PEASEBLOSSOM sitting Down Right on a tree stump nibbling on a blossom. MUSTARDSEED, COBWEB, and MOTH sit Down Center weaving a boa of flowers and leaves for their Queen. As laughter is heard offstage Right, MOTH rises quickly and crosses to Up Center platform. PUCK enters Up Right of the platform. He jumps on the concealed trampoline and onto the platform. PEASEBLOSSOM, MUSTARDSEED, and COBWEB cross Right and hide behind the tree stumps. MOTH crosses Down Left to exit, but is stopped by Puck's question.*

2. *PUCK crosses Down Center. MOTH crosses to Puck. The other FAIRIES steal above the stumps, their heads bobbing up and down to watch the scene between Moth and Puck.*

3. *PUCK crosses Down Right indicating the arrival of Oberon. MUSTARDSEED, COBWEB, and PEASEBLOSSOM counter Left to join Moth. They are all in squatted positions and ready for flight.*

4. *(a) PUCK is electric in miming a horse, a crab walking, and an old woman drinking ale. After his speech, he falls on his back laughing and kicking his legs in the air. (b) He rises and bows Left to an unseen Oberon, then crosses Up Center to platform. The four FAIRIES kneel Down Left for the entrance of Titania. Music swells as TITANIA and OBERON enter Right and Left. The four FAIRIES immediately form a group behind their Queen.*

5. *OBERON snaps his fingers and PUCK crosses to Down Right kneeling behind Oberon. OBERON and TITANIA cross to Center. After the line "jealous Oberon . . ." TITANIA crosses to Up Center platform. OBERON extends his hands in an energetic thrust. This magic freezes TITANIA. OBERON, with a snap of his fingers, breaks the magic spell. TITANIA crosses Down Center to Oberon. The FAIRIES counter this movement with a cross to the Up Center platform. PUCK squats like a chimpanzee behind Oberon.*

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### *Properties*

Bower (stretcher covered with sheer material of green and blue)

Sheer coverlet applied with flowers and leaves—*Titania*

Six-foot boa of leaves and flowers—*Fairies*

Magical flower, glitter—*Puck*

Ass's head—*Bottom*

Scrolls for the *Rustics*

Pouch filled with pistachio nuts—*Flute*

Two lanterns

Two small pots and two skillets—*Snout*

Two wooden swords

Ear trumpet—*Snout*

Smoking pipe—*Snug*

Tiara or garland of flowers—*Fairies*

Four heavy duty wire hoops (approx. 4' in diameter) so constructed to sit on the tops of columns to give the illusion of trees. Attach long thin strips of green material in lengths of 6' to 3' around the periphery of the hoops. Any other type of prop trees may be used.

Small stool, glasses—*Quince*

Basket of rose petals or daisies, mantle—*Flute as Thisbe*

False proscenium with curtains (curtains must part in the center—*Pyramus and Thisbe* painted in bold letters across the curtains)

### *Costume Suggestions*

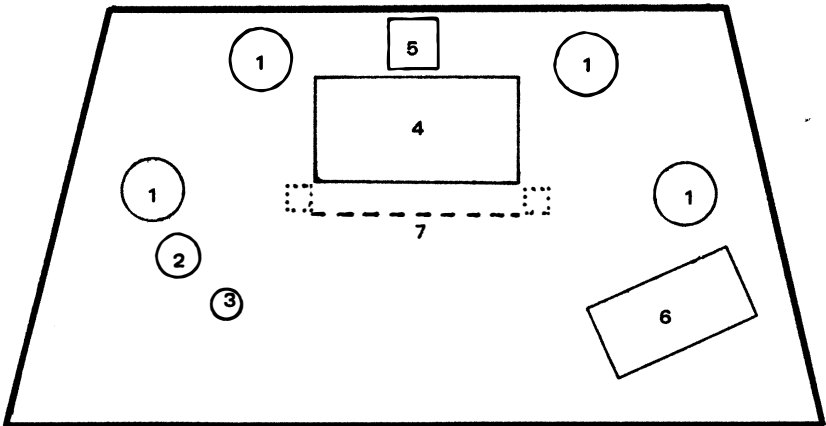
An important viewpoint in costume design for this show is the contrast of the two worlds—the ethereal world of the Fairy Kingdom and the workaday mundane world of the *Rustics*. You might wish to select a period of time for the *Rustics* (Grecian, Elizabethan, or even modern eclectic). Despite the period, one needs to think of the *Rustics* in materials such as muslin, hopsacking, burlap, leather, suede, and cotton. The color family for the simple cut of clothing could be earth tones. Members of the Fairy Kingdom should blend with their environmental surroundings. For the **sprites**, tie-dyed body stockings for the women covered with leaves, twigs, moss, or wild flowers while the male fairies might wear dance trunks covered with similar choices. Their hair could be wigs—tightly curled—with burrs, flowers, or small crowns of twigs. Body paint could cover the male torso and legs (Mehron offers a wide selection of body paint). **Puck** could be a satyr-like creature—dance trunks covered with brown fur and a short tail, with short horns protruding from his tousled hair, and barefooted. **Oberon** may be a minotaur image with body make-up, dance trunks covered with black fur, 3" fur bracelets on each wrist and ankle, a full transparent black cape, and a crown sculpted of twigs. **Titania** might be a beautiful bird: a long wig with a plumelet of feathers much like that of a cockatiel adorning her head and peacock-designed transparent material flowing from her arms to suggest the bird movement. Remember the *Rustics* are outsiders in this mercurial and sylvan land. Their costumes (like those of the Fairy Kingdom) reflect their physical life. The *Rustics'* movement is heavy-footed, awkward, and deliberate while the *Fairies* are swift, fleeting, graceful, oftentimes acrobatic and rhythmic. A final suggestion—do not go with the dance-recital look for the *Fairies*. Spangles, sequins, and other such "glitz" seem to be a denial of this magical world.

Costumes for the Rustics' performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe" may be something like the following: **Bottom**—shield, helmet, leggings, wooden sword. **Flute**—muslin dress with full skirt, bosom built into dress, huge appliqued daisies around the bottom of the skirt, wig, sandals. **Wall (Snout)**—piece of material painted like a wall (6' wide, 5' long); material has grommets, eyes, and string to attach to arms of actor; papier mache rock on a hat-base with string to tie underneath chin; 6' string of artificial ivy to drape around his arms. **Moon (Starveling)**—astrologer's gown with stars appliqued; half-moon built on hat-base (moon should encircle half his face). **Lion (Snug)**—head and shoulder piece covered with mop material and spray painted; work gloves painted or dyed; claws sewed into fingertips. **Quince**—large cape of rough material, pork-pie hat.

### Music

The adapter used music for his award-winning production at places indicated in the stage directions. Shakespearean or Renaissance music would, obviously, be appropriate, or one might consider Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But any lively classical music—especially music with forest sounds, such as the works of Villa-Lobos—will do very well.

Floor Plan



Scale: 1/8" = 1'

- 1—Trees
- 2—Large tree stump
- 3—Small tree stump (more stumps may be added)
- 4—Platform
- 5—Trampoline concealed behind platform
- 6—Titania's bower
- 7—False proscenium for "Pyramus and Thisbe" (curtains may be suspended on a pole between two pylons)

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Adapted by Cecil Pickett

PUCK. [1] How now, spirit! Whither wander you? [2]

MOTH. Over hill, over dale,  
Thorough bush, thorough brier  
I do wander everywhere to serve  
The Fairy Queen,  
To dew her orbs upon the green . . .  
I must go seek some dewdrops here  
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.  
Farewell, thou lob of spirits, I'll be gone.  
Our queen, Titania, comes here anon.

PUCK. [3] The King doth keep his revels here tonight.  
Take heed the Queen come not within his sight.  
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,  
Because that she, as her attendant, hath  
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;  
And jealous Oberon would have that child  
Knight of his train to trace the forests wild;  
But she perforce withholds the loved boy,  
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy.

MOTH. Either I mistake your shape and making quite,  
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite  
Called Robin Goodfellow. Are you not he?

PUCK. I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
I jest to Oberon and make him smile [4a]  
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
Neighing in likeness of a filly-foal;  
And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl  
In very likeness of a roasted crab,  
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob  
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.  
[4b] But room, Fairy . . . Here comes Oberon!

MOTH. And here my mistress! Would that he were gone!

OBERON. Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania! [5]

TITANIA. What, jealous Oberon? Fairies, away.  
I have forsworn his bed and company!

6. *OBERON kneels at Titania's feet.*

7. *PUCK leaps to the top of Down Right tree stump.*

8. *TITANIA crosses to Up Center platform, stops and turns to face Oberon. OBERON crosses Down Right to Puck. PUCK whispers in his ear. The crouching FAIRIES form a semi-circle above Titania.*

9. *OBERON crosses Up Center to Titania.*

10. *TITANIA turns and exits Up Right. The FAIRIES follow Titania.*

11. *OBERON calls after her.*

12. *OBERON sits on the center edge of the platform. PUCK crosses to Oberon and squats in front of him.*

13. *PUCK jumps up and down in wild excitement, then crosses Down Right leaping onto the tree stump. He exits Down Right on "forty minutes!"*

14. *OBERON rises and crosses Down Center in full front position.*

15. *PUCK enters Up Center by a leap onto the platform, feigning exhaustion. PUCK hides the flower behind his back. OBERON crosses Up Center to Puck. PUCK teases Oberon by handing him the flower, then quickly withdrawing it. PUCK crosses Down Left. OBERON, with his hand demanding the flower, follows him. PUCK crosses to the Down Right area near the stumps. OBERON gives the magic thrust with his hand to Puck. PUCK freezes in flight. OBERON crosses Left to him, snaps his fingers, and releases the spell. A cowering PUCK hands Oberon the flower.*

16. *OBERON sits on the tree stump. PUCK crosses and sits at the feet of Oberon on the line, "and sit!"*

OBERON. Tarry, rash wanton! Am I not thy lord? [6]

TITANIA. Then I must be thy lady!

OBERON. Why would Titania cross her Oberon? [7]

I do but beg a little changeling boy

To be my henchman.

TITANIA. [8] Set your heart at rest.

The fairyland buys not the child of me.

I will not part with him.

OBERON. How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA. Perhaps till after Theseus' wedding day.

OBERON. [9] Give me that boy and I will go with thee!

TITANIA. Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies away,

We shall chide downright if I longer stay. [10]

OBERON. [11] Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove  
Till I torment thee for this injury!

My gentle Puck, come hither. [12] You remember

That very time,

Cupid all armed. A certain aim he took

At a fair Vestal, throned by the West,

And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,

As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.

Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell.

PUCK. I remember! I remember!

OBERON. It fell upon a little western flower.

The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid,

Will make or man or woman madly dote

Upon the next live creature that it sees.

Fetch me that flower!

PUCK. [13] I will! I will! I'll put a girdle round

The earth in forty minutes!

OBERON. [14] Having once this juice,

I'll watch Titania when she is asleep

And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.

The next thing then she, waking, looks upon

She shall pursue it with the soul of love!

[15] Ah, hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

PUCK. Ay, there it is.

OBERON. I pray thee give it me.

[16] Come, my gentle Puck and sit!

17. *PUCK cups his hands as OBERON squeezes some of the magic juice of the flower into Puck's palm.*

18. *PUCK rises, crosses Down Right, turns, bows to Oberon, exits.*

19. *The FAIRIES, laughing and chattering, enter Up Left bearing TITANIA on her bower. MOTH leads the way tossing magic dust into the air. COBWEB serves as the rear sentinel. They cross Down Left and place the bower gently down. PEASEBLOSSOM, MOTH, and MUSTARD-SEED sit above the bower. MOTH stands at the Down Left of Titania, fanning her with a large plume. Simultaneously with the above action, OBERON rises, places his palm above his head and slowly moves it down to his waist, making himself invisible. The light on this area dims with the movement. The FAIRIES chant a lullaby to TITANIA as she falls asleep. The FAIRIES cover her gently with a gossamer cloth covered with small blossoms and leaves. OBERON crosses Center. FAIRIES circle Titania to protect her. OBERON does the magic thrust to the FAIRIES and they exit Left. OBERON crosses and kneels upstage of the bower. He takes the gossamer cloth and gently pulls it back revealing Titania's head. OBERON, on cue, squeezes one drop of liquid from the flower into Titania's eyes. He replaces the coverlet, rises, and exits Down Right. Music fades and the singing of the RUSTICS can be heard Up Left. They are singing an old English round. QUINCE enters to Up Center platform. He signals the others to join him. BOTTOM crosses to Left of Quince as the other RUSTICS remain above them. QUINCE, holding the lantern, crosses to Right Center. BOTTOM crosses to Left Center. SNOUT crosses to right edge of platform and sits. STARVELING crosses to left edge of platform and sits. FLUTE, after searching for the right spot by turning around, crosses to Up Left and sits under the tree. SNUG, after lighting his pipe, crosses to Down Right tree stump and sits facing upstage. Each Rustic, except Snug, begins a task: STARVELING opens his basket, takes out needle and thread, and mends a garment. A lantern is by his side. SNOUT shines a skillet. FLUTE takes nuts from his pouch, cracks them with his teeth, and eats them.*

20. *QUINCE crosses to Snug. He hands the lantern to him, then takes out his reading glasses and puts them on. He reaches in his knapsack and takes out the master scroll. He opens the scroll and reads the title of the play with overdone articulation.*

21. *BOTTOM claps his hands and all the RUSTICS except SNOUT, who is deaf, give their attention to Quince.*

22. *QUINCE selects Bottom's script from his sack and hands it to him.*

I know a place where the wild thyme blows,  
 Where oxslips and the nodding violet grows;  
 Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
 With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine.  
 There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,  
 Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight;  
 And there the snake throws her enamell'd skin,  
 Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in;  
 And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes  
 And make her full of hateful fantasies.

[17] Take thou some of it and do my will  
 And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow!

PUCK. [18] Fear not, my lord; your servant shall do so!

TITANIA. [19] Come, now a roundel and a fairy song  
 To sing me soon asleep.  
 Then to your offices, and let me rest.

OBERON. What thou seest when thou dost wake,  
 Do it for thy true-love take;  
 Love and languish for his sake.  
 Be it ounce or cat or bear,  
 Pard, or boar with bristled hair  
 In thy eye that shall appear  
 When thou wak'st, it is thy dear.  
 Wake when some vile thing is near.

QUINCE. Here's a marvelous place for the rehearsal of our play. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring house, and we will do it in action as we will do it before the Duke of Athens on his wedding night. So, is all our company here?

BOTTOM. You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the script.

QUINCE. What! Oh, yes of course. [20] Yes of course. Marry, our play is "The Most Lamentable Comedy and Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby."

BOTTOM. A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll! [21] Masters, spread yourselves.

QUINCE. Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.

BOTTOM. Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE. [22] You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.