A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Supplemental Guide

Created By:

COLORADO BALLET — EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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How long will it be?

Act 1 - 45 min

Act 2 - 45 min

Total Run Time

Intermission - 20 min

1 hour 50 min*

*Times are approximate

Synopsis of the Ballet

Act I Prologue: The Court of Duke Theseus
Egeus, Hermia s father, demands that she marry Demetrius against her wishes; she wants to marry her sweetheart Lysander. The Duke of Athens, Theseus, agrees with Egeus. Demetrius wants to marry Hermia, but is pursued by Helena. To escape, Lysander and Hermia flee into the woods, but Helena informs Demetrius of their flight. Demetrius follows in hot pursuit, with Helena close behind him.

Act I, Scene 1: The Woods
The lovers wander deep into the woods, watched by Puck, servant to Oberon, King of the Fairies, as sprites and fairies make their way to the court of their King and his Queen, Titania.

Act I, Scene 2: A Forest Clearing
Titania and Oberon quarrel when she refuses to give him a changeling child. Angry, Oberon sends Puck to fetch a magical flower that causes love at first sight. He plans to use it on Titania and also help the troubled mortals in the forest. Mistaking Lysander for Demetrius, Puck enchants him, leading to confusion as Lysander falls for Helena. Meanwhile, Oberon casts the spell on the sleeping Titania. Elsewhere, village rustics wander into the woods, and Puck transforms Bottom into a donkey. Titania awakes, sees the donkey-headed Bottom, and instantly falls in love, completing Oberon's trick.

Act II, Scene 1 A Forest Clearing
Hermia, searching for Lysander, confronts Demetrius but storms off when he refuses to help. Demetrius falls asleep, and Oberon enchants him with the love spell meant for Lysander. Lysander enters, still enchanted, pursuing Helena, who is confused and upset when Demetrius also wakes and falls in love with her. Chaos ensues as both men compete for Helena. Hermia arrives, and Oberon, angry at Puck's blunder, uses magic to restore order, putting the lovers to sleep with their true partners. Meanwhile, Titania awakens from her enchantment, sees the beast she loved, and relinquishes the changeling boy to Oberon. At dawn, the fairies vanish. Theseus and Hippolyta find the sleeping lovers and, seeing all resolved, bring them back to Athens for a joyful wedding

Act III The Court of Theseus that Evening The bridesmaids and court children prepare Hermia and Helena for their wedding. The lovers are married by Duke Theseus, and the court dances in celebration. That night, deep in the magical wood, Titania reconciles with Oberon. She presents him with the changeling child, and bathed in moonlight they dance, at peace with each other once more.

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Behind the Ballet: William Shakespeare
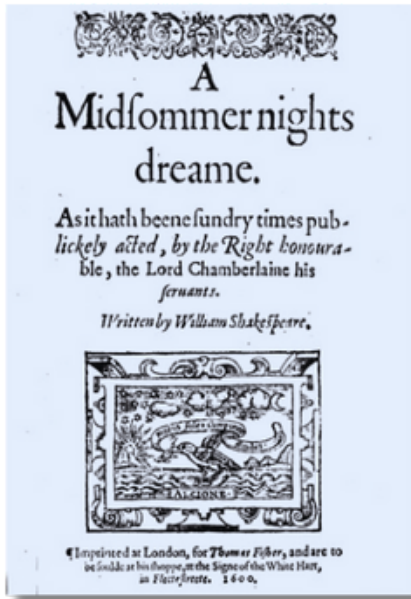
Christopher Wheeldon's ballet is based on the famous play "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by William Shakespeare. Full of mischief, mistaken identities, and magical creatures, the story is a perfect match for ballet, where movement and music help bring the enchanted world to life.

Shakespeare wrote A Midsummer Night's Dream in the mid-1590s, likely around the same time he was working on Romeo and Juliet. Some scholars believe it may have been written to celebrate an aristocratic wedding—just like the play's own grand wedding of Duke Theseus and Hippolyta. Unlike many of Shakespeare's other works, the plot seems to be entirely his own invention. The play is full of references to mythology, fairies, and dreams, and explores themes like the challenges of love, the power of magic, and the mystery of dreams.

About William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Widely regarded as one of the most influential writers of all time, William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Although his exact birthdate is unknown, he was baptized on April 26, 1564. He came from a middle-class family and attended grammar school but did not go to college. At just 18, he married Anne Hathaway, and they had three children.

In his mid-twenties, Shakespeare moved to London to pursue a career in theater. He began writing plays for his own acting troupe, Lord Chamberlain's Men, which later became The King's Men. He wrote 38 plays and over 150 poems, including famous works like Hamlet, Macbeth, and King Lear. Despite some criticism in his time for lacking a formal education, his work was celebrated by both Queen Elizabeth I and King James I.

Shakespeare retired to Stratford and died in 1616 at the age of 52. After his death, his friends collected his plays in a book known as the First Folio, helping preserve his work for generations to come.

Choreographer

(Image © Holger Badekow)

Christopher Wheeldon

Christopher Wheeldon is being called a wunderkind in the ballet world for his choreography, recently making his triumphant operatic debut, drawing critical acclaim for his project with the Bolshoi Ballet, and creating his dynamic new company, Morphoses.

The New York Times praised his piece for the Metropolitan Opera as "dazzlingly glamorous and sophisticated as it is pretty." Resident choreographer for New York City Ballet, Mr. Wheeldon was nominated for an Olivier Award for DGV (Danse à Grande Vitesse) with the Royal Ballet. His artistic brilliance has taken him around the world, with performances in Moscow, San Francisco, Oslo, Boston, Spain, Seattle, Miami, and beyond.

In August 2007, Mr. Wheeldon premiered Morphoses at the Vail International Dance Festival. His bold new company, he said, will restore ballet as a force of innovation and blend elements of traditional and classical ballet.

What is a Choreographer?

A person who creates the sequence and movements for a dance performance.

Born in Yeovil, Somerset, England, Christopher began his ballet training at the East Coker Ballet School and joined the Royal Ballet School at age 11. In 1991, he joined The Royal Ballet and won the Prix de Lausanne. In 1993, he moved to New York City Ballet and became a soloist in 1998. Mr. Wheeldon retired from dancing in 2000 to focus on choreography. As NYCB's first artist in residence, he created Polyphonia and Variations Sérieuses in 2001, and was named resident choreographer that same year.

His ballets include Morphoses, Carousel (A Dance), Carnival of the Animals (with verse by John Lithgow), Liturgy, Slavonic Dances, and Mercurial Manoeuvres. He has created works for major companies including Boston Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, The Royal Ballet, and the School of American Ballet. He received the Mae L. Wien Award for choreography and the Martin E. Segal Award from Lincoln Center.

Mr. Wheeldon also choreographed for the film Center Stage and made his Broadway debut in 2002 with Sweet Smell of Success. Other notable works include Continuum for San Francisco Ballet and Tryst for The Royal Ballet.
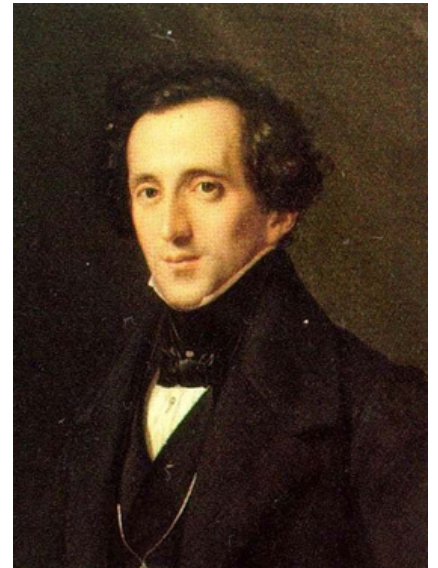
Composer

Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809 1847) was a German Romantic composer. He wrote and conducted many symphonies (instrumental pieces of three or more movements for an orchestra), concerti (compositions for one or more instruments with orchestral accompaniment), and piano and chamber pieces (music for fewer than 10 instruments).

Born in Hamburg, Germany to Jewish parents, Mendelssohn's family converted to Lutheranism and moved to Berlin in order to access the best in education. Felix and his siblings began piano lessons early on. Felix was regarded as a prodigy making his first public performance at the age of nine and publishing works by the age of thirteen, and his sister, Fanny, went on to become a pianist and composer herself. Because it was considered inappropriate at the time for a woman to have a career in music, select works of Fanny's were later published under her brother's name.

Mendelssohn wrote twelve string symphonies between the ages of 12 and 14, and his first full symphony at fifteen. A year later, he composed an octet for strings and the overture to Shakespeare s A Midsummer Night's Dream. These are among his highest-regarded early works. Sixteen years later, Mendelssohn created incidental music for the play, including his famous Wedding March, which continues to be used in many countries as the recessional, or closing music, for marriage ceremonies.

Felix Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn's own marriage was happy, and he and his wife, Cécile, had five children. In 1835, he was appointed conductor of the orchestra in Leipzig, Germany, and he later founded and served as the first Director of a Conservatory, or College of Music there. The Leipzig Conservatory is still in existence, and now also includes Drama in its curriculum.

What is a Composer?

A person who writes music, especially as a job.

Suffering from ill-health later in life, and very sad over the death of his sister Fanny in May of 1847, Mendelssohn died just six months later after a series of strokes. After his death, the Nazi regime banned his work because of his Jewish origins, and Anti-Semitic critics denigrated his genius. Statues erected in his memory were destroyed in Germany. In England, however, Mendelssohn's work remained popular. In 1858, Princess Victoria began the tradition of including his Wedding March in her wedding to the Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia.

Shakespearean Insults

Take that, thou puking, onion-eyed, bum-bailey! Shakespeare was not only a master of words, but also a master of the insult!

All of the words below are contained in Shakespeare s plays. The next time you want to really shock your enemies, combine terms from columns 1, 2, and 3, and preface them with the word thou. Better yet, research to find out what some of these epithets really mean!

1	2	3
artless	base-court bat-fowling	apple-john
bawdy	beef-witted	baggage
beslubbering	beetle-headed	barnacle
bootless	boil-brained	bladder
churlish	clapper-clawed	boar-pig
cockered	clay-brained	bugbear
clouted	common-kissing	bum-bailey
craven	crook-pated	canker-blossom
currish	dismal-dreaming	clack-dish
dankish	dizzy-eyed	clotpole
dissembling	doghearted	coxcomb
droning	earth-vexing	codpiece
errant	elf-skinned	death-token
fawning	kat-kidneyed	dewberry
fobbing	fen-sucked	flap-dragon
froward	flap-mouthed	flax-wench
frothy	fly-bitten	flirt-gill
gleeking	folly-fallen	foot-licker
goatish	fool-born	fustilarian
gorbellied	full-gorged	giglet gudgeon
impertinent	guts-griping	haggard
infectious	half-faced	harpy
jarring	hasty-witted	hedge-pig
loggerhead	hedge-born	horn-beast
lumpish	hell-hated	hugger-mugger
mammering	idle-headed	lewdster
mangled	ill-bred	lout
paunchy	ill-nurtured	maggot-pie
pribbling	knotty-pated	malt-worm
puking	milk-livered	mammet
puny	motley-minded	measle
qualling	onion-eyed	minnow miscreant
rank	plume-plucked	moldwarp
reeky	pottle-deep	mumble-news
roguish	pox-marked	nut-hook
ruttish	reeling-ripe	pigeon-egg
saucy	rough-hewn	pignut
spleeny	rude-growing	puttock
spongy	rump-fed	pumpion
surly	shard-borne	ratsbane scut
tottering	sheep-biting	skainsmate
unmuzzled	spur-galled	strumpet
vain	swag-bellied	varlet
venomed	tardy-gaited	vassal
villainous	tickle-brained	whey-face
warped	toad-spotted	wagtail
wayward	urchin-snouted	
weedy	weather-bitten	
yeasty		

Activities

LISTEN AND LEARN: Listen to music. Close your eyes, if you need to. Now, answer the following questions: If this piece of music were a shape, what shape would it be? A color? An animal? A season? A place? Why? Is it fast, slow, or varied? What is the mood of the piece, or what emotions do you feel when you listen to it? Think of three more adjectives that you believe describe the music. Compare your answers with other students' answers. Are any of your answers the same? Why do you think you came up with similar or different answers?

MOVE TO THE MUSIC: Now, divide into groups and create movements that go with your team's answers from the listening activity. Try to incorporate some of everyone's answers. How do the animals move? How would you move in winter that's different from how you move in summer? How would blue move, as opposed to orange? Some movements should be high; others should be low. Some should be fast; others could be slow. Be mindful of using all of your body, not just your feet. Link your movements together into a dance and perform it for the class.

POETRY IN MOTION: After seeing the production, write a poem inspired by the performance. Now, try reversing that process! Get into groups, find a poem that you really like, and create a dance to go along with it! Identify powerful words and themes within the poem, and associate movements with them. Link the movements together to create a dance to perform for your peers. If you were to make an entire production out of your dance, what kind of sets and costumes would be fitting? Draw or make a collage of pictures representing how you would set the scene.

STORYTELLING THROUGH DANCE: Dance is an art form that tells a story through movement. Using a story or text your class is studying, you can recreate scenes from the story using dance. Put the students in small groups and assign different scenes from the story. Instruct the students to reinterpret the story using only movement. Invite the students to be creative in their reinterpretations, allow abstract or literal movement.

Activities

COMPARE AND CONTRAST: Utilize the Venn diagram as a way to compare and contrast three different media mediums for storytelling. Try comparing the ballet to two other stories – one in literature and one in film.
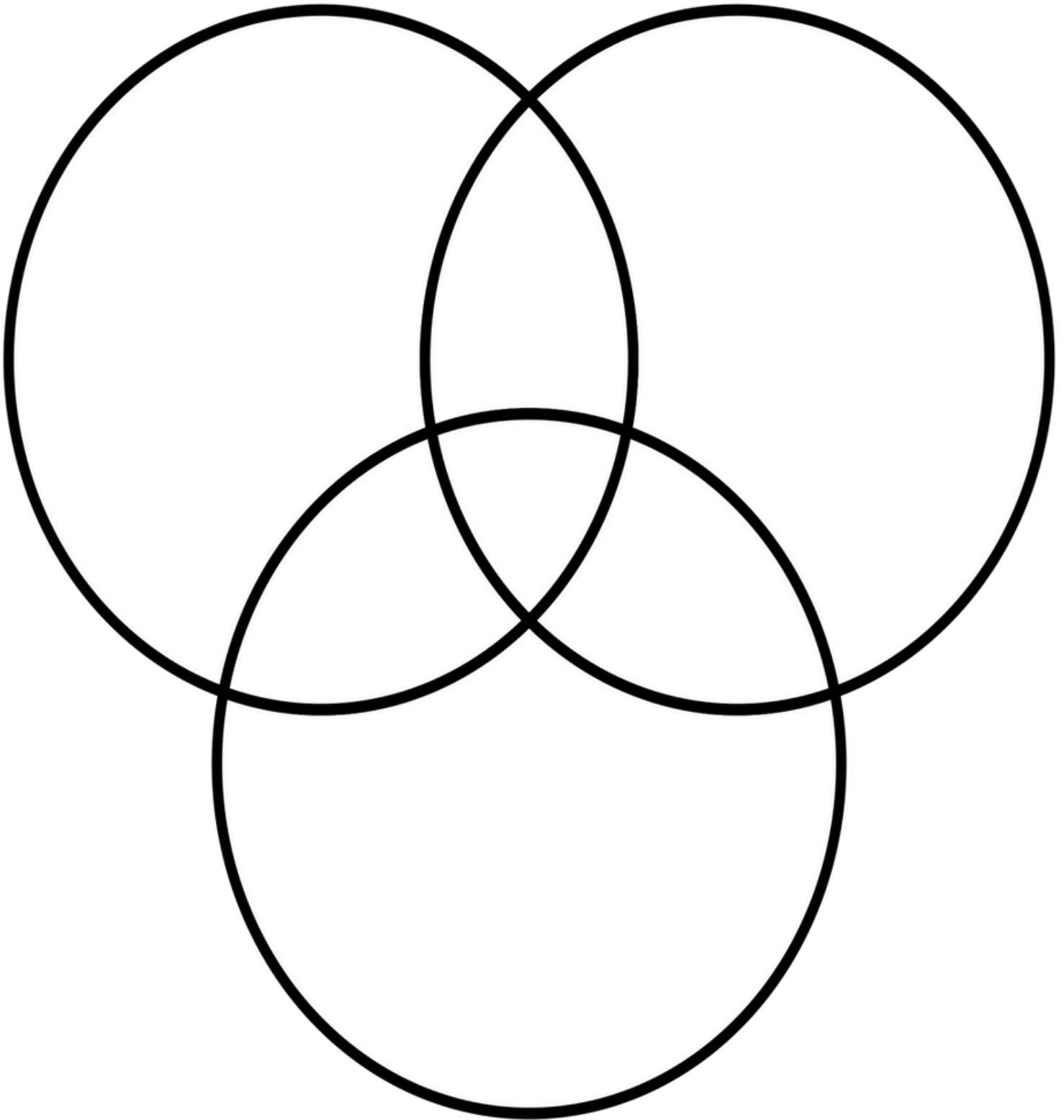
Activities
Dancing Ribbon Rings

Materials Needed:

- Plastic rings, shower curtain rings, paper plates (with the center cut out) or cardboard circles
- Long ribbons, strips of fabric, or tissue paper (various colors)
- Tape or glue optional
- Bells or beads optional

Directions:

1. Students tie, tape, or glue ribbons around the ring
2. Optional: Add a small bell to make it jingle like fairy magic.
3. Use the ribbon rings during movement activities to mimic dancing fairies, wind, or magic.

Imagine That!

Imagine you're a fairy living in the enchanted forest.
What do you look like? Where do you live? What kind of magic do you use?
Draw yourself as a fairy or a nymph in your magical home!
Write a story or draw a picture below!

Coloring Page

Surveys

Teacher/Facilitator Survey

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Student/Viewer Survey

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