A Midsummer Night's Dream (1909) (Vitagraph, silent film)

Directed by Charles Kent and J. Stuart Blackman
Writing credits William Shakespeare (play)

Plot Summary. When the Duke of Athens tries to separate young lovers Lysander and Hermia, insisting that Hermia instead marry Demetrius, the two lovers run off together. Meanwhile, Demetrius is pursued by Helena, who wants to marry Demetrius herself. Impish fairies from the woods make things even more complicated with a herb that, when placed on someone’s eyes, causes that person to fall in love with the first creature he or she sees. This version of Shakespeare’s play works well with some excellent performances (the girl playing Puck, Julia Swayne-Gordon, Maurice Costello, Florence Turner) and an attempt to pack in all the twists and turns of the plot into a very short time span. The curio is that Oberon is omitted and Penelope added instead - very odd! The players are also very funny, particularly the wild looking actor playing Bottom.

Cast: Elita Proctor Otis .... Hippolyta  
William Humphrey ... Theseus  
Clara Kimball Young.... Penelope  
Florence Turner .... Titania  
Julia Swayne Gordon .... Helena  
Rose Tapley .... Hermia  
Walter Ackerman .... Demetrius  
Maurice Costello .... Lysander  
James Young ... Egeus  
Charles Chapman .... Quince  
William V. Ranous.... Bottom  
William Shea .... Mechanical  
Dolores Costello .... Fairy  
Helene Costello .... Fairy  
Gladys Hulette .... Puck

NOTES from SHAKESPEARE: SCRIPT, FILM AND STAGE (2006)
“A Midsummer Night’s Dream is especially “film friendly.” Various photographic tricks can be used to create the illusion of fairies appearing and disappearing, of dream states, and other visual magic. Thus the play is among the most filmed of Shakespeare’s works. There have been several animated films and a puppet version, superbly conceived and directed in 1959 by Jiri Trnka, Czechoslovakia. The first “live action” film of The Dream appeared in 1908 (sic) when Vitagraph, one of the first film companies, released an eight-minute version of Puck and several fairies cavorting in New York’s Central Park. (163-4)
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1935)  133 minutes, Black and White

Directed by William Dieterle, Max Reinhardt
Writing credits Charles Kenyon, Mary C. McCall Jr.

Plot Summary: King Theseus is going to marry Hyppolyta, his officer Demetrius is engaged with Hermia, but Hermina loves Lysander. Helena loves Demetrius. Oberon and Titania, of the kingdom of fairies have a slight quarrel about who gets a boy as servant, so Oberon tries to get him from her by using some magic. But they're not alone in that forest Lysander and Hermina have there a rendevous, Helena and Demetrius are there, too as well as some workers, who are practising a play for the ongoing wedding of Theseus and Hippolythea. Due to some misunderstandings by Puck, the whole thing becomes a little bit confused...

Cast:  
James Cagney .... Bottom, the Weaver
Joe E. Brown .... Flute, the Bellows-Mender
Dick Powell .... Lysander, in Love with Hermia
Mickey Rooney .... Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, a Fairy
Victor Jory .... Oberon, King of the Fairies
Ian Hunter .... Theseus, Duke of Athens
Verree Teasdale .... Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, Betrothed to Theseus
Hobart Cavanaugh .... Philostrate, Master of Revels to Theseus
Ross Alexander .... Demetrius, in Love with Hermia
Olivia de Havilland .... Hermia, in Love with Lysander (as Olivia de Haviland)
Jean Muir .... Helena, in Love with Demetrius
Grant Mitchell .... Egeus, Father to Hermia
Frank McHugh .... Quince, the Carpenter
Dewey Robinson .... Snug, the Joiner
Hugh Herbert .... Snout, the Tinker
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1968) 124 minutes
Directed by Peter Hall
Writing credits William Shakespeare (play)

**Cast:**
- Derek Godfrey .... **Theseus**
- Barbara Jefford .... **Hippolyta**
- Nicholas Selby .... **Egeus**
- Hugh Sullivan .... **Philostrate**
- David Warner .... **Lysander**
- Diana Rigg .... **Helena**
- Michael Jayston .... **Demetrius**
- Helen Mirren .... **Hermia**
- Paul Rogers .... **Bottom**
- Sebastian Shaw .... **Quince**
- Bill Travers .... **Snout**
- Clive Swift .... **Snug**
- Donald Eccles .... **Starveling**
- John Normington .... **Flute**
- Ian Richardson .... **Oberon**
- Judy Dench .... **Titania**
- Ian Holm .... **Puck**
Peter Brook Stresses Sensual Aspects

Once in a while, once in a very rare while, a theatrical production arrives that is going to be talked about as long as there is a theater, a production that, for good or ill, is going to exert a major influence on the contemporary stage. Such a production is Peter Brook's staging of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, which the Royal Shakespeare Company introduced here tonight.

It is a magnificent production, the most important work yet of the world's most imaginative and inventive director. If Peter Brook had done nothing else but this Dream he would have deserved a place in theater history.

Brook has approached the play with a radiant innocence. He has treated the script as if it had just been written and sent to him through the mail. He has staged it with no reference to the past, no reverence for tradition. He has stripped the play down, asked exactly what it is about. He has forgotten gossamer fairies, sequinned eyelids, gauzy veils and whole forests of Beerbolm-trees.

He sees the play for what it is - an allegory of sensual love, and a magic playground of lost innocence and hidden fears. Love in Shakespeare comes as suddenly as death, and when Shakespeare's people love they are all but consumed with sexual passion.

Brook's first concern is to enchant us - to reveal this magic playground. He has conceived the production as a box of theatrical miracles. It takes place in a pure-white setting. The stage is walled in on three sides, and the floor is also white. Ladders lead up the walls and on the top are scaffolds and rostrums from which actors can look down on the playing area like spectators at a bullfight.

The fairy characters - Oberon, Titania and Puck - are made into acrobats and jugglers. They swing in on trapezes, they amaze us with juggling tricks, Tarzan-like swings across the stage, all the sad deftness of clowns.

Shakespeare's quartet of mingled lovers, now mod kids humming love songs to loosely strummed guitars, are lost in the Athenian woods. The trees are vast metal coils thrown down from the walls on fishing rods, and moving in on unwary lovers like spiraling metallic tendrils. And in this wood of animal desire the noises are not the friendly warblings of fairyland, but the grunts and groans of some primeval jungle.

Sex and sexuality are vital in the play. Oberon and Titania, even when quarreling, kiss with hasty, hungry passion - no shining moon for them - and the lovers seem to be journeying through some inner landscape of their own desires toward maturity.

The sexual relationship - with the Wittiest use of phallic symbolism the stage can ever have seen - is stressed between Titania and Bottom. Yet the carnality of the piece is seen with affectionate tolerance rather than the bitterness the playwright shows in Troilus and Cressida, and this tolerance, even playfulness, suffuses the production.

Brook is a magician and he gives us new eyes. Here, for reasons admirably supported by the text, he has Theseus and Hippolyta (that previously rather dull royal couple whose wedding provides the framework for the play) played by the same actors as play Oberon and Titania. At once the play takes on a new and personal dimension. The fairies take on a new humanity, and these human princelings, once so uninteresting, are now endowed with a different mystery, and the gentle, almost sad note on which the play ends has a feeling of human comprehension and godlike compassion to it. It is most moving.

Two other characters take on dual assignments. Philostrate, that court master of ceremonies for Theseus, is also, naturally enough, Puck, and, rather more puzzlingly, Egeus, the angry father of Hermia, whose
opposition to her marriage sets off the action, is also Peter Quince, one of the mechanicals. Presumably the purpose is to bring the play within the play more closely into the main structure, for just as Egeus initiates the real action, so Quince initiates the inner play. But it savors of a literary rather than dramatic device.

Puck is the key figure in this version. Looking like a more than usually perky Picasso clown, he bounces through the action with happy amiability, the model of toleration. John Kane plays him delightfully, performing his tricks with a true circus expertise and acting with unaffected delight.

The Theseus/Oberon and Hippolyta/Titania of Alan Howard and Sara Kestelman are special pleasures, and the mechanicals with the terrible tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe are the best I have ever seen, with David Waller's virile Bottom particularly splendid.

But the star of this dream is Peter Brook himself, with his ideas, his theories and above all his practices. Of course he is helped - first by the samite-white pleasure palace devised by his Los Angeles-based designer, Sally Jacobs, and the richly evocative music and sound score provided by Richard Peaslee. But Mr. Brook is the genius architect of our most substantial pleasure.

He makes it all so fresh and so much fun. After a riotously funny and bawdy courtship of Titania by Bottom, the two leave the stage to, of all wonderful things, Mendelssohn's Wedding March, and all hell breaks loose, with confetti, paper streamers and Oberon himself flying in urbane mockery across the stage.

And Brook uses everything to hand - he is defiantly eclectic. It is as though he is challenging the world, by saying that there is no such thing as Shakespearean style. If it suits his purpose he will use a little kathakali, a pop song, sparklers borrowed from a toyshop, dramatic candles borrowed from Grotowski. It is all splendid grist to his splendid mill. Shakespeare can be fun, Shakespeare can be immediate, Shakespeare can most richly live.

Clive Barnes (NY Times, August 8, 1970)

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1981) (TV)
Directed by Elijah Moshinsky
Writing credits William Shakespeare (play)

Cast: Estelle Kohler .... Hippolyta
       Nigel Davenport .... Theseus
       Hugh Quarshie .... Philostrate
       Geoffrey Lumsden .... Egeus
       Pippa Guard .... Hermia
       Nicky Henson .... Demetrius
       Robert Lindsay .... Lysander
       Cherith Mellor .... Helena
       Geoffrey Palmer .... Quince
       Brian Glover .... Bottom
       John Fowler .... Flute
       Don Estelle .... Starveling
       Nat Jackley .... Snout
       Ray Mort .... Snug
       Phil Daniels .... Puck
       Helen Mirren .... Titania
       Peter McEnery .... Oberon

1978, the BBC set itself the task of filming all of William Shakespeare's plays for television. The resulting productions, renowned for their loyalty to the text, utilized the best theatrical and television directors and brought great performances from leading contemporary actors.

Shakespeare's fairytale comedy contains some of the most lyrical expressions of love, dreams and imaginations. The performances is star-studded, with Helen Mirren as Titania and Peter McEnery as Oberon dominating the proceedings, supported by a superb cast. As the New York Times wrote "they are all accomplished performers, but the director has given the extra dimension
### A Midsummer Night's Dream (1996)  
**105 minutes**  
**Directed by** Adrian Noble  
**Writing credits** Adrian Noble and William Shakespeare (play)

#### Plot Summary:
A boy dreams the play. Authority in Athens is shaky: Hermia rejects her father's choice, the Duke backs her father, and the Duchess sides with Hermia. Dad’s choice, Demetrius, pursues Hermia but is loved by Helena. When Hermia and her lover meet in the woods the next night, Helena tells Demetrius in hopes she can follow and change his mind. Also in the woods are craftsmen preparing a play, plus the fairies: the fairy rulers, Oberon and Titania, are at odds, so Oberon conjures a spell and Titania falls for a craftsman bewitched with the ears of an ass. Oberon’s sprite, Puck, also tries to bring the four young lovers into compatible couples but makes an error before all is right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cast</th>
<th>Character</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay Duncan</td>
<td>Hippolyta/Titania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex Jennings</td>
<td>Theseus/Oberon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desmond Barrit</td>
<td>Nick Bottom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finbar Lynch</td>
<td>Philostrate/Puck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Osheen Jones</td>
<td>The Boy</td>
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<td>Monica Dolan</td>
<td>Hermia</td>
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<td>Emily Raymond</td>
<td>Helena</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ann Hasson</td>
<td>First Fairy</td>
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<td>Alfred Burke</td>
<td>Egeus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin Doyle</td>
<td>Demetrius</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel Evans</td>
<td>Lysander</td>
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### A Midsummer Night's Dream (1999)  
**116 minutes  PG-13**  
**Directed by** Michael Hoffman  
**Written by** William Shakespeare (play)  
**Written by** Michael Hoffman (screenplay)

#### Plot Outline:
Shakespeare's intertwined love polygons begin to get complicated from Demetrius and Lysander both want Hermia but she only has eyes for Lysander. Bad news is, Hermia’s father wants Demetrius for a son-in-law. On the outside is Helena, whose unreturned love burns hot for Demetrius. Hermia and Lysander plan to flee from the city under cover of darkness but are pursued by an enraged Demetrius (who is himself pursued by an enraptured Helena). In the forest, unbeknownst to the mortals, Oberon and Titania (King and Queen of the faeries) are having a spat over a servant boy. The plot twists up when Oberon's head mischief-maker, Puck, runs loose with a flower which causes people to fall in love with the first thing they see upon waking. Throw in a group of labourers preparing a play for the Duke's wedding (one of whom is given a donkey’s head and Titania for a lover by Puck) and the complications become fantastically funny.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cast</th>
<th>Character</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Strathairn</td>
<td>Theseus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sophie Marceau</td>
<td>Hippolyta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle Pfeiffer</td>
<td>Titania</td>
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<td>Rupert Everett</td>
<td>Oberon</td>
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<td>Stanley Tucci</td>
<td>Puck (Robin Goodfellow)</td>
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<td>Bernard Hill</td>
<td>Egeus</td>
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<td>Calista Flockhart</td>
<td>Helena</td>
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<td>Dominic West</td>
<td>Lysander</td>
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<td>Christian Bale</td>
<td>Demetrius</td>
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<td>Anna Friel</td>
<td>Hermia</td>
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<td>Kevin Kline</td>
<td>Nick Bottom</td>
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<td>Roger Rees</td>
<td>Peter Quince</td>
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<td>Sam Rockwell</td>
<td>Francis Flute</td>
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<td>Gregory Jbara</td>
<td>Snug</td>
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<td>Bill Irwin</td>
<td>Tom Snout</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max Wright</td>
<td>Robin Starveling</td>
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**A Midsummer Night's Dream** (2006, BBC-TV)

**Director:** Ed Fraiman  
**Writer:** Peter Bowker from the play by William Shakespeare

**Plot summary:** During an engagement party thrown by Theo and Polly for their daughter Hermia and Theo, a man she grew up with but doesn't really love, Hermia's true love Xander shows up. After Hermia declares her engagement to James is off, it becomes clear that her best friend Helena has been in love with James all along. When the King and Queen of the Fairies (themselves feuding) decide to straighten things out with a love potion, their meddling goes terribly wrong and the relationships between all those involved become even murkier than they were.

**Cast:**  
- Bill Paterson as Theo  
- Imelda Staunton as Polly  
- Lennie James as Oberon  
- Sharon Small as Titania  
- Dean Lennox Kelly as Puck  
- Zoe Tapper as James  
- Lennie James as Xander  
- Michelle Bonnard as Helena  
- Dean Lennox Kelly as Bottom  
- Rupert Evans as Flute  
- Simon Day as Snug  
- Ben Crompton as Snout  
- Mina Anwar as Peaseblossom  
- Amy Darcy as Fairy  
- Daniel Larner as Swimmer

Running time: 90 minutes

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**Quotes from the screenplay**

**Oberon:** [advising Theo how to patch things up with his wife] You just go in there and you say the three magic phrases that all women love to hear: "I'm sorry", "I love you" and "You were right".

**Bottom:** And what do they call you?  
**Titania:** Titania  
**Bottom:** [looking down at her breasts] I'm not surprised.