

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Directed by Michael Hoffman  
Produced by Michael Hoffman and Leslie Urdang  
Distributed by Twentieth Century-Fox  
Released in 1999

If one questions the story, then one questions Shakespeare. No playwright, not even Shakespeare, is beyond reproach, but the Bard is best. And the ability to enjoy this frothy tale of inconstant love is greatly heightened by Puck's soliloquy at the end, reducing what has transpired to a farce of no high regard. Nevertheless, the audience must come to its own conclusions. Shakespeare's apology is a device of storytelling later employed by Mark Twain, who prefaced Adventures of Huckleberry Finn with this:

## NOTICE

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.  
BY THE ORDER OF THE AUTHOR  
PER G.G., CHIEF OF ORDINANCE

And who takes that seriously either?

As far as this film is concerned, it is cleanly shot, designed with flair, possesses quality visual effects, but is cut with little discrimination or creativity. The boring is elongated, the intriguing demoted from gusty mirth to breezy chuckle.

Given the material the production is working with, the actors are of paramount importance. The ladies, including Marceau, Flockhart, and Pfeiffer, all disappoint. The men fare much better—Rockwell and Tucci work a little magic, but Kevin Kline, far and away, trumps all comers in the choice role of Bottom. It helps that the film is cut to favor him, giving him not one but two scenes of quiet introspection, played with no dialogue. (In a Shakespeare movie that's as unusual as a superstar slugger denied the chance to pinch hit.) Kline is particularly amusing as Pyramus in the play before the court, his own (and his character's) great love for acting apparent as he's relishing the opportunity to lance himself with the sword, twice.

The primary failure of the film is not a major one, as it is agreeable in most respects (its many disappointments equaled by counter-balancing delights). Great emphasis is placed on the setting, transplanted from mythological Greece to late 19th-century Italy. We get some beautiful scenery out of the deal, but we're still saddled with fairies and other mystical delights inconsistent with the most whimsical of Italian thinking and folklore. And the wonders of the bicycle and the Victrola are also heralded to great fanfare, but subsequently forgotten. There's

no point in updating the story when it just becomes more confusing than it already was. That's the one misguided fancy of this fantastical retelling.