

# Cubans lend exuberance to Shakespeare production

By Charles Prosser  
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## PLAY REVIEW

### 'UN SUENO DE UNA NOCHE DE VERANO/A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM'

**What:** Production of Shakespeare's comedy performed by Cuban and American actors, in Spanish

**When:** Last show at 7:30 tonight

**Where:** Allen Bales Theatre, Rowand-Johnson Hall, UA campus.

**How much:** \$5

**More:** Call 205-348-3845 or email spanitch@as.ua.edu for reservations.

in this area in a long while.

As with opera, it was not necessary to understand the language to appreciate the emotions and intent. Knowing the storyline — and there is a synopsis in the program — is enough to keep you engaged.

The actors tell the story not only with beautifully translated and lyric Spanish prose and verse, but also with their bodies, faces and voice. They even throw in a few English words along the way just to keep you

on your toes.

Every one of the Cuban actors had standout moments. All of the principal roles were taken by the Cubans, with the other roles played by Americans who also spoke Spanish. The American actors will not be returning to Cuba when this production makes its way home next week; the roles played by them will be taken by Cuban actors in Havana.

Oberon/Theseus, played by Yarlo Ruiz, and Titania/Hippolyta, played by Vítica Sobrino, were convincing in their staid "establishment" roles, while wonderfully charismatic and cool in their roles as the King and Queen of the hippies/fairies. The lovers — Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius — played by Alianne Portuondo, Linnett Hernandez, Raysel Cruz and Frank Egusquiza, were passionate and romantic, yet slapstick, physical and athletic. Over-the-top gestures and broad physical comedy left no doubt at any time just who was in love or in hate with whom.

The Rude Mechanicals, the group of actors within the play who perform "Pyramus and Thisbe" for the establishment types in Act V, were headed by

Roberto Salomon who played Peter Quince, and also doubled as Hermia's father Egeus. Roberto had his hands full acting with the Americans, whose Spanish ranged from very good in Jake Boyd (Flute/Thisbe) to "someone who really surprised me with his Spanish" in Mark Hughes Cobb (Snug/Lion).

The other Americans rounding out the wonderfully comic Mechanicals include Lawson Hangartner as Snout/Wall and Allie Ficken as Starveling/Moon. Others giving light-hearted and whimsical performances included Katie Burton, Sarah Carlton and Erica Hansen as the flower children Cobweb, Mustardseed and Moth. The fourth flower child/fairy was Dianna Hernandez, part of the Cuban company, who played Peaseblossom. The American actors rounding out the "establishment" were Nick Shabel, David Bolus and Bria Knapp. Along with their impressive abilities with the language, all the American actors acquitted themselves well with their acting.

The performances that stood apart were Bottom, played by Jorge Luiz Curbelo, and Puck,

played by Enrique Est on comic timing, excellent characterization, and a physical presence by turned the always-pop Bottom into a delight. The Latin tradition w or asnos (donkeys) h actor vocally expres Americans in the s could not. He simply l one sounded like and v effortlessly integrate t into his performance.

And Estevez's sprightly, bouncy, quirky and cunning Puck was I have ever seen. He ing so much fun on sta carried the audience. When the lights went his English "If we sp offended" epilogue, that it was over.

Before the summer good, come see this production.

*Charles Prosser is an frequently appears i atre Tuscaloosa. He technology teacher a Riverside Middle Schoo in Colombia in 1984-8 taught Spanish off a 25 years.*

As summer rushes headlong into school, football and eventually cooler weather, the University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance, the UA-Cuba Initiative and Cuban actors from Consejo Nacional de Artes Escenicas ask us to pause and enjoy a little midsummer madness with the Spanish-language production of "Un Sueno de Una Noche de Verano," better known to us as William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Director Seth Panitch, acting professor at UA, assembled a mixed group of professional actors from Cuba and student and local actors to present this fiery, passionate and hilarious classic.

I went in anticipating a Shakespearean/Cuban hybrid, maybe set in Havana and a nearby jungle, but what I saw was a completely American-style production set in the late '60s, complete with wide collars, tied-up T-shirts and short skirts gloriously styled by costumer Donna Meester, original funky music brilliantly composed and performed by Tom Wolfe with

Chris Kozak and Mark Lanter, and all on a colorfully painted paisley floor set creatively designed by Rick Miller and expertly lit by Joey Lay.

Panitch developed the piece as he would for a production featuring his students. The Cuban actors got to experience an American-style production from the inside out, without having to master the language.

The audience was treated to a production of Shakespeare performed by actors who probably never had the typically bad experience with the Bard in high school or college, when they had to study him and weren't ready to understand. There was no sense of the reverence for Shakespeare that you see in stuffy productions. These actors performed this as a farcical romantic comedy!

Over-the-top gestures, explosive energy, rough-and-tumble physical comedy, overt and sometimes slightly vulgar sexual innuendo, with a spicy Latin sense of romance and passion, made this just about the best version of "Midsummer" seen