

The Mischievous ELF Returns in

*A Midsummer
Night's Dream*

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IN THE MONADNOCK REGION
Thursday, May 28, 2015 • Issue #50

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AN EDITION OF **THE KEENE SENTINEL**



A Midsummer Night's Dream

By Nicole S. Colson / Photos by Bill Gnade

Spotlight

Your weekly entertainment source.

Everyone knows Shakespeare is known for his dialogue - but there's no need for words when communicating the universal language.

MoCo Arts School of Dance will present one of The Bard's most widely-performed works, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," on Saturday, June 6, and Sunday, June 7, at Keene State College's Redfern Arts Center.

The George Balanchine ballet version of the comedic play about love is well-known, performed by such metropolitan ballet companies as those based in Boston and New York City.

In true MoCo Arts fashion, its version will be a bit different because it will incorporate all students of every type of dance the organization offers: hip-hop, jazz, modern, and of course, ballet, among them.

The play, which is believed to be written by Shakespeare between 1590 and 1596, has three interwoven

storylines: the experiences of two sets of lovers camping in an enchanted forest, the world of a fairy king and queen and their elves, and a group of amateur actors attempting to stage a comedic production for the wedding of the Duke of Athens - a group that is controlled and manipulated by the fairies (namely Oberon and Titania, the warring king and queen of the fairies) who inhabit the moonlit forest in which most of the play is set.

Hermia, daughter of the Duke of Athens, is in love with Lysander, but her father wants her to marry Demetrius. To escape the arranged marriage, she and Lysander elope into the woods. Demetrius follows them, and he is pursued by Helena, who nurses an unrequited passion for him. A love quadrangle develops among the young lovers when mischievous Puck plays Cupid and hilarity ensues with many cases of mistaken identity.

"The magic that happens in the forest is what drives the story," says Reagan Messer, artistic director of the dance department at MoCo Arts. "Puck has magical powers but he's always messing things up. He can't control his powers like Oberon."

All 250 dance students - who range in age from 2nd-graders to high school seniors - perform in the show.

"The story is character driven - there's not a lot of ensemble work," says Reagan Messer, Moco Arts executive director. "We had to get creative by creating roles. Puck has his own group of fairies, there are mystical animals and water nymphs - we had to fit in all the dance classes." By including all the types of dance MoCo offers, audiences get a sense of what each class is doing.

Messer says the MoCo Arts version follows Shakespeare's basic storyline, and most of the musical score is traditional, composed by Felix Mendelssohn as in the Balanchine ballet.

Although it was tricky, says Messer, to cast 250 students who also didn't know the story, he believes the play is a perfect fit for the company to perform.

"Shakespeare for the ballet world is such a vehicle," he says.

The show marks the last MoCo Arts performance for dance student Robin Bigaj of Keene, who will play Puck. She's been studying dance with the organization since she was 4 - she's now 18 and graduating from Keene High School next month. She plans to minor in dance at (Gilford) College in North Carolina.

The role is traditionally played by a male dancer.

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"There's a lot of jumping - it's very active," she says. "But it's the kind of dancing I'm more inclined to."

She hadn't read or seen the play before taking the role of Puck. "I'm trying to add a lot of pantomime to get the story across to the audience," she said. "I often bring a lot of my own personality to a role. Puck is so energetic and mischievous - that's very much like me."

One aspect of Shakespeare's story involves a fight between Puck and Oberon, a scene that will

be set using a machine that projects images onto a screen at the back of the stage - the images take the place of traditional backdrops and allow more freedom in terms of staging the play. "The story takes place in the forest and with the projections we can move to different places in the forest," says Messer.

This show will have the most costume changes in MoCo Arts history - at 565. A group of volunteers help make sure each

dancer is in the right costume. "Some kids do seven costume changes," says Messer, adding that without volunteers, the show wouldn't happen.

"The volunteers give these kids that moment to shine, they are setting them up to succeed when they take that risk of getting on-stage. It gives them more confidence," he says. "These students are not at home on the couch in front of a computer screen - they are active and healthy, and they

are learning to love the arts and give back to their community."

MoCo Arts School of Dance will perform William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" Saturday, June 6, at 2 and 7 p.m. and Sunday, June 7, at 2 p.m. at the Redfern Arts Center, Keene State College. Tickets are \$14-\$20 and can be ordered by calling the Redfern Arts Center box office at 358-2168.

Online: www.keene.edu/arts/redfern



Top photo: Reagan Messer working with dancers. Bottom photo: Dancers following Messer's advice. Photos by Bill Gnade.

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