

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 133

SHAKESPEARE-MENDELSSOHN

A Midsummer Night's Dream

PRISTINE
AUDIO

CAST: Robert Helpmann (Oberon); Moira Shearer (Titania); Philip Guard (Puck); Jocelyn Britten (Peaseblossom); Sheila Wright (Mustardseed); Joan King (Moth); Tania d'Avray (Cobweb); Anthony Nicholls (Theseus); Margaret Courtenay (Hippolyta); John Dearth (Egeus); Anne Walford (Hermia); Terence Longdon (Lysander); Joan Benham (Helena); Patrick Macnee (Demetrius); Peter Johnson (Philstrate); Eliot Makeham (Peter Quince); Michael Redington (Snug); Stanley Holloway (Bottom); Philip Locke (Flute); Norman Rossington (Snout); John Warner (Starveling); Elizabeth Wade (Singer 1); Suzanne Steele (Singer 2); Anne Wilson (Singer 3)

Producer's Note

This recording offers a rare opportunity to hear Mendelssohn's complete incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the context of an only slightly abridged performance of Shakespeare's play (Act IV, Scene 2 was omitted entirely, and small cuts were made throughout the rest of the work). The 1954 production by London's Old Vic Theatre company is said to have been the last major mounting of the work to employ what was even then considered to be an old fashioned approach combining orchestra, theatre and ballet. It was successful enough to be brought over to America, where it played at New York's Metropolitan Opera House later the same year.

Before leaving England, the production was recorded by EMI and subsequently released by HMV and RCA Victor. As far as I can determine, it has never received an "official" reissue since, either on LP or CD. This is particularly surprising in view of some of the artists involved. Moira Shearer and Robert Helpmann were ballet dancers turned film and stage actors (both starred in the Powell/Pressburger classics *The Red Shoes* and *Tales of Hoffmann*); Patrick Macnee would go on to be forever identified with John Steed of *The Avengers* TV series; and veteran entertainer Stanley Holloway was just two years away from immortality as Alfred P. Doolittle in the stage and subsequent film productions of *My Fair Lady*.

Additionally, there is the combination of Sir Malcolm Sargent, the orchestra, chorus and vocal soloists in Mendelssohn's magical score. Those familiar only with the suite excerpted from the music will find some surprises hearing it in its original context. For example, the theme associated with the rustics does not appear here at the end of the Intermezzo, as it was appended in the suite. And besides the longer, familiar set pieces, there are many short melodrama underscorings that appear throughout the play, which created the template for later film composers. (Indeed, Erich Wolfgang Korngold's adaptation of the music for the 1935 Hollywood production of the work seemed to bring this connection full circle.)

The present transfer has been made using the best portions of two American RCA pressings. The original master tape had many problems, chiefly in the spoken sections – overload distortion, pops, electronic clicks, thumps, and other noises. I have been able to remove nearly all of these blemishes, but some stubbornly resisted amelioration and remain, hopefully few enough not to impede enjoyment of the performance.

Mark Obert-Thorn

the old vic 1954 production of shakespeare's

PRISTINE
AUDIO

a midsummer night's dream

with the complete incidental music by felix mendelssohn



sargent conducts

SHAKESPEARE - MENDELSSOHN

A Midsummer Night's Dream

DISC ONE

- 1 Overture (11:22)
- 2 Act 1 - Scene 1: 'Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour' (11:38)
- 3 Scene 2: 'Is all our company here?' (5:38)
- 4 Scherzo (4:30)
- 5 Act 2 - Scene 1: 'How now, spirit! whither wander you?' (13:47)
- 6 Scene 2: 'Come now, a roundel and a fairy song' (0:34)
- 7 'You spotted snakes with double tongue' (11:59)
- 8 Act 3 - Scene 1: 'Are we all met?' (12:13)

DISC TWO

- 1 Act 3 - Intermezzo (2:48)
- 2 Scene 2: 'I wonder if Titania be awak'd' (21:53)
- 3 Act 4 - Scene 1: 'Come, sit thee down upon this flow'r'y bed' (5:10)
- 4 Notturmo (13:38)
- 5 Wedding March (5:11)
- 6 Act 5 - Scene 1: 'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of' (16:09)
- 7 Dance of the Clowns (3:41)
- 8 Finale: 'Through the house give glimmering light' (5:12)

Women's Chorus • BBC Symphony Orchestra

Sir Malcolm Sargent, conductor • Michael Bentham, theatre director

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Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on woodcuts
of Mendelssohn and Shakespeare

Photography by Andrew Rose

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Recorded 23 & 26 July (orchestra) and
11, 16 – 20 August 1954 (actors) in EMI
Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London.

First issued on HMV ALP 1262/4
and RCA Victor LM-6115

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