



# *A Midsummer Night's Dream:* Background and Characters

By Katherine Semsecen

Music by Benjamin Britten

Libretto adapted from William Shakespeare by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears

Benjamin Britten wanted a new opera to open the refurbished Jubilee Hall in Aldeburgh. There wasn't enough time to create a new libretto so he and librettist Peter Pears decided to adapt Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play they greatly admired. The opera was composed in 10 months and premiered June 11, 1960, at the Aldeburgh Festival. The performance was conducted by Britten.

This is a co-production with Houston Grand Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Sung in English with English SURTITLES™

## MAIN CHARACTERS

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Oberon	<i>King of the Fairies</i>	Countertenor*	OWE-beh-ron
Tytania	<i>Queen of the Fairies</i>	Coloratura soprano	tih-TAH-nee-yah
Puck	<i>Oberon's jester; amuses himself by playing pranks on mortals</i>	Speaking role	
Theseus	<i>Duke of Athens, engaged to Hippolyta</i>	Bass-baritone	THEE-see-yus
Hippolyta	<i>Queen of the Amazons, engaged to Theseus</i>	Mezzo-soprano	hih-POH-lih-tah

*continued over...*

### \* Countertenors

The highest male voice, this falsetto voice type emerged in European music of the 14th and early 15th-centuries, and regained popularity in the second half of the 20th century, due in large part to the career of Alfred Deller, an English countertenor who created the role of Oberon in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

### What is a co-production?

A co-production is when two or more companies collaborate on creative ideas, and share financial and human resources to make one artistic piece. *Opera lingo*: In the opera world, people refer to this type of partnership as a "co-pro".

Lysander	<i>A young man of Athens, in love with Hermia</i>	Tenor	lye-SAN-der
Demetrius	<i>A young man of Athens, who pursues Hermia after abandoning Helena</i>	Baritone	deh-MEE-tree-yus
Hermia	<i>A young woman of Athens, in love with Lysander and childhood friends with Helena</i>	Mezzo-soprano	HER-mee-yah
Helena	<i>A young woman of Athens, still in love with Demetrius to whom she was once engaged.</i>	Soprano	HEH-leh-nah
Bottom	<i>A weaver chosen to play the role of Pyramus in the Rustics' play for Theseus's marriage celebrations.</i>	Bass	
Quince	<i>The leader of the Rustics who is trying to organize the play.</i>	Bass-baritone	
Flute	<i>A bellows-mender chosen to play the role of Thisbe in the Rustics' play. A bellows-mender is the person who fixes bellows, devices that increase flames by blowing air on coals; (see right)</i>	Tenor	
Snug	<i>The tinker chosen to play Pyramus's father in the Rustics' play. A tinker is a person who works with tin.</i>	Bass	
Snout	<i>The joiner chosen to play the lion in the Rustics' play. A joiner is a woodworker who makes objects by joining two pieces of wood without the use of nails.</i>	Tenor	
Starveling	<i>The tailor chosen to play Thisbe's mother in the Rustics' play. A tailor sews and mends clothes.</i>	Baritone	
Cobweb Peaseblossom Mustardseed Moth	<i>Fairies in Tytania's court. Ordered to care for Bottom when the Queen falls in love with him.</i>	Trebles (children)	

Katherine Semsecen is the Manager of the COC's Education and Outreach Department.

The performances this season will take place on: May 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 19, 21, 23, 2009. All performances take place in the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. [Click here to book Group Tickets for your school!](#)