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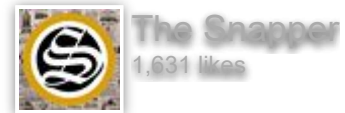
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🕒 November 6, 2019 📁 Arts & Culture



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Jon Bolds wows audiences as Papa Guédé in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” at Rafters Theatre. Photo courtesy of Sylvia Garner.

Josh Rittberg **Arts & Culture Editor**

“A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” playing from November 1st-10th at Millersville’s Rafters Theatre, is a modern reinvention of a Shakespearean classic as adapted by MU alum, Phillip Rooney. The play deals with the same comedic situations of mistaken identities and love triangles; there is even still a hammy actor who gets transformed by the gods into a donkey. This particular production is set in the New Orleans Bayou. With gender inclusive casting and a tight knit ensemble of 20, this is a fresh production signifying a new start for University Theatre.

This piece is directed by Millersville professor, Adam Boyer. Boyer is an “organic director,” who likes watching things come together for themselves. His directing style gives much room for experimentation and a sense of freedom for the actors. This particular production is done in an alley staging, which is done with the audience on all sides and close to the actors.

For Boyer, the alley staging, gave him a chance to “do more environmental work with the design and to open up the possibility of the audience space and the actors space comingling, and not necessarily being defined.” This is especially true of this production as at times the audience can be so close to the actors and feel like they are a part of the show. “By splitting the audience in half and having the stage in the middle the audience has no option but to just be in the world.” The intimate nature

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of this staging harkens back to the three quarter thrust style of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, yet its New Orleans setting adds a contemporary sense of Americana and fun to the play. This staging is a delicious combination of the old and new that bleeds from the staging all the way into the casting.

The cast is a talented ensemble of twenty who are energetic and bring a modern flair to this classic. This production is gender bent with most of the cast playing both genders therefore defying audience stereotypes. Synder Bryan who plays an attendant/fairy, feels that "It is a more inclusive show than most you see." Bryan specifically is excited as an actress in this play to "explain new perspectives to people." Exploring the gender identities of these characters and treating them as fully developed people in this adaptation allows for a production that feels as human as it is modern and exciting.

The actors' have also built a great sense of ensemble throughout the creative process. This is particularly the case for Dustin Schneider who plays Lee Bottom. While the character himself is incredibly hammy and over the top, Schneider has found a great bond in his fellow actors who play the common folk, and are a part of Bottoms' theatre troupe. Schneider says that "We all got along like that, and our chemistry worked so well." Even speaking about the entire cast he says that, "We all work together and feed off each other to make such a wonderful piece and I can't imagine not working with anyone else."

Assistant director, Jonathan Strayer has also been a great help in making the production of "A Midsummer



"Night's Dream" a success. He has experience in acting, directing, scenic design, teaching and even a Shakespeare theatre company. His works in various aspects of theatre production, particularly his work in acting and specifically Shakespearean theatre makes him someone whose creative voice elevates the show. Grant Dormbach in speaking about Boyer and Strayer's collaboration says that "They are very willing to work with you if you have an instinct, if you have an idea, they will want to see your idea and see how it plays out."

An aspect of this production that makes it particularly exciting is that this is a world premiere adaptation of "Midsummer." Although the story and characters are generally the same, this is the first time this classic play is being done in this particular version. In being the first ones to inhabit this interpretation of these characters and this world, Jacob Dickens who plays Etienne/Crawfish explains that for him it is "Really just getting to plant your flag not really having to look at any precedence or have to take into consideration and really just getting to inhabit this character and bring whatever you want to it." Having this artistic freedom is rare for performers, and is an exciting feature for taking on a world premiere work. For Schneider with it being a new work, "you are starting a trend" as you are the first person to play that part.

With the exciting partnership between Boyer and Strayer, a committed ensemble cast and an environmental physical production, Millersville Theatre's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" aims to work in Shakespeare's vision which is ultimately to adapt his



work for the current day and time and to spread his stories to the new generation.

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