



# A Midsummer Night's Dream

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

**Christopher Ashley, DIRECTION:** There were three anchors for our *Midsummer* production: The first is the idea that the world of the court turns upside-down, literally, for the dream portions of the play—the forest is a dream that happens on the ceiling of the court. The second is the idea of love as weightlessness, that love means losing your bearings. And the third is that music flows throughout the world of the play, even becoming something tangible that the characters experience. In these photos, the elements from the court have been transformed in an upside-down world—the chandeliers have become trees, and a fairy sits at a floating piano (that plays beautifully, incidentally, thanks to our ace production team). At the center of the photo on the left sits the Indian Child whom Oberon and Titania are competing for—we cast an extraordinary young flautist from the San Diego Youth Symphony, so the fairy monarchs are in effect fighting over “art.” The dream itself is Hippolyta’s (played

by Charlayne Woodard, who is double cast, as is often the case, as Titania)—she is a just-captured African queen, and dress-makers (who later become the Mechanicals) build a wedding dress on her that restrains her like a cage. When the stage is transformed, thanks to puppeteer Basil Twist, sheets of music float down from the piano and turn into birds that fly through the forest. Mark Bennett’s lush, rich score, mixed with Mendelssohn’s famous music, is played on stage by a quintet for the court and in the forest by the 20-member youth orchestra, which is situated just outside the windows in the photo. The whole set is built for tumbling and climbing.

**Neil Patel, SCENIC DESIGN:** Turning the world of the play upside-down was obviously this production’s biggest challenge. We couldn’t do it as a special effect like you could in a movie—we had to find objects that served as emblems of the transformation, like the chandeliers



that inverted so they would grow out of the floor, as you see in the photo on the left, and the piano that rose and turned over, shown in the photo on the right. You can't invert walls or windows on stage, so we made the architecture of the room absolutely symmetrical—even the wallpaper patterns and the sculptural caps and bases of the pilasters are identical so as not to contradict the illusion. We were tempted to introduce other ideas—should there be vegetation or other scenic elements introduced into the forest scenes? We decided *no*—the contents of the room itself were magical and dramatic enough.

**Howell Binkley, LIGHTING DESIGN:** This production was, first of all, a great collaboration—it was a pleasure to bring Chris's vision to life and to work in La Jolla's well-equipped and very flexible theatre. Our challenge was to accelerate the show through its many locations using just one footprint, and Neil did a spectacular job of turning the room he had created upside down. My contribution was to use a lot of color and break-up patterns to dissect the journey into its different locales—plus, I was fortunate enough to have LED strips to light the walls, which added to the flexibility. This was a project with many different dynamics, all of them fun to realize.



Ashley



Patel



Binkley

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ran July 20-Aug. 22, 2010, at California's La Jolla Playhouse under Christopher Ashley's direction. The production featured scenic design by Neil Patel; costume design by David C. Woolard; lighting design by Howell Binkley; sound design by Leon Rothenberg; musical direction by Eric Stern; puppet design by Basil Twist; and choreography by Andrew Pacho. Composer Mark Bennett provided original music. Opposite page, from left, Tatyana Petruk, Kyle Anderson (foreground), Sara Garcia, Amanda Naughton, Sara Komfeld Simpson, Anne Stella (under tree), Charlayne Woodard, Matthew Cusick, Ken Berkeley, Cate Campbell. Above, Petruk.