

2007

Preparing the role of Tytania in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: a handbook for singers

Emma Pettemerides
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons



Part of the [Music Practice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pettemerides, E. (2007). *Preparing the role of Tytania in Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream: a handbook for singers*. Edith Cowan University. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1195

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1195

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Preparing the Role of Tytania in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Handbook for Singers*

Emma
Pettemerides

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

Bachelor of Performing Arts (Honours)
WA Academy of Performing Arts
Edith Cowan University
2007

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

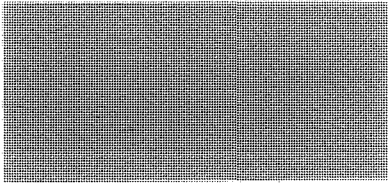
This dissertation represents a handbook designed to assist singers performing the role of Tytania in Britten's opera *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It explores the historical, literary, cultural, and musical contexts to the music and the drama. In addition, an analytical investigation is made into the ways that Britten has created musical characterization through the manipulation of voice types, melodic and rhythmic contours, motives, orchestration, tonality, and structures. The diverse types of knowledge chosen for investigation are foundational (in the author's opinion) in the development of an informed interpretation of the character, Tytania. This information can assist performers in avoiding the pitfalls of idiosyncrasies, malapropisms, or naivety in their performance of the role.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i) Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii) Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- iii) Contain any defamatory material.

I also grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.



Emma Pettemerides

14.03.2008

ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the expertise and efforts of my thesis supervisor Dr Jonathan Paget. Please accept my sincere thanks. I would also like to thank the staff of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts who have inspired and encouraged my studies, especially my vocal teacher Patricia Price who has assisted me in developing my artistic skills and shown unconditional support. I will be eternally grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	8
CHAPTER 1	10
HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT	10
Historical context: William Shakespeare.....	10
Literary Context.....	12
Music in Shakespeare's <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	13
Operatic Settings of Shakespeare's Plays	14
Historical Context: Benjamin Britten	15
A Midsummer Night's Dream: Britten's Opera	16
CHAPTER 2	17
ADAPTATION FROM PLAY TO OPERA.....	17
CHAPTER 3	23
ELIZABETHAN FOLKLORE	23
CHAPTER 4	29
MUSICAL ANALYSIS: Characterization of Britten's Fairies	29
Characterization through Voice Types	30
Characterization through Melodic and Rhythmic Contour.....	32
Characterization through Motives.....	39
Characterization through Orchestration.....	46
Characterization through Tonality	46
Characterization through Musical Structure	51
CONCLUSION.....	52

INDEX OF TABLES

Table 1: Britten's Simplified Libretto.....	18
Table 2: Occurrences of the Oberon/Tytania Motive	40
Table 3: Spell-Binding Motive	41
Table 4: Woodland Motive	45
Table 5: Musical Structure of Act I	45
Table 6: Use of Orchestral Instruments in Tytania's Music	50

INDEX OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 1: Large Intervallic Leaps Portray Tytania's Fury	33
Example 2: Large Intervallic Leaps Express Feisty Disagreement	33
Example 3: Stepwise Motion in the Vocal Lines of the Mortals	34
Example 4: Oberon's Monotone Vocal Line	35
Example 5: Tytania's Sustained High Tessitura.....	36
Example 6: The Contrasts Between the Vocal Contour's of Bottom and Tytania	37
Example 7: The Contrasts Between the Vocal Contour's of Bottom and Tytania (More)	38
Example 8: The Oberon/Tytania Motive (as bracketed).....	40
Example 9: Another Instance of the Oberon/Tytania Motive (as bracketed)	41
Example 10: Spell Motive (in the Celesta)	42
Example 11: Scotch Snaps (as bracketed)	43
Example 12: Woodland Theme	44
Example 13: Fairy Accompaniment: Woodland Theme	47

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation represents a handbook designed to assist a singer who is performing Tytania in Britten's opera *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in developing an informed characterization of the role. The aim of this research is to provide a tangible guide for character development by contextualizing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from an historical, literary, cultural, musical, and analytical perspective. It is hoped that this investigation might serve as a demonstration of the types of knowledge most pertinent to a performer. The discussion of the many varied and complex ways that this knowledge can influence an interpretation, however, is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, it is the premise of this investigation that the best performances are ones that are grounded in this type of contextual knowledge, in order to avoid the pitfalls of interpretative naivety, idiosyncrasy, or malapropism.

The handbook comprises four main chapters: (1) Historical and Literary Context; (2) Adaptation from Play to Opera; (3) Elizabethan Folklore and Shakespeare's Fairies; and (4) Musical Analysis: Characterization of Britten's Fairies.

The first chapter provides a literary context of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a historical context for both Shakespeare's play and Britten's opera. To provide a stylistically truthful performance of a character, a singer should aim to familiarize themselves, as closely as possible, with the period and circumstances of the author and composer. The second chapter gives recognition of the play's transformation into opera, with the intention of assisting the performer in achieving a more complex understanding of the role. This chapter highlights the important alterations made by Britten and Pears that affect the characterization of Tytania.

The third chapter explores the cultural and literary context of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through an examination of Elizabethan folklore. One of the first stages of undertaking an operatic role is to undergo the process of translating either a historical or foreign language (in this case, Elizabethan English). However, for an accurate translation to occur the performer must first gain an awareness of the texts cultural/literary context. This chapter will therefore focus on Elizabethan folklore with which a performer must be aware in order to perform a credible, truthful characterization of the role of Tytania.

The final and more technical part of learning a role is gaining an understanding of the musical devices employed in characterization. Chapter four consists of an examination of devices engineered by Britten to shift a beloved play onto the operatic stage. Britten characterized the three distinct character groups through the use of different textures and colours. This chapter focuses on Britten's characterization of the fairies through the use of musical devices including voice types, melodic and rhythmic contours, motives, orchestration, and tonality. This musical analysis can aid a singer's performance by developing an understanding of *why* the composer chose to set the text in a particular musical way and what effect that has on the character dramatically.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Shakespeare and Britten are both pivotal figures whose extensive histories have been well documented. This chapter provides a brief historical context for both the composer and author and traces the various operatic adaptations of the play from the 16th century up until Britten's own masterpiece in the 1960s. The literary context of Shakespeare's play has been established to familiarize the performer with the origins of the character of Tytania. The second half of the chapter maintains a focus on the transition from Shakespeare's play to Britten's opera in an attempt to provide sufficient detail for the performer to begin interpreting the character of Tytania for performance.

Historical context: William Shakespeare

The reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) saw England emerge as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world. London's atmosphere reflected all the vibrant qualities of the Elizabethan age and consequently attracted many of the leading literary talents of the day. It was in this invigorating environment that William Shakespeare lived and wrote.

Shakespeare's exact birth date is unknown, but there is record of his baptism in Stratford-upon-Avon, England on April 26th, 1564. By 1592, Shakespeare had established himself as a playwright and actor. He was also part-owner of a playing company known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. In total, he wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets. His dramatic work is divided into four categories: comedies, histories,

tragedies, and romances. His works have graced the stages for more than 400 years, entertaining generations of audiences. His genius can be seen in the consistency and quality of his writing, the complexity of his characters, the balance of comedy and drama, and the elaborate plots. These traits have secured a place for Shakespeare as one of the greatest playwrights to ever live. His mark on Western civilization and the English language has been profound.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was written in a highly creative period in Shakespeare's career. Scholars estimate that the play was written in 1595 or 1596 (when Shakespeare was 31 or 32 years old), at approximately the same time as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II*. Obvious plot links exist between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and critics disagree about which play was written first. Not only do both dramas emphasize the conflict between love and social convention, but the plot of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the play-within-the-play of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, closely parallels the story of *Romeo and Juliet*.¹

Most scholars believe that Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as light entertainment to accompany a marriage celebration. While the identity of the historical couple for whom it was meant has never been conclusively established, there is good textual and background evidence available to support this claim.²

Whatever the case, the play was entered into the Register of the Stationers Company on 8th October 1600 by the bookseller Thomas Fisher, who published the first quarto edition later that year. The first performance known with certainty occurred at Court on 1st January 1604.³

¹ R.A. Foakes, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2.

² James Calderwood, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare*, (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 15.

³ R.A. Foakes, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, 12.

Literary Context

Shakespeare created a masterpiece of true originality by combining Classical style, English folklore, and Greek mythology. Foakes, writing in *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream: The New Cambridge Shakespeare, puts it thus:

The most notable feature of the play is the dramatist's inventiveness, brilliantly fusing scattered elements from legends, folklore and earlier books and plays into a whole that remains as fresh and original now as when it was composed.⁴

Some elements of the story can be traced to classical literature. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the transformation of Bottom into an ass is descended from Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*. Similarly, Shakespeare's fairies owe much to Elizabethan folklore, while the story of Theseus and Hippolyta comes from Greek mythology.

Leah Scragg proposes that one of the primary influences of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was John Lyly's *Gallathea* (1585). "Shakespeare expanded Lyly's dramatic structure of balancing a number of self-contained groups, one against the other and presenting each group in turn."⁵ Holland suggests that the framing device of the play, the wedding celebrations of Theseus, was probably adapted by Shakespeare from the narrative in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, which refers to the conquest by Theseus of the Amazons and their queen, Hippolyta. Holland also proposes that the general idea for a king and queen of fairies who quarrel between themselves and intervene in the affairs of human beings came from Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*, in which the king and queen, Pluto and Proserpine, argue over infidelity.⁶

⁴ R.A. Foakes, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, 4.

⁵ Leah Scragg, *Shakespeare, Lyly and Ovid: the influence of "Gallathea" on "A Midsummer Night's Dream"*, (1977), 125-34.

⁶ Peter Holland, *A Midsummer Night's Dream – The Oxford Shakespeare*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 30.

The name “Titania”⁷ appears several times in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in reference to children of the Titans, such as Pyrrha, Latona, Diana, and Circe.⁸ This is the first known instance that the name (Titania) is used to represent the fairy queen. However, since Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, it has been used to depict the fairy queen in countless stories and plays.

Music in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

In the Elizabethan theatre live music was commonly employed in stage productions. Although Shakespeare used music in all of his plays to some extent, it has been suggested that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* incorporated music more extensively than the norm.⁹ Music was interwoven with dialogue at important dramatic moments and accompanied the fairies’ entrances and exits. Long suggests that “The primary purpose of music was to set the fairies apart from the mortal.” Furthermore, he adds that “music helped to stress the contrast between the dainty Tytania and the boorish Bottom, to heighten the dramatic effect of the fairy spells and enchantments, and symbolized the concord arising from the settlement of the fairy quarrel, foreshadowing the resulting harmony between the mortals—thus emphasizing the turning point of the play.”¹⁰ The possibility that Shakespeare used music in his play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* much more lavishly than in any of his other plays suggests that he was aware of the power music had in creating the ethereal

⁷Britten changed the spelling of ‘Titania’ to ‘Tytania’ to indicate a long first syllable in pronunciation. See William Godsalve, *Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare’s Comedy*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), 61.

⁸R.A. Foakes, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, 7.

⁹ John Long, *Shakespeare’s Use of Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977), 102.

¹⁰ Ibid, 84-89.

atmosphere of the fairies. Arguably, without the music in this play, much of the sense of magic and enchantment would be lost.

Operatic Settings of Shakespeare's Plays

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera* lists 245 operas based, closely or loosely, on Shakespeare's stories. However, comparatively few of these have remained in the repertory. Of the exhaustive list, 16 are versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹¹ In 1692 Henry Purcell produced a reshaping of the play in the form of an opera that he named *The Fairy Queen*. The text was dramatically cut and substantially altered, and additional characters were added. Various other operatic adaptations were staged during the 18th century. The most notable, David Garrick's version *The Fairies* (1755), omitted all characters but the lovers and the fairies.¹² The first production that restored most of Shakespeare's text to the stage (cutting only 400 lines) was by Mme Lucia Vestris, opening in November 1840 at Covent Garden. Vestris is also responsible for setting the fashion for a woman to play the role of Oberon.¹³

Arguably the two most popular operas based on Shakespeare are Verdi's *Falstaff* (adapted by Arrigo Boito from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Significantly, Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is credited with being the only successful setting of Shakespeare's words (without substantial paraphrase or alterations). Moelwyn Merchant comments that Britten's interpretation was "the most faithful interpretation of Shakespeare's intentions in *A*

¹¹ Other examples include: *The Fairy Queen* (Purcell) and *Puck* (Marcel Delannoy)

¹² Eric White, *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd), 193

¹³ R.A. Foakes, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 13.

Midsummer Night's Dream that the stage has seen in our generation.”¹⁴ Although other composers attempted to adapt Shakespeare's play to opera, the text and narrative were distorted to such an extent that the author's true intentions were not successfully characterized. Perhaps this is one reason why many of these operas have not remained in the repertory. Britten's adaptation, however, remains comparatively faithful to Shakespeare's text and the dramatic impetus of the story has been realized to stunning effect through Britten's compositional genius.

Historical Context: Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten was born in Suffolk, England, on 22nd November 1913. He came from an upper-middle-class background where his first musical influence was his mother, an amateur musician and singer. By the age of five he had begun composing and at the age of 15 he commenced composition lessons with Frank Bridge¹⁵ who introduced him to the music of progressive European composers such as Bartok, Berg, and Schoenberg. While Britten's music is partly rooted in the English pastoral neo-romantic tradition of Vaughan-Williams, it also reflects the influence of more progressive European composers.

Britten became Britain's most prolific composer, with almost 100 major compositions to his credit. His operas form perhaps the most substantial and important part of his compositional legacy. Nearly all of them have firmly established themselves in the repertory. As a whole, his operas have come to be recognized as one of the most significant contributions to twentieth-century British music.

¹⁴ Moelwyn Merchant, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: a visual recreation", in *Early Shakespeare*, Edward Arnold, (London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1961), 182-183.

¹⁵ Arnold Whittall. "Britten, Benjamin," In *New Grove Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed [07/09/2007]), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

Peter Grimes, his second opera, is widely regarded as one of the masterpieces of post-war opera, and the most important opera by an English composer since Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (written 250 years earlier). Its premiere marked a turning point in the history of British opera and established the future path of Britten's career as an opera composer. Prior to *Peter Grimes*, contemporary British composers had struggled to be taken seriously by opera-house managements. The success of *Peter Grimes* proved that there was an audience for good contemporary work and encouraged institutions like Covent Garden to embrace new repertoire.

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Britten's Opera

In August 1959 Britten decided to write an opera for the re-opening of the Jubilee Hall at Aldeburgh. The resulting work, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, premiered on 11th June 1960. It was well received by the critics. The veteran critic of the Times, Frank Howes, described it thus:

...a major opera of the size and quality to follow *Peter Grimes* around the world, for it contains music as imaginative as the text to which it is set...the impression made by the performance...was that of being gripped by a spell, of being subjected to a dose of Oberon's own medicine.¹⁶

Later in June *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed at the Holland Festival and performances throughout the world soon followed. It premiered at Covent Garden on 2nd February 1961, with George Solti conducting and Sir John Gielgud producing.

¹⁶ Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*, (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 234.

CHAPTER 2

ADAPTATION FROM PLAY TO OPERA

The slower pace of operatic plots (the result of the singing of the dialogue and the interruption of the action by arias) imposes simplification. To create an opera from Shakespeare's play, Britten and Pears¹⁷ needed to make textual adaptations and cuts to the libretto before composition began.

With the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the first task was to get it into manageable shape, which basically entailed simplifying and cutting an extremely complex story – one can only hope that one hasn't lost too much, but since the sung word takes so much longer than the spoken word, to have done the complete *Midsummer Night's Dream* would have produced an opera as long as *The Ring*.¹⁸

The subtle ways that Britten has altered the libretto can have important implications for a nuanced understanding of the characters in Britten's opera. An exploration of Britten's adaptation of the libretto is thus essential background information for the creation of an informed interpretation of the character of Tytania.

In collaboration with his partner Peter Pears, Britten worked from facsimiles of the First Folio and the First Quarto,¹⁹ adapting and shortening Shakespeare's play but sticking faithfully to Shakespeare's words.²⁰

¹⁷ Mention must be made of Britten's lifelong partner, Peter Pears who evidently provided much inspiration for the composer and performed many of Britten's operatic roles and songs.

¹⁸ Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, ed. Paul Kildea. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 177.

¹⁹ Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, 178.

²⁰ Britten added one line only: 'compelling thee to marry with Demetrius'. This textual addition was created in order to explain 'the sharp Athenian law' that Lysander and Hermia are trying to escape. In the play, Egeus, Hermia's father, explains the law, but he is completely omitted from the opera.

The 2,136 lines of the original were cut to about half, and the action simplified by starting, not at the court of Theseus in Athens, but in the wood with the quarrel between Oberon and Tytania.²¹

These cuts alter the dramatic structure of Shakespeare’s play and Britten’s music reweaves the remaining text into something different, a new creation. Structurally, Shakespeare’s play is cast in a symmetrical ABA form. It opens in the city of Athens, moves to the woods, then back to the city. While Shakespeare’s language has been retained, the narrative flow has been altered to create a version of the play with notable differences. **Table 1** demonstrates that while the play is set out in 5 Acts, the opera is laid out in 3 Acts, all of which are set in the wood, except for the scene which takes place in Theseus’ Palace in Act 3 of the opera.

Table 1: Britten’s Simplified Libretto

Britten	Shakespeare
Act 1	Act 2, scene 1
	Act 1, scene 1
Act 2	Act 3, scene 1
	Act 4, scene 1
	Act 3, scene 2
Act 3	Act 4, scene 1
	Act 4, scene 2
	Act 1, scene 1
	Act 4, scene 1
	Act 5 scene 1

This structure dictates that the first act introduces the various groups of characters who are wandering in the wood. The second act shows the effect of Oberon’s magic

²¹ Eric Walter White, *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*, 222.

spell on them, and in the third act Oberon's spell is undone. At this point, the two pairs of lovers are wedded at Theseus' Palace where the mechanicals present the play that they have been rehearsing.

The omission of Shakespeare's first Scene in Act One with Theseus and Hippolyta creates a different mood for Britten's opera. Whereas the play establishes civilized society as the framing device, the opera focuses on the ethereal world of the fairies in the woodland. The beginning of the opera transports us to the fairies' home and introduces the king and queen of the fairies as the reason for the chaos that follows. Peter Evans believes that this omission "softens" and "sacrifices" much of the play's impact.²² Certainly, Britten's opera radically changes the way that the audience perceives the lovers' chaos, as it is through the fairies' eyes that all the love situations are seen, rather than from the perspective of Theseus, Hippolyta and civilized society. Wilfrid Mellers suggests that "Britten omits Shakespeare's Act 1 in the 'external' world in order to concentrate on the effect of the dream on mortal creatures."²³ The fairies are elevated to a position of primacy and relevance as they frame each scene involving the mortals and unite the other character groups within the play. Howard comments that,

They are promoted to the framing role and in consequence "reality" or the norm is shifted from the anachronistic court of Athens to the domestic and cosmic affairs of Tytania and Oberon...By putting the fairies at the centre of the opera every other aspect is seen only as touched by them.²⁴

Also of significance is the presence of Tytania on stage throughout Act 2. In Shakespeare's play, Tytania falls asleep with Bottom in the first scene of Act 4 and

²² Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, (London: Dent, 1989), 237.

²³ Wilfrid Mellers, "The Truth of the Dream" in *The Britten Companion*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1984), 182.

²⁴ Patricia Howard, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, 165.

Oberon immediately appears to reverse his spell. In the opera, however, Tytania falls asleep with Bottom in the middle of Act 2 and Oberon does not appear to reverse his spell until the beginning of the third Act. Therefore, Tytania and Bottom remain asleep on stage while the actions of the rustics and lovers continue for the remainder of the Act. Tytania's presence thus acts as a continual visual reminder of the presence of the fairies and the magic that exists in the woods.

Britten recognized that his opera represented a single interpretation of Shakespeare's play, noting that "although one doesn't intend to make any special interpretation, one cannot avoid it."²⁵ Patricia Howard and Peter Evans suggest that, due to a musical interpretation of the plot, the characters are developed and explored in more depth:

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Britten) has a number of things in common with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare), but it presents a single interpretation of the comprehensive material of the play, and in imposing this narrow reading reveals some aspects in compensational greater depth.²⁶

New drama has been invented through the use of music and these musical experiences bring out new, perhaps surprising aspects of Shakespeare's text. Britten's composition evokes the magical atmosphere of the fairies woodland but it is also evident that his interpretation of Shakespeare's fairies is one with *sinister* undertones. For instance, Britten has established Tytania's supernatural aura and extreme sensuality in her aria "Come now a roundel" through the use of orchestration, vocal contour, choice of tessitura, and the like. However, the chromatic and spooky woodland theme that accompanies Tytania's aria adds a sinister undertone to the text. Likewise, instrumental music between the dialogues also serves to develop the plot

²⁵ Benjamin Britten, "The Composers' Dream" in *The Britten Companion*, 178.

²⁶ Patricia Howard, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, (London: Barrie and Rockliff the Cresset Press, 1969), 163.

independently of Shakespeare’s text. For example, when Oberon awakens the sleeping Tytania from her dream, an instrumental interlude of 24 bars establishes an atmosphere with a clear sinister undertone not evident in Shakespeare’s text.

By cutting text from Shakespeare’s play, relationships between characters are undoubtedly redefined. For instance, in the play Oberon’s authority over his queen is firmly established in their first scene together:

Oberon	Ill met by moonlight proud Titania.
Titania	What, jealous Oberon? Fairies, skip hence. I have forsworn his bed and company.
Oberon	Tarry, rash wanton? Am I not thy Lord?” ²⁷

However, Britten and Pears chose to eliminate this reference of Oberon’s authority “Am I not thy Lord?” thereby creating a different dynamic between the king and queen by establishing them more as equals. Britten’s division of Tytania’s speech “contagious fogs” between the two monarchs also establishes a balance in their argument and creates an altered dimension to their relationship.²⁸ In the play, Tytania refers to Oberon’s love for Hippolyta, the future bride of Theseus and in return Oberon accuses Tytania of loving Theseus:

Titania	But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon Your buskin’d mistress and your warrior love, To Theseus must be wedded, and you come To give their bed joy and prosperity.
Oberon	How canst thou thus for shame, Titania Lance at my credit with Hippolyta, Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?” ²⁹

In Shakespeare’s play the opening scene introduces the characters of Theseus and Hippolyta, but in Britten’s opera the mortal monarchs do not feature until the second

²⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, (London: Murray sales and service co. Cresta House, 1978), 179.

²⁸ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 239.

²⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 178.

last scene of Act 3. Oberon and Tytania's infidelities are thus omitted from Britten's Act 1, scene 1. It is important to be aware of these subtle differences because the textual cuts alter the perceived motivations of the character. For instance, in both the play and the opera, the couple's fight over possession of the changeling boy. But only in the play does the jealousy of each other's infidelity provide the dramatic impetus for their power struggle.

CHAPTER 3

ELIZABETHAN FOLKLORE AND SHAKESPEARE'S FAIRIES

This chapter investigates the folklore contiguous to fairies from the Elizabethan age. This literary and cultural contextualization of Shakespeare's play aims to assist the singer preparing Tytania by highlighting the motivations behind her actions/reactions within the context of the play. To provide a credible, truthful, convincing, characterization of the role, it is very helpful to explore the Elizabethan folklore from which Shakespeare drew and to pinpoint those aspects of Tytania's character that stem from these origins.

The presence of the fairies is one of the most noticeable and entertaining elements of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Although Shakespeare employs several important aspects of the Elizabethan folklore to the fairies of his play, he arguably altered the conception of fairies, not only within the context of the play, but for all time. Shakespeare's character of Tytania was partly based on the public perception that fairies were 'evil' or harm-doers. However, Shakespeare arguably also alters this customary perception. The folklore which depicts fairies as evil is undermined by Shakespeare's imaginative plot and use of text. Accordingly, he introduced the more modern notion of fairies that conceives of them as being primarily friendly spirits.

Much of the folklore about fairies revolves around protection from their malice. Shakespeare's fairies, however, are arguably not depicted as particularly malicious spirits. Although Puck plays tricks on the mortals, the fairies eventually help them restore order. For instance, Tytania cares for the Indian boy, a mere human,

out of love for one of her followers (a “votress” of her “order”)³⁰, and Oberon orders Puck to resolve Helena’s misery without any kind of reward. Both rulers even bless the bridal beds of the mortals at the end of the play. This portrayal of the fairies is in contrast to the fear-inspiring fairies to which Shakespeare’s Elizabethan audiences were accustomed. Shakespeare, aware of the distinction in public perception of fairies, makes overt this transformation from wicked tricksters to harmless shadows in Puck’s epilogue to the play:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended.
That you have but slumb’red here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream³¹

Shakespeare dismisses the folkloric notion that fairies were wicked by describing them as harmless “shadows.” Puck’s epilogue sends the audience home with an altered perception of fairies by insinuating that all they have witnessed is only a dream.

Another example of this altered perception of fairies is the sympathy that Tytania expresses for the mortals as they endure miserable weather:

The human mortals want their winter cheer.
No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.³²

This concern for mortals recurs in her next speech, where she explains that she refuses to give Oberon the changeling boy (the subject of her quarrel with Oberon) out of loyalty to the boy’s dead mother:

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, (London: Murray sales and service co. Cresta House, 1978), 179.

³¹ *Ibid*, 194

³² *Ibid*, 179

But she, being mortal, of that boy did die,
And for her sake do I rear up her boy;
And for her sake I will not part with him.³³

The sympathy that Tytania expresses for mortals who are dependent on her arguably represents a departure from Elizabethan literature and folklore.³⁴ Shakespeare himself refers to this tradition of evil fairies in other plays. For example in *Hamlet*, fairies are associated with witches, and in *Cymbeline*, Imogen prays for protection from “fairies and the tempters of the night”³⁵ Bevington and Warren both make note of Oberon’s insistence that he and his followers are “fairies of another sort!”³⁶ Oberon thus overtly distinguishes the fairies from “witches” and “tempters of the night”. Both the fairies and their monarchs (Oberon and Tytania) in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* seem to want to help the mortals they encounter. Latham comments:

Bottom awakes unharmed and restored to earth at the exact minute and in the exact place where it is necessary for him to be... with no other marks of his sojourn with the fairies than the remembrance of a dream.³⁷

Indeed, Shakespeare portrays the fairies as helpful spirits rather than evil doers. For instance, each of the mortals affected by the magic of the fairies is enlightened in some way. The lovers, for example, awake as if from a dream. The love triangles are

³³ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 179.

³⁴ Minor White Latham, “The Elizabethan Fairies” in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Anthony Price, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983), 61.

³⁵ R. Foakes, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 8.

³⁶ David Bevington, *Contemporary Critical Essays- A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, (Hampshire: Macmillian Press LTD, 1996), 28; Roger Warren, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, (Somerset: Macmillian Press LTD, 1983), 19.

³⁷ Minor White Latham, “The Elizabethan Fairies” in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 60.

resolved and the mortal characters are all happily matched with their respective partners.

Of particular interest is the way that aspects of fairy folklore can illuminate the motivations behind Tytania's actions/reactions within the play. The central drama that runs through *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (causing chaos for the mortal world) is the dissension between Oberon and Tytania that stems from their mutual desire for possession of the changeling boy. A considerable amount of folklore concerning fairies revolves around changelings: the theft of a human baby and the substitution of a fairy one. It was widely believed that women who had just given birth were regarded as being in particular danger. In folklore the term 'changeling' refers to the substitution fairy.³⁸ However, in the play the changeling is the stolen human child itself.³⁹ The notion that fairies stole human babies and replaced them with changelings is arguably undermined in the play as the Indian boy is not stolen, but rather Tytania has adopted him out of loyalty to her devotee (and friend) who, has died. She explains that the boy was the son of a votress of her order and because of a promise to the mother to take care of her child she refuses to part with him, even if it causes chaos for the rest of the world.

Another common thread in fairy folklore is that if the captive ate the fairies' food then they would be permanently trapped.⁴⁰ Tytania, madly infatuated with Bottom, exercises her queenly authority over him by demanding that he remains in the woods with her:

³⁸ Minor White Latham, "The Elizabethan Fairies" in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Anthony Price, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1930), 60.

³⁹ Martin Wright, *Notes on A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 27.

⁴⁰ Kathryn Briggs, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 127.

Out of this wood,
Do not desire to go.
Thou shalt remain here,
Whether thou wilt or no.

Feed him with apricots,
And dewberries
With purple grapes,
Green figs,
And mulberries.....⁴¹

When the fairy queen is madly doting on Bottom she specifically orders her fairy attendants to “feed” him. By ordering her fairy attendants to wait on him and feed him exotic fruits, she elevates Bottom to the status of royalty. However, an awareness of Elizabethan folklore might suggest that Tytania also feeds him so he will remain in her bower as her captive. On the other hand, the notion that this is done with deliberate sinister intent is mitigated by the fact that Tytania is operating under Oberon’s spell and only feeds him because she is bewitched into doing so.

Shakespeare did not always deviate from the popular conceptions of fairies within Elizabethan folklore. For instance, the widely held belief that fairies enjoy dancing and music was adhered to within the play, as was the association of fairies with night-time. Similarly, fairies were believed to dance in fairy circles that humans were forbidden to see. The fairy attendant’s line “To dew her orbs upon the green” refers to this fairy tradition. Holland suggests that Lyly’s *Gallathea* fairies, which were depicted dancing and playing, may also have been an influence on this play.⁴²

In his study of *The Elizabethan Fairies*, Latham found no early references to fairies as diminutive, and suggests that Shakespeare originated the literary fashion for

⁴¹ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 183.

⁴² Peter Holland, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream – The Oxford Shakespeare*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 30.

presenting fairies as tiny, harmless spirits that were associated with flowers.⁴³ The influence of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may well have been a contributing factor in the presentation of fairies as tiny and charming in drama, but Kathryn Briggs⁴⁴ and others argue that fairies of diminutive size were common enough in lore and legend. Whatever the case, the size of the fairies was an important factor in Shakespeare's (mis)representation of fairies as being 'friendly' creatures. The notion that a fairy was something to fear is undermined by the depiction of them as being small and cute (with references to them being "cowslips tall" and small enough to "creep into acorn cups"⁴⁵).

An awareness of the literary traditions and cultural contexts within which the drama is situated is crucial information for a singer performing the role of Tytania. This knowledge of Elizabethan folklore aims to help the performer achieve a deeper awareness of characterization by highlighting the key facets of Tytania's uniqueness as a fairy. In some ways, her character adheres to fairy folklore and in other ways she defies the Elizabethan perception of fairies. Shakespeare's characterization of the fairy queen and of her attendants altered the perception of fairies by depicting them as friendly spirits with human emotions/ feelings and by providing a rationale for their actions throughout the play.⁴⁶ This information is foundational to an understanding of the complexities of Tytania's character. With this knowledge a performer can validate their actions and reactions throughout the play with the aim of creating a credible and detailed realization of the role of Tytania.

⁴³ Minor Latham, "The Elizabethan Fairies" In *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Anthony Price, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983), 23.

⁴⁴ Kathryn Briggs, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976),

⁴⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (London: Murray sales and service co. Cresta House, 1978), 178.

⁴⁶ R.A. Foakes, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 13.

CHAPTER 4

MUSICAL ANALYSIS: Characterization of Britten's Fairies

To perform Tytania successfully, it is necessary that the singer obtains a firm understanding of the musical devices Britten has engaged to characterize the role. This chapter offers an overview of techniques employed throughout the opera that enhance and develop Shakespeare's original characterization of the supernatural characters. In order to successfully highlight these devices and their dramatic effects, it is necessary at times to refer to the lovers and the rustics for comparison and contrast, in order to highlight the ways that Britten has employed musical techniques to characterize the three different character groups. If a singer has an awareness of these devices, their performance will arguably have a greater chance of successfully conveying the dramatic nuances within the role.

The opera *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the work of a mature composer who has made bold choices in the musical treatment of Shakespeare's characters.⁴⁷ Britten was clearly excited by the challenge of characterizing such unique groups as the fairies, the lovers, and the rustics

Operatically, it is especially exciting because there are three quite separate groups – the Lovers, the Rustics, and the Fairies – which nevertheless interact. Thus in writing the opera I have used a different kind of texture and orchestral 'colour' for each section.⁴⁸

Throughout the score, Britten has created these three distinct character groups through the sophisticated manipulation of musical elements. This analysis and discussion focuses on the way that musical characterization is enhanced by the use of (1) voice-

⁴⁷ Britten had written nine operas prior to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Britten, "The Composers' Dream" in *The Britten Companion*, 177.

classifications, (2) melodic and rhythmic contour, (3) recurring motives, (4) tonal relationships, (5) orchestration, and (6) musical structures.

Characterization through Voice Types

The operatic voice types that Britten has chosen to represent the three character groups define which 'world' they belong to. Each casting choice serves a dramatic purpose. From the first appearance of the fairies at the beginning of the opera we are transported into the fairy realm. We are immediately aware that these creatures are from another world. One of the key characterizing devices used to portray the fairies' ethereal quality is the use of high voices. Britten has broken away from operatic conventions by writing the roles of Tytania and Oberon for coloratura soprano and counter-tenor respectively.⁴⁹ On the operatic stage, authority figures (such as kings) are typically characterized by overtly masculine, commanding, and powerful voices. Think of Verdi's Scarpia or Mozart's Count Almaviva. Arguably, power and masculinity are associated with a certain voice type. A counter-tenor could not be further from this stereotype. Britten's casting immediately evokes a sense of otherworldliness. It could also be argued that Oberon's unsettling high-pitched timbre also portrays an unnerving undertone to his character. Wayne Koetenbaum comments that "falsetto seems profoundly perverse: a freakish side-show: the place where voices go wrong."⁵⁰ The role of Oberon was in fact the first time that a counter-tenor had been used on the operatic stage since the castrati tradition died out in the late 18th

⁴⁹ William Godsalve, *Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare's Comedy*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), 156. Wilfrid Mellers, "The Truth of the Dream" in *Britten on Music*, 183. Patricia Howard, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, 169.

⁵⁰ Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: expression and evasion*, (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 235; Wayne Koetenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire*. (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993).

century.⁵¹ The impact of the counter-tenor, a rare voice type, is immediate and striking:

Visually and aurally Oberon must have unsettled the first audience, challenging their musical and dramatic expectations, for the part was written for male countertenor, a voice which was infrequently employed on the stage at this time.⁵²

Similarly, Tytania is distinguished from ordinary mortals by her coloratura soprano. The unearthly high tessitura conjures up ideas of brilliance, authority, and regal stature. The tessitura in which she sings throughout the opera implies her ethereal status. A comparison could be drawn between Mozart's Queen of the Night and Britten's Tytania in that their regal stature and flighty temperaments are musically portrayed through their coloratura vocal range. Tytania's fairy attendants also follow the trend of high voices: the solo fairies, Cobweb, Peaseblossom, Mustardseed and Moth are written for boy trebles; and the chorus of fairies, for trebles and sopranos. It is evident that Britten enhanced the ethereal unreality of the fairies music by choosing these specific voice types.⁵³

It is interesting to note that Puck (otherwise known as Robin Goodfellow), the mediator between the three worlds of court, country, and supernatural—as well as between the stage world and the audience—is a spoken role usually given to a teenager with acrobatic skills. Robin Goodfellow was a common character in Elizabethan folklore but was not a fairy per se.⁵⁴ Whereas the fairies in Shakespeare's

⁵¹ The part of Oberon was written for Alfred Deller, the performer who played an essential part in the rediscovery of the countertenor tessitura and the popularization of Elizabethan repertoire.

⁵² Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*, 230.

⁵³ Roger Warren, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (Somerset: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983), 322.

⁵⁴ Minor White Latham, "The Elizabethan Fairies" in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed Antony Price, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983), 61.

play sing, Robin Goodfellow does not. Making him a speaking role completes his individuality. Britten maintained this characterizing device in his opera. He states:

Puck is a quite different character from anyone else in the play. He seems to me to be absolutely amoral and yet innocent....I got the idea of doing Puck like this in Stockholm, where I saw some Swedish child acrobats with extraordinary agility and powers of mimicry, and suddenly realized we could do Puck that way.⁵⁵

Britten obviously wanted to make this distinction between Puck and the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* overt.

While the immortals are cast as unconventional voice types, the lover's range assignments are conventional. Helena is a soprano; Hermia is a mezzo-soprano; Lysander is a tenor, and Demetrius is a baritone. This characterizing device musically and dramatically contrasts the mortals with the immortals. The audience hears the familiar range and tessitura of the most common operatic voice types (soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and baritone) and, perhaps unconsciously, makes the connection between their music and their mortal status.

Characterization through Melodic and Rhythmic Contour

The contour of vocal lines is one of the musical elements that Britten has manipulated in order to delineate the various characters in the opera. Initially, Tytania and Oberon's vocal lines are characterized by large intervallic leaps, as seen in **Example 1**. Tytania's very first interval in the opera on "*Ill met by moonlight*" is an 11th that characterizes her furious state of mind.

⁵⁵ Wilfrid Mellers, "The Composers' Dream" in *The Britten Companion*, 179

Example 1: Large Intervallic Leaps Portray Tytania's Fury

The musical score for Example 1 features two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The top staff is for Tytania, and the bottom staff is for Oberon. Both characters sing the same line: "III Wie met by / Wie schlimm schlimm bei". The lyrics are written below the notes. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked with a bracket and the number 11. The piano accompaniment consists of a left hand with a steady eighth-note pattern and a right hand with a more complex, flowing melody. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings like *f* (forte) and *tr* (trills).

Furthermore, when Oberon and Tytania are challenging each other over the changeling boy they both have octave leaps on the stresses of their sentence. ('I have *forsworn his bed and company*,' and 'therefore the ox *hath stretched* his yoke in vain'). **Example 2** demonstrates the use of a diminished 12th at the climax of the argument on "We are their parents and original! We are!"

Example 2: Large Intervallic Leaps Express the Feisty Disagreement

The musical score for Example 2 features two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The top staff is for Tytania (T.) and the bottom staff is for Oberon (O.). Both characters sing the same line: "pa-rents and o-ri-gi-nal, We are / Stif-ter al-les Ungemachs, Wir sind's!". The lyrics are written below the notes. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked with a bracket and the number 132. The piano accompaniment consists of a left hand with a steady eighth-note pattern and a right hand with a more complex, flowing melody. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings like *f* (forte) and *sf* (sforzando).

Thus we can conclude that the feisty disagreement and opposition between the two characters is expressed through their vocal lines. In contrast to this technique, the

quarrel scene between the lovers in Act II does not feature the same large intervallic leaps (see **Example 3**). Therefore, we can deduce that Britten has characterized Tytania by emphasizing her coloratura range and giving the illusion that her powers are beyond mortal capacity.

Example 3: Stepwise Motion in the Vocal Lines of the Mortals

HELENA *f*
You both are ri - vals and love Her - mi - a,
Ihr seid Ri - va - len und liebt Her - mi - a,

Her-mia? Are you not Ly - san - der?
Her-mia? Bist du nicht Ly - san - der? What, can you do me
Welch' grös-ser Leid kann

L.
Ay, by my life be cer-tain'tis no jest, That I do hate thee and love He - le-
Ja, sei du nur ge-wiss, es ist kein Scherz, Ich has-se dich und lie-be He - le-

D.
If e'er I lov'd her all that love is gone.
Liebt' ich sie je, dann ist die Lieb' vor - bei.

Following the initial outbursts of Oberon and Tytania at their first meeting in the woodland, we observe another musical device which further enhances their supernatural characters. In contrast to the large intervallic leaps, Britten establishes the fairies mystical and eerie quality through the use of monotone, chant-like singing. In **Example 4** we can see that the melody is contained within a small range. Britten employs this technique in the vocal lines of the supernatural characters throughout the opera when important text for plot development needs to be coherent and also whenever a spell is cast by Oberon. Godsolve comments: “monotone gives an archaic,

ceremonial flavour to the utterance; it also imitates the still-living spoken device of resorting to even pitched syllabification for forceful emphasis and clarity.”⁵⁶

Example 4: Oberon’s Monotone Vocal Line

always in tempo
(sempre a tempo)
15 *f* with force (mit Nachdruck)

O. *f* Do you a-mend it then, it lies in you; *f*
So hilf dem ab, es liegt an dir al - lein, Ich

TYTANIA
TITANIA *f* with force (mit Nachdruck)

O. *f* Set your
Gib dein

do but beg a lit-tle change-ling boy to be my hench-man.
bit-te nur ein klei-nes Wech-sel-kind Zum E-del-kna - ben.

T. *mf* heart at rest, The Fai-ry land buys not the child of me.
Herz zur Ruh! Dein Fe-en-land kauft mir dies Kind nicht ab. *sf*

The same technique has been used for Tytania’s Act 1 aria “Come now a roundel,” in which her mystical, godly aura is further established. The mysterious atmosphere is initiated by the strings’ portamenti glissandi (the woodland theme—shown here in vocal score in **Example 5**) and the sustained, high vocal line once

⁵⁶ William Godsalve, *Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare’s Comedy*, 158.

Example 1: Large Intervallic Leaps Portray Tytania's Fury

Example 1 is a musical score snippet from a play, featuring two vocal parts: TYTANIA and OBERON. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. A bracket above the vocal lines indicates a large intervallic leap. The lyrics for both characters are: "Wie met by", "schlimm", and "bei". The piano accompaniment features trills and arpeggiated figures.

Furthermore, when Oberon and Tytania are challenging each other over the changeling boy they both have octave leaps on the stresses of their sentence. ('I have *forsworn his* bed and company,' and "therefore the ox *hath stretched* his yoke in vain"). **Example 2** demonstrates the use of a diminished 12th at the climax of the argument on "We are their parents and original! We are!"

Example 2: Large Intervallic Leaps Express the Feisty Disagreement

Example 2 is a musical score snippet showing a vocal duet between Tytania (T.) and Oberon (O.). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as (♩ = 132). The lyrics for both characters are: "pa-rents and o-ri-gi-nal, We are", "Stif-ter al-les Ungemachs, Wir sind's!". The piano accompaniment features trills and arpeggiated figures, with dynamics ranging from forte (f) to fortissimo (ff).

Thus we can conclude that the feisty disagreement and opposition between the two characters is expressed through their vocal lines. In contrast to this technique, the

quarrel scene between the lovers in Act II does not feature the same large intervallic leaps (see **Example 3**). Therefore, we can deduce that Britten has characterized Tytania by emphasizing her coloratura range and giving the illusion that her powers are beyond mortal capacity.

Example 3: Stepwise Motion in the Vocal Lines of the Mortals

The musical score for Example 3 features four vocal parts: HELENA (soprano), Her. (Hermia, alto), L. (Lysander, tenor), and D. (Demetrius, bass). The music is in G major and 4/4 time. Helena's line begins with a forte (f) dynamic and a stepwise melody. Hermia's line follows with a similar stepwise motion. Lysander's line also features stepwise motion, with a forte (f) dynamic. Demetrius' line is in the bass and also shows stepwise motion. The piano accompaniment at the bottom consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex pattern in the left hand. The lyrics are in English and German.

HELENA *f*
 You both are ri - vals and love Her - mi - a,
 Ihr seid Ri - va - len und liebt Her - mi - a,

Her.
 Her-mia? Are you not Ly - san - der? What, can you do me
 Her-mia? Bist du nicht Ly - san - der? Welch' grös-ser Leid kann

L.
 Ay, by my life be cer-tain'tis no jest, That I do hate thee and love He - le-
 Ja, sei du nur ge-wiss, es ist kein Scherz, Ich has-se dich und lie-be He - le-

D.
 If e'er I lov'd her all that love is gone.
 Liebt' ich sie je, dann ist die Lieb' vor - bei.

Following the initial outbursts of Oberon and Tytania at their first meeting in the woodland, we observe another musical device which further enhances their supernatural characters. In contrast to the large intervallic leaps, Britten establishes the fairies mystical and eerie quality through the use of monotone, chant-like singing. In **Example 4** we can see that the melody is contained within a small range. Britten employs this technique in the vocal lines of the supernatural characters throughout the opera when important text for plot development needs to be coherent and also whenever a spell is cast by Oberon. Godsolve comments: "monotone gives an archaic,

ceremonial flavour to the utterance; it also imitates the still-living spoken device of resorting to even pitched syllabification for forceful emphasis and clarity.”⁵⁶

Example 4: Oberon’s Monotone Vocal Line

always in tempo
(sempre a tempo)
15 *f* with force (mit Nachdruck)

O. *f* Do you a-mend it then, it lies in you; *f*
So hilf dem ab, es liegt an dir al - lein. Ich

TYTANIA
TITANIA *f* with force (mit Nachdruck)
f Set your
Gib dein

O. do but beg a lit-tle change-ling boy To be my hench-man.
bit - te nur ein klei-nes Wech - sel-kind Zum E-del - kna - ben.

T. heart at rest, The Fai-ry land buys not the child of me.
Herz zur Ruh! Dein Fe - en - land kauft mir dies Kind nicht ab.

The same technique has been used for Tytania’s Act 1 aria “Come now a roundel,” in which her mystical, godly aura is further established. The mysterious atmosphere is initiated by the strings’ portamenti glissandi (the woodland theme—shown here in vocal score in **Example 5**) and the sustained, high vocal line once

⁵⁶ William Godsolve, *Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare’s Comedy*, 158.

again enhances her unearthly status. As demonstrated in **Example 5**, Britten has portrayed her sensual and graceful qualities through the use of numerous slur markings and chromaticism in the vocal line.⁵⁷

Example 5: Tytania's Unearthliness

94 Mysterious (*misterioso*)
♩ = about 104

TYTANIA
TITANIA

distant
(*entfernt*)

pp freely (*frei*)

Come,
Kommt!

Glock.

ppp

Sirs.
(with ped.)

(portamento)

T.

come, now a roun - del, and a
Kommt! Ei - nen Rund - tanz, ei - nen

sim.

T.

fai - ry song; Then for the third part of a minute,
Fe - en - sang! Dann auf ein Drit - tel - chen Mi - nu - te

⁵⁷ The vocal and dramatic style of singing Britten is largely dictated by the printed demands in his scores. His marks of expression are very specific and to be faithful to the composers dramatic intentions, one must follow his musical markings closely.

Example 6: The Contrasts between the Vocal Contours of Bottom and Tytania

Example 6: The Contrasts between the Vocal Contours of Bottom and Tytania

Always *f*

very loudly (*sehr laut*)

f rough

f rough

f rough

f rough

f rough

f rough

The woo - sell cock, so black of hue, With o - range law - ny bill, The
 Die Schwal - be, die den Som - mer bringt, Der Spatz, der Zei - sig fein, Die

Example 6: The Contrasts between the Vocal Contours of Bottom and Tytania

throats with his note so true, The wren with lit - tle quill,
 Ler - che, die sich lu - stig schwingt Ins Him - mels - blau hin - ein.

Example 7: The Contrasts between the Vocal Contours of Bottom and Tytania (More)

31 *Quietly (tranquillo)*
a2 *ppp*

Fl. 1, 2
Hn. 1, 2 in F
Perc. Glock. *p*
Harp I *p Sweetly* *sim. arpeggiando* *pp*
Harp II *p Sweetly* *sim. arpeggiando* *pp*

TYTANIA *awaking (erwachend)* *ppp* *sustained*

What an - gel wakes me — from my flow - 'ry bed?
Weckt mich ein En - gel — von dem Blu - men - bett?

d=d Lively (vivo)
a2 *f*

Fl. 1, 2
Ob.
Cl. 1, 2 in Bb
Bsn.
Hn. 1, 2 in F *f*
Tbne. *f heavy* *always, f and heavy*
Perc. *B.D.* *ff* *Timp.*
BOTTOM **ZETTEL** *ff*

The finch, the sparrow, and the lark, The plainsong cuckoo grey, —
Der Fink, der Sperling, und der Specht, Der grau-e Kuckuck fein, —

d=d Lively (vivo)
VI. I *f*
VI. II *f*
Va. *f*
Vc. *f*
Db. *f*

The love scene between Tytania and Bottom that occurs at the very centre of the piece is a pivotal scene to the drama, and one in which Britten employs some of his most remarkable music. Britten has gradually blended two radically opposed musical styles. While Tytania's vocal line and orchestral accompaniment is lyrical and beautiful, Bottom's vocal contour contrasts with the queen's by its disjointed, atonal characteristics. The depth of her disgrace is suggested by the contrast between her beautiful line and his vulgar line. **Example 6** and **Example 7** demonstrate the use of vocal contour and orchestration to differentiate Bottom and Tytania. The coiling woodwind and the harps' ostinato characterize Tytania's elegant and graceful trance.

It could be argued that Britten has enhanced Shakespeare's language by remaining faithful to its lyrical structure and composing music that reflects the text with extreme truthfulness. In his article on Benjamin Britten's librettos, Porter comments:

A Midsummer Nights Dream is a brilliant biopsy of the play, where Britten's music miraculously replaces Shakespeare's poetry without damaging the original drama.⁵⁸

Characterization through Motives

Just as Shakespeare used imagery and iterative motifs to unify his diverse plots and separate character groups, so Britten uses musical motives to characterize and unify his opera. Each group has their own set of motives and each realm of reality has its own atmospheric motive. Being aware of these recurring motives throughout the opera enables the singer to follow the implicit drama of the "musical text" as well as the written text. To successfully depict these individual facets of each character, the

⁵⁸ Peter Porter, "Benjamin Britten's Librettos." In *Peter Grimes, Gloriana: Benjamin Britten*. ed Nicholas John, 7-18. Opera guide Series, No. 24. (London: John Calder, 1983); William Godsalve, *Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare's Comedy*, 197.

performer should be aware of what each device signifies. In performance, this musical analysis can then be made audible to the audience.

Tytania’s relationship with Oberon is musically enhanced by a recurring three-note descending figure (with a characteristic rhythm)⁵⁹ that appears throughout the opera at dramatically important moments when Oberon is enforcing his control over Tytania. Its frequency in the vocal line is demonstrated in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Occurrences of the Oberon/Tytania Motive

Act I, 3 bars before figure 11
Act I, 4 bars after figure 11
Act I, 2 bars before figure 12
Act I, 5 bars before figure 15
Act II, figure 88
Act III, 8 bars after figure 9

This motive first appears in the Act 1 dissension scene, in the fairy monarch’s first lines of the opera (see **Example 8**).

Example 8: The Oberon/Tytania Motive (as bracketed)

The musical score for Example 8 shows the Oberon/Tytania Motive. It features three staves: Tytania (T.), Oberon (O.), and Piano. The key signature is D major (two sharps). The time signature is 4/4. The motive is a three-note descending figure, bracketed in the vocal lines. The lyrics are as follows:

Tytania (T.): moon - light, Jealous O - beron, Fairies, skip
Mond - licht, Tref - fen wir uns hier! El - fen, da -

Oberon (O.): moon - light, Proud Ty - ta - ni - a.
Mond - licht, Tref - fen wir uns hier!

The piano accompaniment includes a three-note descending figure in the right hand, marked with a trill (tr) and a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic.

⁵⁹ William Godsalve, *Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare’s Comedy*, 128; Patricia Howard, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, 171.

This same motive recurs continually in the orchestra throughout the scene, establishing a clear reference to the king and queen’s relationship. Goldsalve notes:

The motive returns in inversion on Tytania’s exit “fairies away, away!” F#, G#, A in the double basses (40), the instruments that earlier featured the original downward G#, F#, E entry figure.”⁶⁰

It appears for the final time in Act 3 when Tytania has been defeated by Oberon and he finally has control over his queen (see **Example 9**).

Example 9: Another Instance of the Oberon/Tytania Motive (as bracketed)

The musical score for Example 9 is in 2/4 time. The vocal line for Tytania (labeled 'TYTANIA' and 'TITANIA') is marked 'very warmly (warm)'. The lyrics are: 'My O - be - ron! what vi - sions have!' and 'Mein O - be - ron, wie war ver-wirrt mein'. The orchestra includes a string section (labeled 'Strs.') and a double bass section (labeled 'pp'). A bracket above the vocal line indicates the Oberon/Tytania motive.

Another unifying motive is the spell ostinato which first appears at figure 19 and recurs throughout the opera whenever a spell is cast by Oberon. **Table 3** demonstrates its frequency.

Table 3: Spell-Binding Motive

Act I, Figure 19
Act I, Figure 22
Act I, Figure 35
Act I, Figure 46
Act I, Figure 102 to Figure 103

⁶⁰ William Goldsalve, *Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare’s Comedy*, 148.

The spell motive (see **Example 10**) further characterizes Oberon by representing his magical powers. It appears whenever he casts a spell in the opera, for example, before Tytania's enchantment with Bottom and when the male lovers are bewitched into falling in love with Helena, which unifies the immortals and mortals in bewitchment.

Example 10: Spell Motive (in the Celesta)

Puck approaches Oberon.
Puck nähert sich Oberon.

[19] Slow and gentle (♩ = 104)
(lento, con lenezza)

Tpt.

Perc. Tamburo *pp* Glock. *pp*

Cel. *very sustained* *p*

O. *clearly (deutlich)*
come hither, come hither;
komm her, komm her.

thou re-mem-b'rest The
Kennst du wohl noch Das

Perc. Glock.

Cel.

O.
herb I shew'd thee once,
Kraut, ich wies es dir,
The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid,
Sein Saft, getropft ins schlau'um-langne Aug',
Will make or man or woman — mad-ly dote Up-
Macht Männer o - der Frauen — toll vergafft in

Another significant rhythmically-based form that Britten uses to structurally define sections of the opera is the Scotch snap.⁶¹ The snap appears first in the fairies music of the opening scene, Act 1, when they describe the “cowslips tall” (see **Example 11**).

⁶¹ Eric White, *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1983), 203.

Example 11: Scotch Snaps (as bracketed)

4 SOLO FAIRIES: SOLO - ELFEN

Cow - slips tall, her pen - sion-ers be,
Pri - meln sind ihr Hof - ge - - leit,

Bsn. Cl.

pp f

The fairies' rhythm is changed to a Scotch snap in the second half of each bar. Britten also uses this form in Oberon's "I know a bank" aria and then again at the end of the opera in "Now until the break of day."⁶² The effect of this bounce in the rhythm is that the fairies light and airy qualities are characterized.

As well as the character motives, Britten also uses atmospheric motives, such as the woodland theme (Act 1—see **Example 12**) and the sleep motive (the four chords at the opening of Act 2)⁶³ to unify his opera. The woodland theme is significant to the fairies characterization in that the ethereal quality of the fairies is linked directly to their habitat.⁶⁴ Shakespeare differentiates his fairies from human beings by presenting them in terms of the natural world in which they live. He describes their surroundings with poetic detail with reference to "delicate wild flowers," "nodding violets," "wild thyme," and "sweet musk-roses."⁶⁵ It is evident that the images of nature reflect different aspects of the fairies themselves. Just as

⁶² Britten was heavily influenced by the music of Henry Purcell and here we see a borrowed technique from his predecessor.

⁶³ This motive has been widely discussed in the literature. See for example, Mervyn Cooke, "Britten and Shakespeare: Dramatic and Musical Cohesion in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,'" *Music and Letters* 74 (May 1993), 260.

⁶⁴ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 239.

⁶⁵ Minor White Latham, "The Elizabethan Fairies" in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 61.

Shakespeare's language shapes the fairies characters, Britten's woodland theme establishes the fairies' character by painting their habitat. As shown in **Example 12**, the woodland theme consists of a sequence of 12 major triads linked by string glissandi.⁶⁶

Example 12: Woodland Theme

The wood - deepening twilight.
Der Wald. Tiefe Dämmerung.

Slow and mysterious (*lento misterioso*)

pp (portamento)

Strs. (with ped.)

sim.

slowly animating (*poco a poco animando*)

mp *mf*

cresc. *f*

1 Lively *d.=63* (*vivace*)

Enter fairies, first group with Cobweb and Mustardseed.
Die erste Elfengruppe mit SPINNWEB und SENFSAMEN tritt ein.

Harps *f* *dim.*

⁶⁶ Mervyn Cooke suggests that the woodland theme was borrowed from Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. "The chords are linked by atmospheric string glissandi, an idea which may have been consciously borrowed from the music for the swaying trees in Ravel's opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Mervyn Cooke, *The Cambridge companion*, 137.

Functioning as a reminiscence motive, this theme serves to set the scene in the woods. The woodland theme is given relevance as Britten uses the motive to open Act I, which in effect establishes the eerie tone of the opera. The returning theme constantly reminds the audience that they are in the world of the fairies. **Table 4** demonstrates the regularity of the woodland theme throughout Act 1.

Table 4: Woodland Motive

Act I, bar 1
Act I, Figure 23
Act I, Figure 34
Act I, Figure 52
Act, Figure 72
Act I, Figure 94
Act I, Figure 98
Act I, Figure 103

As can be seen in **Table 5**, Britten has used the woodland theme in Act I as a strong unifying device to connect the various different scenes featuring each of the groups.

Table 5: Musical Structure of Act I

<i>Woodland theme</i>
Fairies, Puck, Oberon and Tytania
<i>Woodland theme</i>
The lovers – observed by Oberon and Puck
<i>Woodland theme</i>
The mechanicals
<i>Woodland theme</i>
The lovers – Lysander spellbound
<i>Woodland theme</i>
Tytania and fairies; Tytania spellbound by Oberon
<i>Woodland theme</i>

Characterization through Tonality

Setting him apart from his serialist contemporaries, Britten's compositions remain essentially tonal (although not always functionally tonal). For instance, the woodland theme uses employs triads with roots based on all twelve pitch classes. However, the vocabulary of sonorities remains essentially triadic. By using a less systematic approach than his serialist contemporaries, Britten created his own unique compositional style. Godsolve uses the term "tonality sets" to describe Britten's frequent completion of the chromatic aggregate without the use of a twelve-tone row, without atonality, and without deserting the familiarity of triadic sonorities:

The term, 'tonality set', distinguishes such a passage from a "tone row," the latter describing the melodic building element of Schoenberg's method of composition with twelve tones and later developments. Rather than using single pitch classes (sounds of definite pitches within any octave) as elements of a collection, Britten uses either tones, intervals (two different tones together), triads (three tones), or denser simultaneities, each with a more or less clear root, bass, and tonality.⁶⁷

Britten has characterized the three groups by distinguishing them through the means of tonality. Godsolve goes on to suggest that tonality sets play a motivic role, noting that "each tonality set is different, but effectively discharges a common responsibility: to distinguish and vitalize an important dramatic event or situation."⁶⁸ Commonly, each time a scene change takes place and another character group takes centre stage, the tonality-set changes accordingly.

The fairies music is further characterized by the constantly shifting tonal centre. This ambiguous tonality creates something other-worldly yet since Britten has

⁶⁷ William Godsolve, *Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare's Comedy*, 134.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 134.

used triadic, chordal progressions, it still sounds strangely familiar. While the fairies’ music revolves around the key of F# we are continually aware of the shifting tonal centre by the presence of the woodland theme (centred on G) in the orchestra.⁶⁹ The fairies’ close affinity to the woodland is thus established through the use of bitonality. The fairies first appearance (shown in **Example 13**) demonstrates this technique, employed to establish the connection between the fairies with their environment. (Tytania’s “Come now a roundel” is also accompanied by the woodland theme in the orchestra). The scalar movement of their vocal lines is also a recurrent fairy symbol.

Example 13: Fairy Accompaniment: Woodland Theme

FAIRIES, FIRST GROUP, with COBWEB and MUSTARDSEED

ERSTE ELFENGRUPPE mit SPINNWEB und SENFSAMEN

Fairies I

1. Gruppe

thorough bush, thorough briar,

Durch den Busch, durch den Wald,

O - ver park, o - ver pale, thorough flood, thorough

Ü - ber Gra - ben und Zaun, Durch das Feu - er, durch

⁶⁹ Arnold Whittall, *The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques*, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 178.

Britten's preference for juxtaposing key centres a semitone apart is further demonstrated by Tytania and Oberon's quarrel in Act 1. Their duet is in the key of A major but is challenged by B flat minor.

Tytania's aria "Be kind and courteous" is a perfect example of Britten's ability to express different moods through tonality. The aria is in D Dorian but Britten has employed two prominent notes for colouring, the B-flat and the F-sharp. The B-flat is used to illuminate the danger in stealing the "honeybags" from the "humblebees" and the frequency of the F-sharp increases the more Tytania becomes infatuated with Bottom, leading to the climax at "And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs, and light them at the fiery glowworm's eyes!"

Characterization through Orchestration

Intended for performance in a small recital hall, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written on a reduced scale for a medium-sized orchestra.⁷⁰ The score calls for strings, two percussion players, two harps, harpsichord, celesta, four brass (two horns, trumpet and trombone), and six woodwinds (two flutes, oboe, two clarinets, and bassoon). The "tongs and the bones" music calls for an additional stage band of small cymbals, woodblocks, and two recorders. While Shakespeare uses language to distinguish the three groups of characters, Britten uses orchestration as an additional means of characterization. Each group has a distinct orchestral texture and colour.

The fairies' music is delicately scored and distinguished by high voices. While the fairies' orchestration is characterized by the harp, harpsichord, celesta and percussion, the lover's music is signified by the use of woodwind and strings. The rustics are differentiated by using lower brass instruments and bassoon. We can see

⁷⁰ Eric White, *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*, 195.

the characterizing effect these individual registers have on each of the groups. Compare, for instance, the high, unearthly tessitura of the fairies; the middle, conventional tessitura of the mortal lovers; and the earthy, grotesque brass and bass instruments of the rustics.⁷¹ Britten relies on unconventional orchestration to characterize the fairies' music, thus reflecting their magical, unearthly quality. Their musical texture and orchestration is thinner than that of the lovers and rustics and is primarily characterized by the use of two harps and the harpsichord. It is evident, when comparing the orchestration of the three groups, that there are certain instruments that have been employed to distinguish each group from the other.

Two of the instruments used to characterize the fairies music are the Glockenspiel⁷² (also known as orchestra bells)⁷³ and the Celesta,⁷⁴ which has a sound akin to that of the Glockenspiel but with a much softer timbre. Being a transposing instrument, it sounds one octave higher than written. Godsolve comments

Britten associates Oberon with the celesta. Both possess high-pitched voices of unusual timbre, and, indeed Oberon often seems to be straining upwards with his supernatural countertenor into the tinkling-bell range of the higher voiced celesta.⁷⁵

The high and light sonority of these instruments distinguishes the fairies as mystical spirits when compared to the other character groups. Thus we see a pattern established: the light, high, and bright instruments such as the glockenspiel, celesta, harp, and flute, are used to accompany much of the fairy music. Because the

⁷¹ Eric White, *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*, 224.

⁷² This percussion instrument is similar to the xylophone, in that it has tuned bars laid out in a fashion resembling a piano keyboard but it's much smaller and higher in pitch.

⁷³ Britten composed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* after a visit to Indonesia in 1956 where he was introduced to the instruments used by the gamelan ensembles, including the glockenspiel.

⁷⁴ A struck idiophone operated by a keyboard.

⁷⁵ William Goldslove, *Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream: Making an Opera from Shakespeare's Comedy*, 131.

orchestration is light and delicate the singer is able to make use of the full range and colours of their voice. That is to say, one does not need to push to be heard over an orchestra and can afford to pay attention to Britten's very specific dynamic markings throughout the score. **Table 6** demonstrates the use of these instruments in Tytania's music.

Table 6: Use of Orchestral Instruments in Tytania's Music

	"Ill met by moonlight"	"Come now a roundel"	"What angel wakes me"	"Be Kind and Courteous"
2 Flute	X		X	X
Oboe	X			
2 Clarinet	X			X
Bassoon	X			
2 Horn				
Trumpet				
Trombone				
Glockenspiel	X	X	X	
Xylophone	X			
Vibraphone	X			
Bells	X			
Triangle				
2 Woodblocks	X			
Tambourine				
Tamburo				
Side drum				
Tenor drum				
Bass drum				
Timpani				
Cymbals				X
Gong				
2 Harps			X	X
Harpsichord				X
Violin I	X	X		
Violin II	X	X		
Viola	X	X		
Violin cello	X	X		X
Double bass	X	X		X
Soprano Recorder				
Cymbals (small)				
2 Woodblocks				

Characterization through Musical Structure

Shakespeare used language itself to give the three groups their own distinct style. Theseus and Hippolyta speak formally in blank verse, the lovers are characterized by rhyming couplets, the fairy attendants and Puck speak in rhymes (using delicate imagery as they described themselves and their duty), and Tytania and Oberon speak in formal prose (using rich picturesque imagery).⁷⁶ The supernaturals are further characterized by their shorter syllabic lines than the mortals, often with less than ten syllables per line. By retaining the original text, Britten has maintained the individual lyrical structure of each character group. Moreover, Britten has remained faithful to the text's rhythmic structure by setting the text to music without altering its rhythmic quality.

Furthermore, Britten enhanced the fairies, mortals, and rustics characterization through their musical structures. The most structured set pieces belong to the fairies. Their arias and duets frame each of the acts giving them a position of primacy and relevance.⁷⁷ Act 1 begins with "Over hill over dale" and ends with "Come now a roundel" and "You spotted snakes," while Act 3 opens with Oberon undoing his spell on Tytania and ends with the fairies blessing Theseus' palace with "Now until the break of day." The lovers, however, are characterized by an absence of arias and set pieces, which makes it hard to differentiate between Helena, Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius in terms of musical characterization. Thus Britten has emulated Shakespeare's deliberately confusing design in that the lover's music consists of endless through-composed melodies in comparison with the fairies' music.

⁷⁶ Roger Warren, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 12.

⁷⁷ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 244; Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten – Expression and Evasion*, 231.

CONCLUSION

This handbook provides a historical, literary, cultural, and musical contextualization of Britten's opera, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The intent of this study is to assist singers performing the role of Tytania in the development of an informed interpretation and characterization of the role. This research hinges on the issue of the individual singer's professional responsibilities. Is it the performer's responsibility to simply give a good vocal performance or is there a greater responsibility to provide an authentic and informed one?

Chapter one provides an historical and literary context for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in its play and operatic form. Chapter two explores Britten's and Pears's adaptation of Shakespeare's play to operatic form with a focus on the fairies. Chapter three examines Elizabethan folklore and Shakespeare's fairies, and chapter four explores the musical devices used to characterize and distinguish the fairies music from that of the lovers and the rustics.

When preparing an operatic role, a singer should be more than simply a musician: they are also an actor. Like an actor, the development of a sound interpretation of character should ideally be grounded in thorough research. Britten himself was a firm advocate for the *acting* opera singer. He states:

For my part I want singers who can act. Mozart, Gluck and Verdi wanted the same thing . . .⁷⁸

To portray a character successfully a singer cannot simply memorize the notes and words. There is a multi-layered richness evident in a performance that has been created through total preparation. In the author's experience, the assimilation of the

⁷⁸ Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 188.

many diverse types of contextual knowledge is best approached through the mindset of an actor. Eventually, the application of all this information becomes (ideally) second nature. This conviction in the power of an acting approach to opera underpins the choices made as to which areas of knowledge to investigate. The areas of knowledge chosen for investigation were those which (in the author's opinion) should be of most assistance in the development of a detailed, complex, and believable interpretation of the role.

Bibliography

- Bevington, David. *Contemporary Critical Essays- A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Hampshire: Macmillian Press Ltd, 1996.
- Blyth, Alan. *Remembering Britten*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1981.
- Brett, Philip. *Benjamin Britten, Peter Grimes*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Briggs, Kathryn. *An Encyclopedia of Fairies*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.
- Britten, Benjamin. *A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Opera in Three Acts Adapted From William Shakespeare*. London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1960.
- Britten, Benjamin. *Britten on Music*, ed. Paul Kildea. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Britten, Benjamin. "The Composers' Dream." In *The Britten Companion*, ed. Christopher Parmer, 177. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1984.
- Calderwood, James. *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*. London: Faber, 1992.
- Cooke, Mervyn. "Britten and Shakespeare: Dramatic and Musical Cohesion in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.'" *Music & Letters* 74 (May 1993): 246-268.
- Cooke, Mervyn. *The Cambridge Companion To Benjamin Britten*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

- Corse, Sandra. *Opera and the Uses of Language: Mozart, Verdi, And Britten*.
Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987.
- Duncan, Ronald. *Working with Britten: A Personal Memoir*. Devon: The Rebel Press,
1981.
- Evans, Peter. "A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Preview of Britten's new opera."
Tempo – A Quarterly Review of Modern Music 53: (Spring/Summer 1960): 21.
- Evans, Peter. *The Music of Benjamin Britten*. London: Butler & Tanner Ltd, 1979.
- Foakes, R. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1984.
- Ferrier, Kathleen. *Letters and Diaries of Kathleen Ferrier*. Woodbridge, U.K:
The Boydell Press, 2003.
- Godsalve, William. *Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream: Making an Opera from
Shakespeare's Comedy*. London: Associated University Presses, 1995.
- Green, London. "Review: A Midsummer Night's Dream." *The Opera Quarterly* 4:3
(1986): 176
- Halliday, F. E. *Shakespeare in his Age* London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. LTD,
1956.
- Holland, Peter. *A Midsummer Night's Dream – The Oxford Shakespeare*. Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Howard, Patricia. *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*. London: Barrie and Rockliff the
Cresset Press, 1969.

- Johnson, Graham. *Britten, Voice & Piano: Lectures on the Vocal Music of Benjamin Britten*. London: Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Ashgate Publishing (co-publishers), 2003.
- Kastan, David. *A Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999.
- Kendall, Alan. *Benjamin Britten*. London: Macmillan London Limited, 1973.
- Kott, Jan. *Shakespeare our Contemporary*. London: Methuen, 1965.
- Latham, Minor. "The Elizabethan Fairies" in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*. ed. Anthony Price. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983.
- Long, John, H. *Shakespeare's use of Music: A Study of the Music and its Performance in the Original Production of Seven Comedies*. Florida: University of Florida Press, 1955.
- Mellers, Wilfrid. "The Truth of the Dream" In *The Britten Companion*, ed. Christopher Parmer, 181. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1984.
- Merchant, Moelwyn. "A Midsummer Night's Dream: a visual recreation", In *Early Shakespeare*, Edward Arnold. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1961.
- Mitchells, K. "Operatic Characters and Voice Type." *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 97 (1970): 47-58
- Mitchell, Donald, and Phillip Reed. *Letter from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.
- Noble, Jeremy. "Britten's Shakespeare Opera – A Midsummer Night's Dream." *Canon* 14:1 (August 1960): 3.

- Parsons, Charles. "Overview: Benjamin Britten." *American Record Guide* 61:4 (July/August 1998): 66-76
- Porter, Peter. "Benjamin Britten's Librettos" In *Peter Grimes, Gloriana: Benjamin Britten*. ed. Nicholas John, 7-18. Opera Guide Series, No. 24. London: John Calder, 1983.
- Rosenthal, Harold. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera*. London: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Rowse, A. L. *Shakespeare the Man*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1988.
- Schmidgall, Gary. *Literature as Opera*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Scragg, Leah. *Shakespeare, Lyly and Ovid: The Influence of "Gallathea" on "A Midsummer Night's Dream."* 1977.
- Seymour, Claire. *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*. London: Murray sales and service co. Cresta House, 1978.
- Warren, Roger. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Somerset: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983.
- White, Eric Walter. *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1983.
- White, Eric Walter. *The Rise of English Opera / with an Introduction by Benjamin Britten*. London: J. Lehmann, 1951.
- Whittall, Arnold. *The Music of Britten and Tippett – Studies in Themes and Techniques*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Wilcox, Michael. *Benjamin Britten's Operas*. Bath: Absolute Press, 1997.

Winton, Dean. "Shakespeare at Covent Garden." *The Musical Times* 105 (June 1964): 441-442.