

***A Midsummer Night's Dream* revives Maynardville's Shakespeare tradition**

What better way to restart the annual Shakespeare tradition at Maynardville than with a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2-23 February 2023). Shakespeare's playful comedy was the second play to be performed in the venue's history in 1957 and (including that debut) has been performed there six times between 1957 and 2013.



Chi Mendes in the role of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Maynardville 2023. Image by Mark Wessels

Maynardville's outdoor woodland setting is the perfect backdrop for this fairytale that encompasses lovers' quarrels, confusions of identity and multiple other sub-plots woven together. As the sun sets and the moon rises the mischief begins, with Puck enchanting the lovers and proud Titania and her King Oberon presiding over this world of spells and magic as the mortals clamber through enchantment and confusion.

After three years of Covid lockdowns, seasoned Maynardville director Geoffrey Hyland will be bringing the stage back to life. Hyland has chosen to tell the story through reassigned genders, and gives actors multiple roles, as is the tradition of Shakespeare. Although Hyland is exploring a tongue and cheek exploration of the play's themes, he says it is not a 'pretty play'.

"There is a certain accessibility to *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was written by a young Shakespeare. But there are somewhat sinister forces at play and the plot does threaten to tip over into madness or loss. Luckily, Shakespeare has chosen to resolve those tensions and the play ends in reconciliation and celebration but I have chosen to include these tensions within the performance."

The cast leads with the powerful force that is Zimbabwean-born actor, director and voice-over artist Chi Mhende, who South Africans may know from the ground-breaking role of Wandile Radebe on SABC 1's *Generations: The Legacy*. The role was a first of its kind on African television, with a female performer in a male role. Mhende underwent a gruelling transformation of breast binding, and physical and vocal training in order to deliver to our screens, a character that not only changed the trajectory of her career, but also became instrumental in the discourse of the nation's transgender youth. Mhende will play both Oberon and Hippolyta.

Titania will be performed by Roberto Kyle who will also play Theseus. Kyle is a SAFTA (South African Film and Television Awards) recipient for Best Lead Actor in a Telenovela, for his portrayal of Lee-Roy Foster in *Arendsvlei*, and he most recently received his first Africa Choice Award for Most Promising Actor.



The Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Maynardville 2023. Image by Mark Wessels

No stranger to stage or screen, Mark Elderkin has performed in several Shakespeare plays and won an FNB Vita Award for Best New Actor for a previous *Midsummer Nights' Dream*. He plays Nick Bottom the Weaver at Maynardville 2023.

The role of Puck will be played by Sophie Joans, an exciting new artist whose debut solo show *Île* won a Gold Standard Bank Ovation at the 2022 National Arts Festival. She was also nominated for Best Actress at Woordfees in 2022.

The Maynardville season is already off to a good start with short seasons from Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and Cape Town Opera. It also launched a new food experience of Maynardville with the Open Air Collective; the Maynardville Food Market which now includes an offering of food trucks, a bar and a coffee vendor, also invites patrons to pre-order a packed picnic (which can be added on when tickets are ordered). The food market experience is also open to those who are not attending a show at the theatre. Maynardville's organisers have appealed to their patrons to support the vendors rather than bringing their own picnics and picnics are no longer allowed in the venue.

The season will close with the Cape Town City Ballet performing *Summersnow* from 1-5 March.

Tickets for the 2023 Maynardville Open Air Theatre Festival range from R160-R300 and are available via Quicket:
<https://bit.ly/3TAo23l>.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>