

ARTSSF

ARTS COME ALIVE IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA!

[\(http://www.artssf.com/\)](http://www.artssf.com/)


GRAHAM LUSTIG, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

A Midsummer Night's Dream

June 1 7:30pm
June 2 7:30pm
June 3 2:30pm & 7:30 pm

Odell Johnson Performing Arts Center, Laney College

\$35-60 — Adults
\$30-40 — Seniors
\$15-25 — Children and Students

Tickets available online at www.OaklandBallet.org
 or by phone at **510-893-3132**

2016-2017 SEASON SPONSORS

OAKLAND BALLET: PHOENIX RISING OUT OF THE ASHES

📅 June 3, 2017 (<http://www.artssf.com/Oakland-Ballet-Phoenix-Rising-Ashes/>) 👤 Paul Hertelendy
 (<http://www.artssf.com/Author/Paul-Hertelendy/>)

OAKLAND, CA—Graham Lustig can pull rabbits out of the hat, or make silk purses from a pig's ear, or merely make vibrant ballet evenings out of nearly nothing. Just call him somewhere between hyper-wizard and miracle worker.

The case in point is his economically trimmed version of “Midsummer Night's Dream,” mounted for the plucky, long-struggling Oakland Ballet performing in a spartan community-college theater before an audience of about 100. If that.

Despite the troupe's very limited resources and just 19 dancers, his 50-minute showpiece after Shakespeare left the audience exultant, and staying afterward for joyous conversations around the hall at the June 1 opening, and, I'd venture, many more upbeat discussions farther along.

His ensemble had mastered the art of *demi-caractère*, that elusive manner of acting out a story or personal reaction while dancing. In the Lustig “Dream,” the will-o-the-wisp sprite Puck is a wondrous and volatile beast zooming about the stage, the donkey Bottom gives an ungainly piggyback ride to the elegant ballerina, and two ardent men battle for the affections of the fair Helena, dispensing allegro kisses. The five fairies of the wood are shimmering, colorful beauties stopping the heavy traffic on stage. Even the Changeling Boy is a plausible actor.

Lustig's “Dream” differs from Shakespeare and the best-known ballet versions, Balanchine's and Sir Frederic Ashton's of 1964 at the Royal Ballet. Lustig has turned it into a viable male counterpart to little Clara and “Nutcracker,” where now all the fantasy scenes are dreamt by the Boy (a very cool Alexander Pers), battling to find solace from his parents' constant squabbles. It works so well, one or another troupe could offer it as a contrasting Christmas ballet to the inevitable basketsful of Bay Area “Nutcrackers.”

The meticulously rehearsed ensemble plays it all out with comic effect, in a way that even children could absorb it happily. The attention to detail extended to backdrop projections of California scenes such as the redwoods and Oakland's century-old Transamerica counterpart, the spiky Tribune Tower. *Ja*, Mr. Mendelssohn, your music is now accompanying both a Shakespearean scenario out of England as well as West Coast scenes, though now transmitted through a more modern technology called **recordings**.

The well-integrated dancers were solid, capped by a poetic ballerina dividing her time between here and New York, Ramona Kelley, playing the heroine queen Titania. Her imposing partner was the sky-scraping Domenico Luciano (Oberon), who dispenses most of the magic dust of romantic passion, forcing all the victims to turn their attention to new partners, adding both complexity and comedy. Of special note in the cast were the faun-like Puck (Felipe Leon) and the petite and nimble Helena (Alysia Chang). With the addition of various youth-ballet members, the cast flooding the compact stage ran close to 30.


For Mendelssohn fans, a disappointment: The Wedding March, one of the most performed 19th-century works ever by any one, was omitted in this truncation/reimagining. What was that "Always a bridesmaid" proverb?

The program had opened with the world premiere of Lustig's medium-bending "Consort," an Elizabethan invention interweaving Shakespearean sonnets (both spoken and sung), an excellent live lutenist (Dominic Schaner) and countertenor Dan Cromenes. While the Luciano-Kelley pair did another fine pas de deux in this one, I was also struck by a willowy lady, Coral Martin, dancing in various ensembles and solos. And you had to love the massed scene where, from a pile of male bodies, the women pluck out and revive partners one by one.

All in all, while downtown Oakland has yet to share in the post-2008 economic rebound, the city is setting a very promising course in the realm of ballet.

BALLET NOTES—Lustig, who is English, had trained in London. Previously he had led the Lustig Dance Theatre in northern New Jersey. He premiered "Midsummer Night's Dream" in 2000, precisely a decade before he was appointed as artistic director in Oakland.

Lustig's "Midsummer Night's Dream" and his new "Consort." Dancers of the Oakland Ballet, and a live musical ensemble of two. Through June 3 at Johnson Performing Arts Center, Laney College, Oakland. For co. info: (510) 893-3132, or go online (<http://www.oaklandballet.org>).

 Ballet (<http://www.artssf.com/category/ballet/>)

Comments are closed.