

## Review: A Midsummer's Night's Dream, Heaton Park and Hall

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The passion, heart and indomitable spirit of adventure in all of [Feelgood's](#) work has made them a vital part of Manchester's independent theatre scene since their very first show more than 20 years ago. Since then, their promenade shows in [Heaton Park](#) have proved to be one of the most loved aspects of their work.

So it was exciting news that they were returning to the park this Summer with their first outdoor show there since *Macbeth* in 2009 (as last year's *Whispers Of Heaton* was actually performed within Heaton Park Hall). What's more, they are now official 'theatre partners' with Manchester City Council for the park and the hall, a status that allows them – and us – to dream of a new permanent theatre and rep company in the park, much as London enjoys with Regent's Park.



Theirs is a 'site-sympathetic' (as opposed to site-specific) version of The Bard's mischievous *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which Feelgood founder Caroline Clegg had earlier promised would "bring all the history and the culture and the great stories of Heaton Park into the play as well. We're aiming to juxtapose the history of the hall with this sense that Heaton is a real people's park."

The rather ingenious way this was worked into the already dream-like structure of the play was by means of a prologue in front of the hall, wherein the audience were alerted that several members of the cast hadn't yet returned from a day out. Promptly from out of the hall emerged several ghosts of the Egerton family with some of their famous musical and theatrical friends, offering to take part in the evening's entertainment in a less chaotic echo of the way the mechanicals were shortly to talk about their contribution.

Then audience and players wandered through the remarkable park, with actors emerging from the woods at different junctures to continue the action. Passers-by – mainly late evening joggers and dog-walkers – may have been a little taken aback by coming across the magical confusion but it was all rather delightful, albeit exhausting to watch the players running all over the place in between their scenes, before finishing back in the hall itself for the climactic wedding scene and the Mechanicals' show-stopping performance.

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The music played throughout made witty but not intrusive references to the hall and park's history, including dashes of Gilbert & Sullivan, Britten, Mendelssohn and even Oasis, while the players, many of them Feelgood regulars, threw themselves into the action (rather literally for [Toby Hadoke's](#) Bottom at one point) with gusto, notably Ebony Feare as Puck, a part far removed from her Mende in *Slave – A Question Of Freedom*.

Even the weather played along for once. So something of a triumphant return for Feelgood and a tantalising promise of great things to come in the park.

By [Kevin Bourke](#), Theatre Editor

