AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 20, 2026

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Fairy queen Titania with donkey-headed Nick Bottom; prankster Puck; fairy royals Titania and Oberon. More photos...

"A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM" WRAPS UP AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET SEASON

William Shakespeare's most-beloved romantic comedy comes to life in April as American Midwest Ballet [AMB] concludes its sixteenth season with "A Midsummer Night's Dream." a tale of feuding fairies, mismatched lovers, and bumbling actors colliding during one hectic evening in the Forest of Arden.

Tickets are on sale now for the performances, April 11 and 12 at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center in Council Bluffs and April 18 and 19 at Omaha's Orpheum Theater. The production also will feature special student matinees for area schools.

"The fast, intricate, and perfectly timed jump sequences are magical to watch," said Erika Overturff, AMB's founder and artistic director. "They give the dancers an otherworldly quality that it seems only fairies could possess."

"Our dancers are exceptional storytellers, and they bring so much warmth and humor to their portrayals," she said. "The story itself never grows old – it's just as delightful as it was when Shakespeare's play premiered around 1595."

Overturff said the work, created by Royal Danish Ballet alumnus Oskar Antunez, deftly translates Shakespeare's plot and composer Felix Mendelssohn's 1842 score into a fast-paced and charming ballet. The production displays the full artistry of AMB's 25 professional dancers, along with a community cast of 48 young performers, she said.

"And the costumes are not to be missed!" Overturff said. "The hand dyed silks that float effortlessly in beautiful color combinations, along with exquisite headpieces and ethereal wings, make them unique works of art."

"The plot is full of dramatic conflicts, mixed-up romances, and midnight pranks," she said. "And yet somehow, by morning, magic has done its work, everything is forgiven, and love has conquered all!"

Ticket information for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is available at amballet.org/tickets.

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ABOUT AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

American Midwest Ballet [AMB] is the region's resident professional dance company, bringing work beyond words to audiences in Nebraska, Iowa, and beyond. Performing at home and on tour, our mission is to inspire people through dance programs of the highest quality: breathtaking performances, enriching education, and uplifting community engagement.

AMB's Season 16 is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, the Heider Family Foundation, and Douglas County; season sponsor Omaha Steaks; and major supporters the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Sherwood Foundation.

BACKGROUNDER

Plot Synopsis: American Midwest Ballet's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

"The course of true love never did run smooth." – Lysander, Act I, Scene 1

ACT I : Theseus, the Duke of Athens, is to be married to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. He orders a magnificent party be prepared in celebration of their wedding. However, some other lovers in the city of Athens are not as happy as their ruler.

Hermia and Lysander are a young couple in love. But Hermia's father has betrothed her to Demetrius. Unhappy with this arrangement, Lysander and Hermia plot to leave Athens, and Hermia confides in her friend Helena about it. As it happens, Helena is desperately in love with Demetrius and, hoping to get on his good side, tells him about Hermia's plan. Lysander and Hermia run away together into the woods, with Demetrius after them… and Helena after him.

As evening falls, some extremely amateurish actors gather in the woods to practice a play they plan to present in honor of Theseus' wedding. Meanwhile, the fairies also gather to hold their midnight revels. Fairies cannot be seen by mortal eyes unless they choose to make themselves visible, and they delight in playing jokes on humans who stray into their realm.

The fairies are led by Oberon and his queen, Titania - but all is not well with the royal couple. He wants one of her attendants to join his own household – but Titania refuses. Annoyed by her stubbornness, Oberon sends his mischievous servant, Puck, to find a certain flower – the juice of which, when placed on a sleeping person's eyes, causes him or her to fall in love with the first creature seen upon waking. Oberon plans to use the flower to play a trick on Titania by making her fall in love with someone silly and unsuitable.

Puck and his fairy friend, Fee, soon return with the magic flower. In the meantime, though, the human lovers have stumbled into Oberon's realm. He feels sorry for them and directs Puck to use the flower to straighten out their mismatched love affairs. But Puck bungles the job, and soon the confusion is worse than ever!

In a nearby glade, Titania dances with her attendants and then lies down to rest. Meanwhile, the amateur actors practicing their play unknowingly cross paths with the fairies. Puck, the prankster, transforms the head of the foolish weaver Bottom into that of a donkey. Puck leads Bottom on a chase which ends not far from the sleeping fairy queen.

ACT II: Titania gently awakens to a strange sight. Under the flower's spell, she falls instantly in love with the donkey-headed Bottom and orders her fairies to attend to his every need. They are puzzled by this command, but do their queen's bidding, while Bottom enjoys the attention.

Eventually the human lovers meet again. They are all furious, each one sure that they are the victim of a cruel trick by the others. They struggle until they collapse from exhaustion and fall asleep.

Oberon arrives and realizes what has happened. He orders Puck to use the magic flower to straighten out the lovers' situation, and this time makes sure the job is done right. Oberon and Puck slip away, trusting that everything will be all right in the morning.

And so it is! When the lovers awaken, the flower potion does its work, and immediately the two couples are correctly matched in happy pairs. All their quarrels of the previous night seem as insubstantial as a dream. When the rulers of Athens discover them, all is forgiven, and everyone proceeds joyfully back to the city for a grand wedding.

Back in the woods, Oberon lifts the spell on Titania, who is shocked to wake up next to the donkey-headed Bottom. Titania and Oberon agree to forgive their differences. A very bewildered Bottom, restored to his human form by Puck, rushes back to Athens, where the now-happily-married couples are about to watch the amateur actors' entertainingly awful play. Bottom arrives just in time to save the show, much to the merriment of the wedding guests.

After the play is over, the bridal couples retire. The fairies bless all of the couples and their marriages. Oberon and Titania's fairy kingdom is once again united. Puck's final appearance suggests to the audience that perhaps the entire situation was nothing more than a midsummer night's dream.

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BACKGROUNDER
The people behind “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

William Shakespeare [1564-1616] was an English playwright, actor, and poet. He is frequently referenced as the greatest dramatist of all time. His works are known throughout the world and have been used as inspiration in many forms of art, including ballet.

Shakespeare wrote a total of 37 plays from 1590 through 1613. First performed around 1595, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” is considered one his most masterful comedies.

Felix Mendelssohn [1809-1847] was a German composer, pianist, organist and conductor. He composed an overture for “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” when he was only 17. Almost 20 years later, in 1842, he wrote music for an entire production of the play. A version of this score is used in AMB’s production of the ballet.

Along with “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Mendelssohn’s best-known works include his “Scottish” and “Italian” symphonies and his Violin Concerto, a challenging piece often chosen by violinists to showcase their virtuosity.

Oskar Antunez, choreographer of AMB’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” was born in El Paso, Texas, and graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso with a degree in ballet performance.

As a professional dancer, he toured throughout the United States and Europe while performing with Royal Danish Ballet, Les Grands Ballet Canadiens and Harkness Ballet of New York. He began his choreography career at the Royal Danish Ballet, and has created many successful works in classical ballet, jazz, and musical theater dance.

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