

A Midsummer Night's Dream Audition Excerpts

Arts in McNairy 2024 Production

Monologues and Speeches

Young Women

Option 1: **HELENA**

In this monologue, Helena laments that Demetrius, with whom she is in love, has transferred his affections to her best friend Hermia. She determines to tell Demetrius of Hermia's plans to flee Athens the following day, hoping that Demetrius will reward her for this valuable information.

How happy some o'er other some can be!¹
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
He will not know what all but he do know.²
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and show'rs of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
Pursue her; and for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.³
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight⁴ thither and back again.

Option 2: **HERMIA**

At the beginning of this monologue, Hermia is asleep in the Athenian woods, having a nightmare about a venomous snake. Upon awakening, she discovers that her love, Lysander, with whom she fled to the woods earlier in the day, seems to have abandoned her.

[Awaking] Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!

¹ *How happy...:* How much happier some people can be than other people!

² *He will not know...:* He will not recognize what everyone else recognizes (that I am as beautiful as Hermia).

³ *dear expense:* costly (but worthwhile) effort

⁴ *have his sight:* spend time with him, or keep him in sight

Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
Methought a serpent ate my heart away,
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.
Lysander!—what, removed?⁵ Lysander, lord—
What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?

HERMIA gets up and looks around

Alack, where are you? Speak, and if you hear,
Speak, of all loves! I swoon almost with fear.
No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh.
Either death or you I'll find immediately!

Option 3: **HELENA**

In this speech, Helena addresses her best friend Hermia, whom she is convinced has conspired with two young men to play a malicious trick. Deeply wounded by this betrayal, she recalls the happy childhood the two women spent together.

Injurious Hermia! Most ungrateful maid!
Have you conspired, have you with these contrived
To bait⁶ me with this foul derision?
Is all the counsel⁷ that we two have shared,
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,
When we have chid⁸ the hasty-footed time
For parting us—O, is it all forgot?
All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence?
We, Hermia, like two artificial⁹ gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler,¹⁰ sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key.
And will you rent our ancient love asunder,¹¹
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?
It is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly!
Our sex, as well as I, may chide you for it—
Though I alone do feel the injury.

⁵ *removed*: gone away

⁶ *bait*: torment

⁷ *counsel*: secrets

⁸ *chid*: past tense of 'chide'; scolded

⁹ *artificial*: skilled in artistic creation

¹⁰ *sampler*: a piece of embroidery

¹¹ *rent...asunder*: tear apart

Young Men

Option 1: **LYSANDER**

In this speech, Lysander addresses Egeus, the father of the woman he loves. Egeus intends to betroth his daughter to Demetrius instead of to Lysander. Here, Lysander attempts to convince Egeus that he is just as good as Demetrius and to blacken Demetrius's character by detailing his poor treatment of a former love, Helena.

I am, my lord, as well derived as he,
As well possessed;¹² my love is more than his,
My fortunes every way as fairly ranked,
If not with vantage, as Demetrius'.
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.
Why should not I then prosecute my right?
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,¹³
Made love to¹⁴ Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul; and she, sweet lady, dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant¹⁵ man.

Option 2: **DEMETRIUS**

In this speech, near the end of the play, Demetrius addresses the Duke of Athens, explaining that he has, with Helena's assistance, pursued his love Hermia into the Athenian woods—but that somehow, in the course of the adventure, has fallen in love with Helena instead.

My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth,
Of this their purpose hither to this wood,
And I in fury hither followed them,
Fair Helena in fancy¹⁶ following me.
But, my good lord, I wot¹⁷ not by what power—
But by some power it is—my love to Hermia,
Melted as the snow, seems to me now
As the remembrance of an idle gaud¹⁸
Which in my childhood I did dote upon;

¹² *well derived...well possessed*: nobly born...wealthy

¹³ *avouch it to his head*: say it to his face

¹⁴ *Made love to*: courted

¹⁵ *spotted and inconstant*: morally stained and unfaithful

¹⁶ *in fancy*: in love

¹⁷ *wot*: know

¹⁸ *idle gaud*: worthless toy

And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,
The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
Is only Helena.

Option 3: **BOTTOM**

In this monologue, near the end of the play, Bottom awakes from a deep slumber and tries to recall what has happened to him over the past few days. At first, he believes he is still at play rehearsal, remembering the cue for his lines and calling for his fellow actors and friends. But then he remembers what happened after the rehearsal, which he thinks was a dream: that he had a run-in with the fairies and has spent the past few days having been magically transformed into a donkey.

[Awaking] When my cue comes, call me and I will answer! My next is, 'Most fair Pyramus.' Heigh-ho! Peter Quince? Flute, the bellows-mender? Snout, the tinker? Starveling? God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep! [Suddenly remembering] I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream! Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was—and methought I had—[Gesturing to his imaginary ass's ears] but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. [Grandiosely] The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was!¹⁹ I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom. And I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the duke!

¹⁹ *The eye of man...*: Bottom is misquoting from 1 Corinthians 2:9-10.

Adult Men

OBERON

In this speech, Oberon, the fairy king, addresses his servant Puck, also known as Robin. The two are looking at the sleeping fairy queen, Titania, and her love, a donkey. Oberon relates a sad story: how he bewitched Titania so that she fell in love with this donkey and, in her madness, gave the changeling child that she and Oberon had been fighting over into Oberon's care. Oberon decides to return the donkey to its human form and release Titania from her madness.

Welcome, good Robin. See'st thou this sweet sight?
Her dotage now I do begin to pity.
For meeting her of late behind the wood,
Seeking sweet favors for this hateful fool,
I did upbraid her and fall out with her.
When I had at my pleasure taunted her,
And she in mild terms begged my patience,
I then did ask of her her changeling child;
Which straight²⁰ she gave me, and her fairy sent
To bear him to my bower in fairy land.
And now I have the boy, I will undo
This hateful imperfection of her eyes.
And gentle Puck, take this transformèd scalp
From off the head of this Athenian swain,²¹
That he, awaking when the others do,
May all to Athens back again repair,²²
And think no more of this night's accidents
But as the fierce vexation of a dream.
But first I will release the fairy queen.

²⁰ *straight*: straightaway, immediately

²¹ *swain*: country boy

²² *repair*: return

Adult Women

TITANIA

In this speech, Titania, the fairy queen, addresses her former love Oberon, the fairy king, mocking him for his jealousy. She then relates that in the past few months, the two have never met without fighting and that their quarrel has disrupted the natural world and the changes of the seasons.

These are the forgeries of jealousy.
And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By pavèd fountain or by rushy brook,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.
And thorough this distemperature²³ we see
The seasons alter: the spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries;²⁴ and the mazèd²⁵ world,
By their increase,²⁶ now knows not which is which.
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension.
We are their parents and original.

²³ *distemperature*: disorder

²⁴ *wonted liveries*: normal clothing

²⁵ *mazèd*: amazed, bewildered

²⁶ *increase*: produce, crops

Any Age or Gender

PUCK

In this speech, the final speech of the play, the fairy Puck breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience of the play. He encourages them, if they haven't enjoyed the play, to think of it as a fleeting dream and promises to make amends for the performance next time around. In the final lines, he invites their applause.

[*To the audience*] If we shadows²⁷ have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear—
And this weak and idle²⁸ theme,
No more yielding but²⁹ a dream.
Gentles,³⁰ do not reprehend:
if you pardon, we will mend.
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearnèd luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,³¹
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands,³² if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

²⁷ *shadows*: dark illusions, a reference to both fairies and actors

²⁸ *idle*: foolish

²⁹ *No more yielding but*: yielding or accomplishing no more than

³⁰ *Gentles*: gentle audience

³¹ *serpent's tongue*: the hissing and booing of an audience

³² *Give me your hands*: applaud the show

Dialogues & Scenes

Youth (12 & under)

PUCK & FAIRIES

In this exchange, Puck, the servant of the fairy king, encounters and greets the servants of the fairy queen.

PUCK

How now, spirits! Whither wander you?

PEA'S BLOSSOM

Over hill, over dale,
Through bush, through brier.

COBWEB

Over park, over pale,³³
Through flood, through fire.

MOTH

We do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere.

MUSTARDSEED

And we serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs³⁴ upon the green.

PEA'S BLOSSOM

Farewell, thou lob³⁵ of spirits; we'll be gone:
Our queen and all her elves come here anon.

³³ *pale*: another word for park

³⁴ *dew her orbs*: water her fairy rings. A "fairy ring" or a "fairy circle" is a circle of mushrooms.

³⁵ *lob*: lout. The phrase suggests Puck's larger size—he is a different kind of spirit.

Young Man & Young Woman

Option 1: DEMETRIUS & HELENA

This exchange takes place in the woods, where Demetrius is trying to locate his love, Hermia, and the man she ran away with, Lysander. He is also trying to shake off Helena, whose unrequited love for him has compelled her to chase after him into the woods.

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not!
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
The one I'll slay; the other slayeth me.
Thou toldst me they were stolen unto³⁶ this wood;
But here I cannot meet³⁷ my Hermia.
Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

HELENA

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant!³⁸
My heart is true as steel: leave³⁹ pow'r to draw,
And I shall have no pow'r to follow you.

DEMETRIUS

Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?
Or rather do I not in plainest truth
Tell you I do not, nor I cannot, love you?

HELENA

And even for that do I love you the more!
I am your spaniel, and Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you.
Use me but as your spaniel: spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worser place can I beg in your love
Than to be used as you use your dog?

DEMETRIUS

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit,
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

³⁶ *stolen unto*: fled to

³⁷ *meet*: find

³⁸ *adamant*: magnet

³⁹ *leave*: forsake or give up

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you!

DEMETRIUS

You do impeach⁴⁰ your modesty too much,
To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;
To trust the opportunity of night
And the ill counsel of a desert⁴¹ place
With the rich worth of your virginity.

HELENA

Your virtue is my privilege,⁴² for that
It is not night when I do see your face.
Therefore I think I am not in the night.
Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,
For you in my respect are all the world.

DEMETRIUS

I'll run from thee and hide me in the brakes,⁴³
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

HELENA [*Grabbing DEMETRIUS' arm*]

The wildest hath not such a heart as you!

DEMETRIUS [*Shaking her off*]

I will not stay thy questions.⁴⁴ Let me go!
Or if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

⁴⁰ *impeach*: call into question, endanger

⁴¹ *desert*: deserted

⁴² *Your virtue...*: i.e., "I take such liberties because your virtue allows me to."

⁴³ *brakes*: thickets

⁴⁴ *stay thy questions*: abide your conversation

Option 2: LYSANDER & HERMIA

This exchange takes place in the woods, where the lovers Hermia and Lysander have run to flee Hermia's angry father. They discover that they are lost and decide to camp for the night. When Lysander attempts to lie down near Hermia, she requests that he, for decency's sake, find somewhere else to sleep—though Lysander insists on his innocent intent.

LYSANDER

Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood;
And to speak truth, I have forgot our way.
We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day.

HERMIA

Be it so, Lysander. Find you out a bed;
For I upon this bank will rest my head.

HERMIA lies down; LYSANDER lies beside her

LYSANDER

One turf shall serve as pillow for us both;
One heart, one bed, two bosoms and one troth.

HERMIA

Nay, good Lysander; for my sake, my dear,
Lie further off yet, do not lie so near.

LYSANDER

O, take the sense, sweet, of my innocence!
Love takes the meaning in love's conference.⁴⁵
I mean that my heart unto yours is knit
So that but one heart we can make of it.
Then by your side no bed-room me deny;
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

HERMIA

Lysander riddles very prettily.
But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy
Lie further off, in human modesty.

HERMIA urges LYSANDER up; he rises and begins to move further away

Such separation as may well be said

⁴⁵ *Love takes...: Lovers should correctly interpret one another's loving intentions.*

Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid.
So far be distant, and good night, sweet friend.
Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end!

LYSANDER

Amen, amen, to that fair prayer, say I;
And then end life when I end loyalty!

LYSANDER lies down away from HERMIA

Here is my bed. Sleep give thee all his rest!

HERMIA

With half that wish the wisher's eyes be pressed!

They sleep

Adult Woman & Adult Man

OBERON & TITANIA

In this exchange, the fairy king Oberon and fairy queen Titania fight over the possession of a “changeling child,” who resides with Titania but whom Oberon wishes to claim as his own.

OBERON

Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

TITANIA

What, jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence.
I have forsworn⁴⁶ his bed and company.

TITANIA and fairies start to exit

OBERON

Tarry, rash wanton.⁴⁷ Am not I thy lord?

TITANIA

[*Sarcastically*] Then I must be thy lady.⁴⁸ Why art thou here,
Come from the farthest steep of India,
But that, forsooth, the fair Hippolyta,
Your buskined⁴⁹ 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,
Glance at my credit⁵⁰ with Hippolyta,
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?

TITANIA

These are the forgeries of jealousy.
And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By pavè fountain or by rushy brook,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.

⁴⁶ *forsworn*: given up

⁴⁷ *rash wanton*: wilful creature

⁴⁸ *Then I must be thy lady*: said ironically

⁴⁹ *buskined*: wearing leather armor; warrior-like

⁵⁰ *Glance at my credit*: mention my favor

And thorough this distemperature⁵¹ we see
The seasons alter: the spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries;⁵² and the mazèd⁵³ world,
By their increase,⁵⁴ now knows not which is which.
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension.
We are their parents and original.

OBERON

Do you amend it then; it lies in you!
Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
I do but beg a little changeling boy,
To be my henchman.⁵⁵

TITANIA

Set your heart at rest.
The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votaress⁵⁶ of my order,
And in the spiced Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossiped by my side.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die,⁵⁷
And for her sake do I rear up her boy.
And for her sake I will not part with him.

OBERON

How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA

Perchance till after Theseus' wedding day.

OBERON

Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.

TITANIA

Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away!

⁵¹ *distemperature*: disorder

⁵² *wonted liveries*: normal clothing

⁵³ *mazèd*: amazed, bewildered

⁵⁴ *increase*: produce, crops

⁵⁵ *henchman*: page or messenger

⁵⁶ *votaress*: priestess

⁵⁷ *of that boy did die*: i.e., she died giving birth to the boy

We shall chide downright,⁵⁸ if I longer stay.

Exit TITANIA with her fairies

⁵⁸ *chide downright*: fight in earnest

All Ages & Genders

THE ARTISANS

This exchange is the first meeting of a group of working-class actors, who are preparing to put on a play for the Duke's wedding celebration. One of the actors, Bottom, points out to the director, Peter Quince, that there are a number of problems with the play—problems to which he proposes comic solutions.

BOTTOM

Are we all met?

QUINCE

Pat, pat; and here's a marvelous convenient place for our rehearsal! This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house.⁵⁹ And we will do it in action as we will do it before the duke.

BOTTOM

Peter Quince—

QUINCE

What sayest thou, Bottom?

BOTTOM

There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisby that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself, which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

SNOUT

Byrlakin,⁶⁰ a parlous⁶¹ fear.

STARVELING

I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

BOTTOM

Not a whit. I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed. And, for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. 'Twill put them out of fear.

⁵⁹ *tiring-house*: dressing room

⁶⁰ *Byrlarkin*: a mild oath (from the older "by our Lady")

⁶¹ *parlous*: perilous, serious

QUINCE

Well, we will have such a prologue.

SNOUT

Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

STARVELING

I fear it, I promise you.

BOTTOM

Masters, you ought to consider with yourselves: to bring in—God shield us!—a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing, and we ought to look to it.

SNOUT

Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM

Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck; and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect⁶²: 'Ladies'—or 'Fair ladies'—'I would wish you'—or 'I would request you'—or 'I would entreat you'—'not to fear, not to tremble. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing. I am a man as other men are.' And there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner.

QUINCE

Well, it shall be so. But there is two hard things: that is, to bring the moonlight into a chamber—for you know Pyramus and Thisby meet by moonlight.

SNOUT

Doth the moon shine that night we play our play?

BOTTOM

A calendar, a calendar! Look in the almanac. Find out moonshine, find out moonshine!

The players scramble for a calendar and gather around it; Enter PUCK

QUINCE [*Consulting the calendar*]

Yes, it doth shine that night.

BOTTOM

Why, then may you leave a casement of the great chamber window, where we play, open, and the moon may shine in at the casement.

⁶² *defect*: Bottom probably means "effect."

QUINCE

Ay, or else...one must come in with a lantern, and say he comes to present the person of Moonshine!

The actors express satisfaction with this idea

Then, there is another thing: we must have a wall in the great chamber—for Pyramus and Thisby, says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

SNOUT

You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?

BOTTOM

Some man or other must present⁶³ Wall. And let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him, to signify Wall! And let him hold his fingers thus—

BOTTOM holds his fingers in the shape of a hole

—and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper!

The company agrees enthusiastically to this as well

QUINCE

If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts.

⁶³ *present*: play, represent