

A Midsummer Night's Madness
[Shakespeare Revisited]
by Carole Bremson

Shakespeare's plays have always acted as springboards for experimental forays by enthusiastic practitioners eager to explore the magic. His words have been taken out of context, heavily edited, adapted and updated, given happy endings and even performed backwards but, somehow, it all makes sense.

The original idea for *A Midsummer Night's Madness* is based on the premise that when certain characters leave their normal habitat and seek refuge in a wood, park or a forest then they are 'changed' in some way.

Added to this, is the convention of lovers writing sonnets to each other to express their devotion and that, however well-meaning 'servants' are, we know they're not so clever as they'd like us to believe. Letters go astray; sonnets are delivered to the wrong people. Attempts at acting in plays are applauded for their ineptitude, viewed, as it were, as 'a mirror up to nature'.

But in '*A Midsummer Night's Madness*' the real life mirror is distorted. As the title suggests, a panoply of Shakespearean characters emerge among a collection of woodland scenes interspersed with sonnets matched to major figures from well-known plays. We meet Malvolio as he speaks his most famous lines then match him with Sonnet 62: *Sin of self-love...* glimpsing a hitherto unseen side to his personality.

We meet Sarah Siddons preparing for her sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*; we're introduced to the Victorian star acclaimed as the world's worst Shakespearean actor and are presented with an alternative ending to *Hamlet*, courtesy of J.M. Barrie. At the height of their popularity, these figures provoked both a profoundly moving change - and hilarity - in audience reaction as they struggled to come to terms with their craft.

Whether this is performed with a cast of forty or with a multi-talented company of fourteen or even twelve, we hope that you join us in celebrating actors and writers everywhere.