

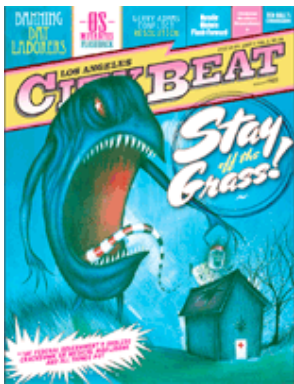


# LOS ANGELES CITY BEAT

  
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## Crushing Your Local Cannibis Collectives

Feds use asset-forfeiture laws to spell evictions for medical-pot providers

## Lies, Damned Lies, and Marijuana

A history of federal confusion and persecution over the 'evil weed'

## Regulating Reefer

As the city works to control the number of medical marijuana dispensaries, more and more patients are signing up

## Harvesting the Secret Gardens

'Operation Alesia' has

## Worth More Than the Admission

L.A. is now dreamy with stylized, even free, Shakespeare

~ By DON SHIRLEY ~



Photo by SF/LA

~ SF/LA's Dream cast ~

**S**hakespeare season is in full swing. And nowhere does it swing more than in Shakespeare Festival/LA's A Midsummer Night's Dream, set in a "fairylend inspired by early Central Avenue" – L.A.'s jazz headquarters from the '20s into the '50s.

A trio of instrumentalists backs up the actors. A string of song and dance standards, with lyrics that reflect Dream themes – "Paper Moon," "Dream a Little Dream of Me," "A Kiss to Build a Dream On," "What




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raided pot farms on public lands

## FRONTLINES

### Criminalizing Labor

Conflict over a local law restricting day laborers could be a test case in the ongoing war over immigration

### Homes for the Homeless

A shelter in Sylmar is a case study for the decentralization of L.A.'s homeless services

## 3RD DEGREE

### Gerry Adams

The Sinn Féin leader on painting a peaceful picture for Northern Ireland with Unionists and Republicans working together

## EDITORIAL

### No Salvation

## LETTERS

## LEFT COAST

a Little Moonlight Can Do,” “Witchcraft,” among others – makes the production feel almost like a musical.

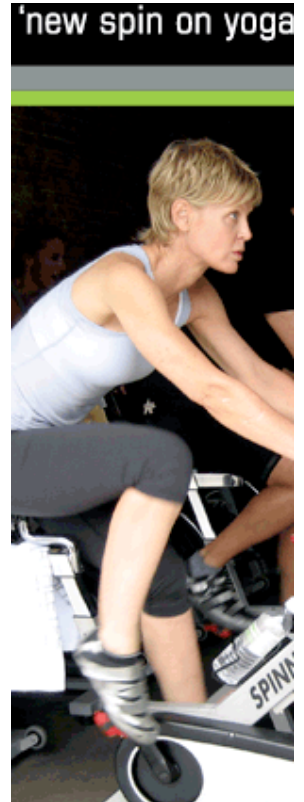
It's one of the funniest Midsummers I've seen. Geoffrey Owens is an unforgettable Nick Bottom, finding a rich supply of contemplative condescension in his glory-hogging over his fellow “rude mechanicals,” including Bryan Cogman, Brian Joseph, and Christopher Neiman in distinctive turns.

Anthony Manough's Puck is a zoot-suited dynamo. Christopher Michael Rivera's Lysander looks cooler-than-thou. He and the other mismatched lovers (Dawn Lyen Gardner, Raina Simone Moore, A.K. Murtadha) generate plenty of laughs. Ben Donenberg's direction is expertly paced.

Eyebrows might rise over some of the naughtier moments, considering that the production's first venue is on the plaza of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. But even if anyone cared, the archdiocese probably had too much going on last week to second-guess a few suggestive poses in a Shakespeare comedy.

For those who prefer Midsummer without prominent directorial concepts, Topanga's Theatricum Botanicum resumes after-dark performances of its Dream in September. And Independent Shakespeare Company is offering a lively, traditional rendition at Barnsdall Park, directed by Melissa Chalsma, who also appears as an especially angry Hippolyta/Titania. Sean Pritchett's hairy-chested Puck, wearing only frilly red accessories but remaining resolutely masculine, is quite a sight. The set's two ladders are reminiscent of the bare-bones, high-imagination look of Our Town.

However, Shakespeare aficionados who can go to Barnsdall only once might want to catch the relatively rare Richard II. David Melville is ideally cast as the smart, ironic, ineffectual monarch whose contradictions make him all the more fascinating. Joseph Culliton directs.



Cartoon By Ted Kall

**TAKE MY PICTURE**

Photographs by Gary Leonard

**7 DAYS****L.A.&E****No Vacancy**

Willy Vlautin of alt-country quartet Richmond Fontaine discusses his engaging new novel 'The Motel Life'

**SUBBACULTCHA****Been There, Done That****LIVE****Ave Mutantes!**

'60s Brazilian psych legend Os Mutantes does an El Rey flashback

**GROUNDWELL****Not as Silly as It Seems**

Fatlip does the 'Salmon Dance' for the Chemical Brothers

**FILM****Bouncy and Shiny**

'Hairspray' is a joyful romp, with Travolta the only tacky note

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**DVD EYE****A Wilder View of  
America**

After 56 years, the master filmmaker's 'Ace in the Hole' seems more relevant than ever

Independent Shakespeare and Shakespeare Festival/LA offer free admission (although not at SF/LA's Palos Verdes venue next week). Yet both are professional companies with the expenses of Actors' Equity contracts – unlike most free Shakespeare outfits. So be generous with donations after the performances. The city of Los Angeles should do the same. It currently charges Independent Shakespeare \$25,000 in rent and other expenses, when it ought to pay the group that much for providing jobs to actors, plus an exuberant experience in a city park.

Farther west, Shakespeare Santa Monica moved up to an Equity contract this summer. Louis Scheeder's staging of Richard III uses even less scenery than Independent Shakespeare's work – just a square of hardwood floor in the center of Miles Playhouse (and not on the stage itself). The costumes are mostly modern, and little tufts of red fabric represent blood in the stylized combat scenes. The staging has a sleek elegance and a slyly affable king in Stefan Wolfert.

Scheeder adds a prologue that attempts to introduce and clarify the roles. But the play is still convoluted (the doomed children also play adults) and overstated, in comparison to Culliton's Richard II.

All these companies deserve support, not only for enlivening our summer but also for paying hard-working actors more than the L.A. small-theater standard. Performing Shakespeare shouldn't have to be a love's labor lost. ★

*A Midsummer Night's Dream, Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, 555 W. Temple St., downtown L.A. this week, and South Coast Botanic Garden, 26300 Crenshaw Blvd., Palos Verdes, next week. Info: (213) 975-9891 or ShakespeareFestivalLA.org. Closes July 29.*

*Richard II and A Midsummer Night's Dream, Barnsdall Park, 4800 Hollywood Blvd., L.A. Info: (818) 710-6306 or Independentshakespeare.com. Closes Aug. 31 (Richard II) and Sept. 2 (Midsummer).*

*Richard III, Miles Playhouse, 1130 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica. Info: (310) 270-3454 or Shakespearesantamonica.com. Closes July 29.*

For more reviews by Don Shirley, see Stage listings.

07-19-07

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L.A. is now dreamy with stylized, even free, Shakespeare

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