

life



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Noise disrupts the Dream for Breakaway to school amphitheatre

Some years ago Breakaway Theatre Company put on their summer production in the amphitheatre of St Albans School. And while there was some noise there, it was not as obvious as it is now they are performing at the Inn on the Park in Verulamium Park. For the dogged cast found themselves competing with the noise of low-flying planes, flocks of birds and general park activities as their production of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream opened last week. It meant that sometimes the lines were hard to hear and

despite the strenuous efforts of the cast, some of Shakespeare's finest comedy lines got lost along the way. In fairness to Breakaway and their imaginative director Steph Harrison-Barker, this was on the opening night and I am sure that she was aware that the cast needed to project their voices more to overcome the noise problem. And assuming they have overcome that distraction, this is a fine production of the play which is so perfect in every other way for an outdoor location. Steph's decision to make Puck a feisty and often sulky woman was spot-on. Saleema Davies brought a new dimension to the production,

particularly in her scenes with John Kensett's Oberon. By design, I am sure, she was in marked contrast to Abigail Giles as a breathy Titania complete with long blonde wig. Get a good Bottom and you are halfway there and in Robert Lewis, the character was in safe – and appropriately ass-headed – hands as the role requires. The performance by Bottom and the 'mechanicals' of Pyramus and Thisbe at Duke Theseus's nuptials, particularly Denis Briggs as Flute aka Thisbe, was one of the high spots. Two of the four lovers in the woods, Oliver Sutton-Izzard as Demetrius and Jamie Russell-

Curtis as Lysander, I have seen before in a production of History Boys and both show a confidence that belies their age. The production was set in the 1950s for good reason – as Steph said in her programme notes, it was a dynamic time for gender roles – but some of the costumes were perhaps a little too unflattering although true to their era. A Midsummer Night's Dream can be seen at 7.30pm from tonight (Thursday) until Saturday (26) and tickets from £7 to £12 can be obtained online from breakawaytheatre.com or on the door subject to availability. MADELEINE BURTON



■ The Roundwood Park Jazz Band

It's all that jazz for school at National Festival in Birmingham

A successful year for a school jazz band ended with a performance in the finals of the National Music for Youth Festival in Birmingham. Harpenden's Roundwood Park Jazz Band performed in the school jazz section of the final and their performance earned praise from judges and audience alike.

The journey to Birmingham began a few months ago in March when the students competed in the regionals at St Albans Music School performing the three pieces that would eventually form part of their repertoire in the finals. During the regionals Roundwood had to compete

against a great variety of school ensembles from all over the local area, eventually triumphing to praise from the judges for their confident 'punchy' style, described as 'enviable for a band of your kind'. It was the first time in four years of competing in the Music for

Youth competition that the school made the finals having narrowly missed out in previous years. The competition in Birmingham was very strong but once the band had performed they were able to relax and enjoy the rest of the competition knowing they had done themselves proud.

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