

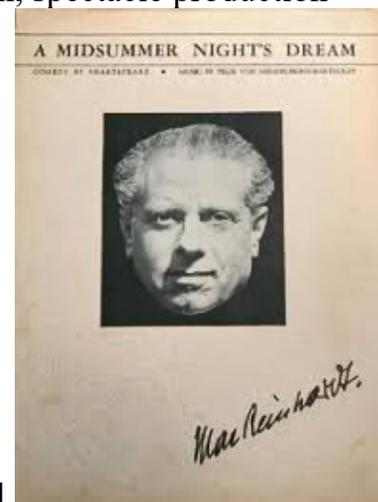


## NEWSFLASH

September - December 2020

### This Month in L.A. Theatre History

New York City and Los Angeles have long had a friendly cultural rivalry, but NYC has always claimed supremacy in theatre. However when I was a young man living back east, I was aware that "*Angels in America*" and "*Zoot Suit*" premiered at the Mark Taper Forum prior to their respective Broadway runs. But there was also one other historical production I was aware of from my history of theatre class at NYU: Austrian-born director **Max Reinhardt's** 1934 lavish, spectacle production



of "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*" at the Hollywood Bowl.

As the Los Angeles Times gushed, "Los Angeles will demonstrate its right to rank with recognized world centers of cultural and artistic appreciation tomorrow night (i.e. Sept. 17, 1934) when one of the greatest dramatic productions ever shown in the West – Max Reinhardt's interpretation of **Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"** – is given in (the) Hollywood Bowl." *Below Reinhardt directing a rehearsal, with Olivia De Havilland to his right.*



Furthermore, the Times noted that this was the first time a Bowl production would continue for more than one performance. The band shell was removed to make way for a stage of 136 feet by 122 feet, covered in 805 square yards of natural sod with actual trees brought in too.

A principal cast of 18 (including De Havilland as Hermia and Mickey Rooney as Puck) cavorted in the stage forest, as well as 60 dancers from the Theodore Kosloff ballet, at least another 40 "court ladies" from the "ranks of Southern California Society" as well as "elves, gnomes, sprites, huntmen and faeries" rounding out the cast of approx. 350 - 450 people (the exact number varied depending on which LAT article or review one read). Additionally, the full LA Phil performed a score by Felix Mendelssohn.



*A good view of much of the massive cast including what appears to be 6 wolfhounds*

There were a number of breathless reviews in the Times over the run of the production as well as reviews of the related society parties. But actual details of the spectacle could be gleaned between the excessive superlatives: "From the first glimpse of the gleaming torches literally dancing on a hillside to the final procession of fire marching virtually down a mountain...again and again, his actors leap down from trees, or bob up from holes in the greenward of the forest..." The fantastical costuming can be glimpsed from these newspaper photos in the Times:

*"Dream's" Extra Performances Popular*



William Henry and Olivia de Havilland, among the principals in the cast of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Max Reinhardt's Shakespearian spectacle, now in extra performances at Hollywood Bowl. Henry is shown in his role of Lysander.

The initial 5 day run would be extended for another two performances. The production transferred to the San Francisco Opera House and then to the UC Berkeley campus before moving onward to east coast venues (though it's unclear if it was re-cast for these transfers).

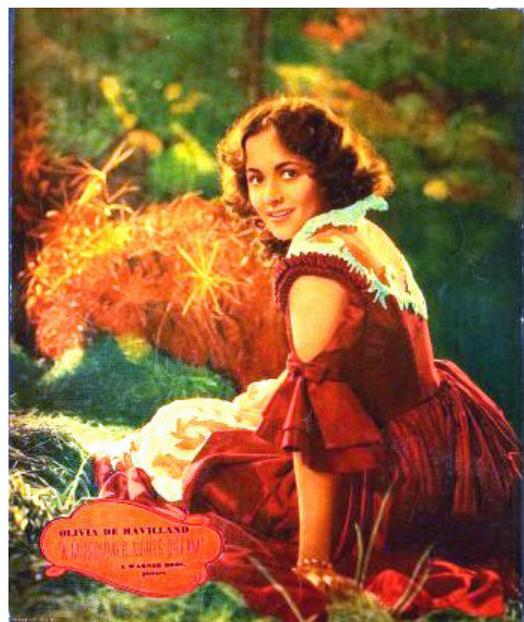


Mickey Rooney, of screen, will appear again as Puck and Joan Davis as the Porcupine in tonight's concluding presentation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The Reinhardt presentation has upset all records for attendance at Hollywood Bowl.

Additionally, a direct impact of the production was the experience it gave Catherine Sibley who helped produce the Bowl production and then produced at least one other theatre extravaganza in California in the 1930s with *"Where Liberty Dwells"* about the American Revolution.

MGM also produced a film version of the Bowl production, though with mostly a new cast and to more mixed commercial and critical results.

*A publicity still (right) of Olivia De Havilland from the 1935 movie.*



When the Los Angeles Public Library created an exhibit in 2017 entitled "*America's Shakespeare: The Bard Goes West*", curator Stephen Dickey noted about the Reinhardt Bowl production that "people talked about it for a long, long time."