

Key Scenes in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Video excerpts and timestamps are pulled from YouTube.

KEY SCENE #1: Act II, Scene 1: Puck "makes an ass" of Bottom

[Act II, Scene 1: Puck "makes an ass" of Bottom](#)

06:19 – 8:50

The mechanicals rehearse their play. Puck transforms Bottom by giving him the head of a donkey (an "ass").

Libretto Excerpt

QUINCE:

Why, you must not speak that yet;
that you answer to Pyramus:
you speak all your part at once,
cues and all.
Pyramus enter:
your cue is past;
it is, 'never tire'.

FLUTE

O, as true as truest horse,
that yet would never tire.

*(Enter Puck and Bottom with an
ass's head upon his shoulders.)*

BOTTOM

If I were fair, Thisbe,
I were only thine.

(Puck flies off.)

THE OTHERS

O monstrous! O strange!
we are haunted.
Pray, masters! fly, masters!
Help!

*(Exeunt Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout,
and Starveling.)*

BOTTOM

Why do they run away?
this is a knavery

to make me afeard.

(Flute reappears.)

FLUTE

O Bottom, Bottom,
thou art changed!
what do I see on thee?

(Exit Flute.)

BOTTOM:

What do you see?
you see an asshead of your own,
do you?

*(The rustics reappear from behind
the trees.)*

ALL

Bless thee, Bottom! bless thee!
thou art translated.

(They disappear.)

BOTTOM

I see their knavery:
this is to make an ass of me;
to fright me, if they could.
But I will not stir from this place,
and I will sing, that they shall hear
I am not afraid.

(Singing)

The woosell cock, so black of hue,
with orange-tawny bill,
the throstle with his note so true,
the wren with little quill,...

KEY SCENE #2: Act 3, Scene 2: Pyramus and Thisbe

Act III, Scene 2: Pyramus and Thisbe

00:06 – 2:01

The mock-tragic play-within-the-play, Thisbe, portrayed by Flute, discovers the lifeless Pyramus (portrayed by Bottom), who believed Thisbe to have been killed by a lion. Thisbe sings the aria “Asleep, my Love?” as a lament and stabs herself.

Libretto Excerpt

THISBE

Asleep, my love?

What, dead, my dove?

Pyramus, arise!

Speak, speak. Quite dumb?

Dead, dead? A tomb

must cover thy sweet eyes.

These lily lips, this cherry nose,

these yellow cowslip cheeks,

are gone, are gone:

Lovers, make moan:

His eyes were green as leeks.

Tongue, not a word:

Come, trusty sword;

come, blade, my breast imbrue:

And, farewell, friends;

thus Thisbe ends:

(She stabs herself.)

Adieu, adieu, adieu.

KEY SCENE #3: Act III, Finale & Puck’s Epilogue

Act III, Finale & Puck’s Epilogue

0:03 – 3:02

The various stories have been resolved: the lovers are united, the mechanicals presented their play, and the fairies have restored order. Puck then breaks the "fourth wall" and talks openly to the audience, apologizing if the performance has offended anyone.

Libretto Excerpt

OBERON AND TYTANIA

Hand in hand, with fairy grace,

Will we sing, and bless this place.

OBERON, TYTANIA, FAIRIES

Now, until the break of day,
through this house each fairy stray.
To the best bride-bed will we,
which by us shall blessed be;
and the issue there create
ever shall be fortunate.
So shall all the couples three
ever true in loving be.
With this field-dew consecrate,
every fairy take his gait;
and each several chamber bless,
through this palace,
with sweet peace;
ever shall in safety rest,
and the owner of it blest.

OBERON

Trip away; make no stay;
meet me all by break of day.

(Exeunt all but Puck.)

PUCK

If we shadows have offended,
think but this,
and all is mended,
that you have but slumber'd here
while these visions did appear.
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon,
we will mend:
Else the Puck a liar call;
so, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands,
if we be friends,
and Robin shall restore amends.

(He claps his hands.)

Libretto excerpts courtesy of [opera-arias](#).