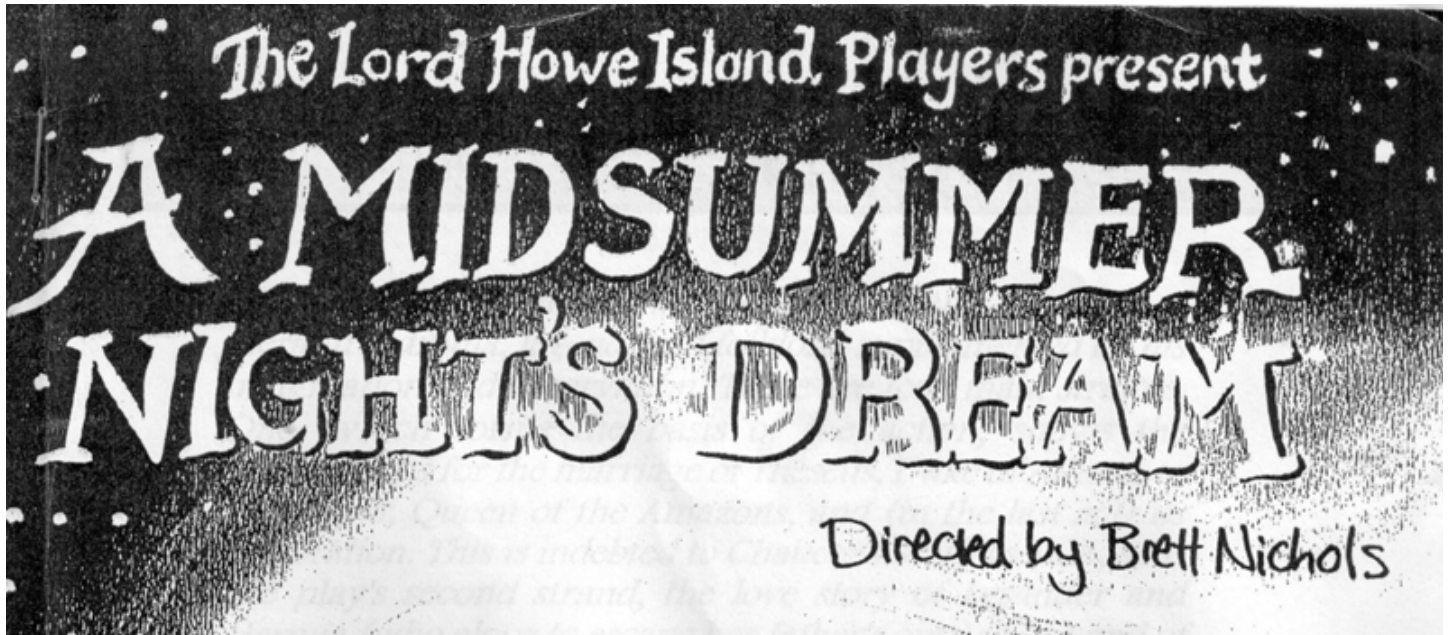


A Cast from the Past Special...Mid-Summer Memories

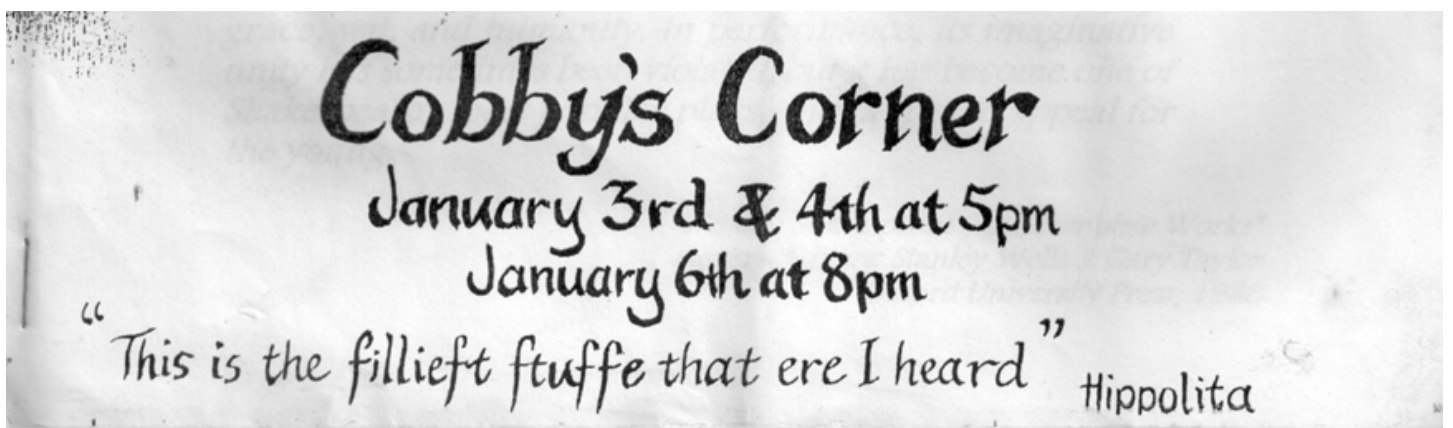


Just recently we've had a few "pop-ups" interrupting the regular flow of Cast from the Past articles - like the 50th anniversary of the airstrip last September. Then, the other day, something quite special arrived in the mailbox - a program for one of the most original live entertainments ever staged on Lord Howe. What else, but a performance of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" directed by Brett Nichols with an amazing cast of local actors. Having been there, I can vouch that it was both exceptionally well-acted and very funny, and the setting at Cobby's Corner was simply superb. I couldn't help thinking - then as now - that Shakespeare would have been delighted.

The program arrived with a covering note from Helen Grant, a regular visitor to the Island, who wrote, "...I would love to see an article in the Signal about the 'Midsummer Summer Night's Dream' performance if it hasn't already been done. Many of the performers are still around. Would you pass this on to someone who might write something?"

It so happened, when I received Helen's note, that Mark Nichols was holidaying at Lord Howe with Daphne, his mum. Without the Nichols family the performance would never have happened: Brett directed the play, and acted the part of Lysander; Mark was Demetrius; Daphne, Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons; her twin brother, Garth, was Egeus; and the rest of the cast was stellar - just read the credits! The actors were all coached by Brett and Mark in Daphne's own home.

Anyway, to my great delight the Nichols family put their heads together to produce this short memoir of a wonderful production. I don't think the Island has ever enjoyed so many laughs...



The Cast!



CAST PROFILE		CAST PROFILE	
 <p>BRIAN BUSTED Will dive into anything! "Theseus"</p>	 <p>BRETT NICHOLS ...No comment! "Lysander"</p>	 <p>EMMA CROMBIE She's Puck and Unbelievable! "Puck"</p>	 <p>JANICE WEBBER All insects beware. This fairy spins a mean web! "Fairy"</p>
 <p>DAPHNE HECK Son, if I don't get this part ...I'll disown you! "Hippolyta"</p>	 <p>KYLIE WOODBURY Best boot thrower around! "Helena"</p>	 <p>KATIE DIGNAM Her Uncle is a famous Actor ...So There! "Peter Quince"</p>	 <p>FIONA HOLLAND I still think I can play the lion too... and Thisbee and Pyramus and ...! "Nick Bottom"</p>
 <p>DONNA WELLS Donna was just "waiting" for this part! "Philostrate"</p>	 <p>MARK NICHOLS Thanks for the holiday Brett! "Demetrius"</p>	 <p>GREG HIGGINS Lights, Camera, Action! What? No lights? Better call the Electrician! "Francis Flute"</p>	 <p>PETER HECK Knocked back the role of the King when he found out it wasn't Elvis! "Robin Starveling"</p>
 <p>GARTH NICHOLS Jobs for the boys... the Director's Uncle! "Ageus"</p>	 <p>MATTHEW RETMOCK A Navy submarine? No... just a Manly Fairy! "Oberon"</p>	 <p>BRUCE STACEY At least he's a pom like Will Shakespeare! "Tom Snout"</p>	 <p>DARRIN NOBBS A Mechanic's Mechanic. With Nobbs on! "Snug"</p>
 <p>SANDY WHITING Sandy was asked to learn Hermia's part, not the whole damned play! "Hermia"</p>	 <p>KRISSY THOMPSON ... Ditto, Mark! "Titania"</p>	 <p>HEATHER SWANSCOTT ERIN CROPPER LEILANI THOMPSON JASMIN THOMPSON "Fairies"</p>	 <p>SPECIAL GUEST A cameo appearance in our little soap! "The Athenian Eunuch"</p>

A Midsummer Night's Dream offers a glorious celebration of the powers of the human imagination while also making comic capital out of its limitations. It is one of Shakespeare's most polished achievements, a poetic drama of exquisite grace, wit, and humanity. In performance, its imaginative unity has sometimes been violated, but it has become one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, with a special appeal for the young."

*"William Shakespeare - the Complete Works"
General Editors: Stanley Wells & Gary Taylor
Oxford University Press, 1988*

PS: The Athenian Eunuch – Guess Who??? – Moose!

MIDSUMMER REFLECTIONS by Daphne Nichols



Left to Right – Mark Nichols / "Demetrius", Garth Nichols / "Ageus" and Daphne Nichols / "Hippolyta"

After directing Island children in two fantastically-received kids plays called *Tree* and *Someone Said Murder* at the Public Hall in 1995, my son Brett Nichols was determined to dial things up a notch. Well, maybe a couple of notches! He decided the Island was ready for William Shakespeare!

Brett and his brother, Mark, had performed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Australian Theatre For Young People while living in Sydney two years earlier, and both agreed the classic play with its cast of fairies, kings and queens, quarrelsome lovers, and odd-ball characters was the perfect theatrical fit for Lord Howe Island.

Dozens of Island residents and staff answered the call to form a theatre group and, in early November, the Lord Howe Island Players was established. Rehearsals (or 'play practice' as it became known) were held twice a week in the Nichols home, and most of the cast arrived enthusiastically with script in hand – and those of us less keen, more often than not, turned up with an esky or a bottle in the other hand!

Three evening performances were held at Cobby's Corner on the 3rd, 4th and 6th of January, 1996, and each show was attended by audiences of over 150 people. The support from the Island community was staggering with the Golf Club and Bowling Clubs providing seating, and the Lord Howe Island Board supplying outdoor lighting and trucks for elevated viewing. The enthusiastic cast tackled the tricky Shakespearean dialogue with gusto, and in times of performance-pressure, were whispered (...shouted) 'life-lines' by Sue Nichols, who was hiding in the bush with her trusty script.

Audiences were delighted with the Lord Howe-themed touches such as characters arriving by horse and buggy and cast costumes made up of bowls uniforms, Hawaiian shirts, baseball caps and plumbing attire.

The weather gods were merciful over the show's run with the final performance ending just minutes before a major flood – a precursor to the 'midwinter night's nightmare' flood of June, 1996!

With such an overwhelming response to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Brett was encouraged to put on another production. In January, 1998, the Lord Howe Island Players were reassembled and performed three sold-out shows of Louis Nowra's classic Australian play, *Cosi*. With the help of the Lord Howe Island Arts Council and Jim Whistler, Louis Nowra was flown to Lord Howe Island to officially open and close the show's run at the Public Hall.

At the Bowling Club after-party, the jubilant cast were presented with 'Cosi Awards' by Louis, but the best reward for most of us was being part of two wonderful mid-summer productions that brought the Island community together.

*Editor's Note: Sadly, two of the cast members – Krissy Thompson and Bruce Stacey – are no longer with us. Also, Sue Nichols who, although she didn't have an acting role, was fantastic as the dialogue prompt. We can't help remembering the many fine contributions these three made to Island life, in addition to their amazing roles in the production of a *Midsummer Night's Dream* at Lord Howe.

And More Cast Photos



Mick Osborne/"Oberon" (stood in for Matt Retmock)



Greg Higgins/"Francis Flute"



(Left to right) The Fairies Top Row:
Heather Swanscott & Erin Cropper
Bottom Row: Jasmin & Leilani Thompson



Janice Webber/"Fairy"



L to R: Sandy Whiting/"Hermia"
Brett Nichols/"Lysander"



Brett & Sandy again