

A Caribbean Dream

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With an irresistible Caribbean twist, in adapting Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Barbadian filmmaker Shakirah Bourne has a character named Bottom played by a woman.

In a 21st-century retelling of this classic comedy about breaking all kinds of rules, why not?



Still frame from film A Caribbean Dream.

Similarly, the music-induced madness of a Caribbean carnival—in this case, Cropover—and the lush tropical bush are perfect substitutes for Shakespeare's classical setting and more sedate European forest.

In *A Caribbean Dream*, Bourne blends Bajan accents and iambic pentameter in a combination so perfect that, like the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, it seems a match made in heaven.

In an introductory soliloquy, the beautiful changeling boy who inadvertently causes trouble between the fairy royals describes this version: it offers sunsets and flying fish, Bajan spouge music and calypso beats, mystery and magic.

In this 21st-century *Dream* there are stretch limos and music trucks, and cellphones on which the lovers send text messages and the fairies take selfies in their Cropover costumes.

Occasionally there's a self-conscious reference to the language of the original—one of the fishermen says of Bottom, "Can't she ever speak normal English?"—but otherwise the film slips easily from blank verse to modern prose and back.

Director and screenwriter Bourne brews these ingredients into a delicious modern-day retelling of an old favourite.

Bourne mixes up British and Bajan talent, black and white, male and female, appropriately enough in this tale of a night in which everything is turned upside down, leaving some characters thoroughly rattled.

Theseus, Hippolyta and their guests meet at Barbados's 18th-century Fustic House in advance of their wedding.

But because it's Cropover season, anarchy reigns already, even before the fairies —among them the chief mischief-maker, a distinctly camp Puck (Patrick Michael Foster)—cause more mayhem in the grounds of the great house.

As in Shakespeare's original, lovers are bewitched, couples change partners, and the queen of the fairies makes a fool of herself.

They're all casualties of a tiff between Titania and her king, Oberon, who's out for revenge—and Puck's mistake in mixing up the mismatched lovers, so that one of them, Helena, goes from being spurned to being pursued by both men.

Into this chaos barges the group of rude mechanicals who take part in a talent show to perform at the wedding.

This play being set on an island, instead of craftsmen, they are fishermen—the perfectly named Hook, Line and Sinker—who join forces with the feisty and appropriately endowed Bottom (Lorna Gayle).

As well as getting caught up in the topsy-turvy magic of the night, the fishermen stage a mangled play, filled with what they describe as tragical mirth.

It bears some resemblance to Shakespeare's Pyramus and Thisbe, but here becomes The Untold Story of King Ja Ja and Young Becka—from a Bajan folk song about a visiting African monarch (surprisingly touchingly acted by Bottom) and a Barbadian beauty reluctantly played in drag by Hook (Angelo Lascelles).

Like Shakespeare's original, its clumsy bathos may not appeal to modern tastes and tries even the patience of the wedding guests for whom it's being staged. But the earnest fishermen themselves have a down-to-earth appeal.

Bourne's first feature film, the comedy Payday (2013), was screened in the Caribbean, the USA and the UK, after playing to sold-out audiences in Barbados for 13 weeks. She's written three more films since then, including this one. A Caribbean Dream won Best UK Feature at the London Independent Film Festival and Best International Feature at the Charlotte Black Film Festival.

More info

The trinidad+tobago film festival (ttff) celebrates films from and about the Caribbean and its diaspora, as well as from world cinema, through an annual festival and year-round screenings. In addition, the ttff seeks to facilitate the growth of Caribbean cinema by offering a wide-ranging industry programme and networking opportunities. The ttff is presented by Flow; given leading sponsorship by BP Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts; supporting sponsorship by the Inter-American Development Bank and UN Women; and contributing sponsorship from RBC Royal Bank.
