

***A Midsummer Night's Dream* SCHOOLS DAY PERFORMANCES**

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

Date: 22 & 29 August 2007

Venue: Sydney Theatre

Pre-performance forum 10.30 am

Lunch Break 11.15 am

Performance commences: 12.15 pm

Performance concludes: 3.00pm

Post performance Q+A concludes: 3.20pm

We respectfully ask that you discuss theatre etiquette with your students prior to coming to the performance.

**Running Late?**

Please contact Sydney Theatre Company's main switch on 9250 1700 and a message will be passed to Front of House.

**Booking Queries**

Please contact Barbara Vickery on 02 9250 1778 or  
[bvickery@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:bvickery@sydneytheatre.com.au)

**General Education Queries**

Please contact Helen Hristofski, Education Manager, on 02 9250 1726 or  
[hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au)



# ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***

**by William Shakespeare  
Directed by Edward Dick**

## **Teacher's Resource Kit**

Written and compiled by Elizabeth Surbey

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## Sydney Theatre Company

Sydney Theatre Company (STC) produces theatre of the highest standard that consistently illuminates, entertains and challenges. It is committed to the engagement between the imagination of its artists and its audiences, to the development of the art form of theatre, and to excellence in all its endeavours.

STC has been a major force in Australian drama since its establishment in 1978. It was created by the New South Wales Government, following the demise of the Old Tote Theatre Company. The original intention was to better utilise the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House and the new Company comprised a small central administration staff, technical staff, workshop and rehearsal facilities. Richard Wherrett was appointed Artistic Director from 1979 to 1990.

The Wharf opened on 13 December, 1984 by Premier Neville Wran, which allowed all departments of the Company to be housed under one roof for the first time. The venue was to become the envy of the theatre world. From 1985, the Company could perform in two locations throughout the year, the Drama Theatre and The Wharf. From 1990 to 1999, Wayne Harrison served as Artistic Director. A third regular venue, Sydney Theatre, administered and operated by STC, opened in 2004.

The predominant financial commitment to STC is made by its audience. Of this audience, the Company's subscribers make a crucial commitment. The Company is also assisted annually by grants from the Federal Government through the Australia Council and the New South Wales Government through the Ministry for the Arts. STC also actively seeks sponsorship and donations from the corporate sector and from private individuals.

Under the leadership Artistic Director Robyn Nevin, STC's annual subscription season features up to 12 plays including: recent or new Australian works, interpretations of theatrical classics and contemporary foreign works. In addition STC regularly co-produces and tours productions throughout Australia, playing annually to audiences in excess of 300,000. STC actively fosters relationships and collaborations with international artists and companies. In 2006 STC began a new journey of artistic development with the inception of The Actors Company, the STC ensemble.

**To access detailed information on Sydney Theatre Company, its history and productions please contact our Archivist Judith Seeff at [jseeff@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:jseeff@sydneytheatre.com.au)**

## Sydney Theatre Company Education

Sydney Theatre Company is committed to education by programming original **productions** and **workshops** that enthuse and engage the next generation of theatre-goers. Within the education programme Sydney Theatre Company produces its own season of plays as well as collaborates with leading theatre-for-young-people companies across Australia.

Often a young person's first experience of theatre is facilitated by teachers. STC ensures access to all of its mainstage productions through the **schoolsdays** programme as well as produces and tours theatre specifically crafted to resonate with young people.

STC works to support educators in their Drama and English-teaching practices. Every year dynamic **workshops** are held by leading theatre practitioners to support curriculum content, detailed resources are provided for all productions and an extensive work-experience programme is available to students from across the state.

The annual Sydney Morning Herald and Sydney Theatre Company **Young Playwright's Award** continues to develop and encourage young writers. The winning students receive a cash prize and a two-day workshop with a professional director, dramaturg and cast – an invaluable opportunity and experience.

Sydney Theatre Company has an extensive **on-line resource** for teachers and students. Visit [www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education).

We encourage teachers to subscribe to regular e-news to keep informed as well as access **heavily discounted** tickets and special offers/

**For further information on STC Education programme, please contact the Education Manager Helen Hristofski at [hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au)**

## Production Credits

### CAST

Demetrius  
Theseus/Oberon  
Snug/Egeus/Mustardseed  
Lysander  
Starveling/Peaseblossom  
Flute/Cobweb  
Hermia  
Helena  
Bottom  
Hippolyta/Titania  
Snout/Moth  
Puck/Philostrate  
Quince/Fairy

MARTIN BLUM  
BRANDON BURKE  
PETER CARROLL  
EDEN FALK  
JOHN GADEN  
ALAN JOHN  
HAYLEY McELHINNEY  
AMBER McMAHON  
COLIN MOODY  
PAMELA RABE  
EMILY RUSSELL  
DAN SPIELMAN  
HELEN THOMSON

Director  
Associate Director  
Set Designer  
Costume Designer  
Lighting Designer  
Music & Sound Design performed live by  
Assistant Director  
Vocal Coach  
Singing Coach  
Production Manager  
Stage Manager  
Deputy Stage Manager  
Assistant Stage Manager  
Assistant Stage Manager  
Backstage Wardrobe Supervisor  
Hair, Wig and Makeup Supervisor

EDWARD DICK  
JANE GIBSON  
RALPH MYERS  
TESS SCHOFIELD  
JON BUSWELL  
MAX LYANDVERT  
ANDREW TIGHE  
CAROL FAIRLAMB  
JEREMY POWELL  
NEIL KUTNER  
GEORGIA GILBERT  
PHOEBE COLLIER  
MINKA STEVENS  
SARAH SMITH  
JANE SELDON  
LAUREN A. PROIETTI

### FOR SYDNEY THEATRE

Head Mechanist  
Head Flyman  
Flyman  
Head Electrician  
Lighting Console Operators  
Follow Spot Operator  
Head of Sound  
Sound Operator

KEVIN SIGLEY  
STEPHEN MASON  
WILLMER PEREZ RONDEROS  
ANDREW TOMPKINS  
KAYNE JOHNSON, MATTHEW COX  
JEMIMA FLETT  
KEVIN WHITE  
ADAM IUSTON

Production Photographer

HEIDRUN LÖHR

This production opened 21 August 2007 at Sydney Theatre. There will be one interval.

## Summary

A Dream like no other.

Dark, sensual and impishly funny, Shakespeare's mystical comedy returns in a bewitching version with the STC Actors Company.

Mistaken identity, thwarted desire and delirious dreams unfold in a brand new production of imagination and theatricality by acclaimed British director, Edward Dick.

A play of wisdom and folly emerges through breathtaking poetry, rough slapstick - and a beautiful evocation of magic. In a strange, love-soaked universe we come to see ourselves - but how much of what we see is the realm of illusion?

Lord what fools these mortals be.

A wood. Mystical drugs. Confused sprites. Appalling amateur theatrics. A sexually irresistible donkey.

An unforgettable masterpiece.

Reference: STC website

## Plot Overview

Theseus, duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of pomp and entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate, to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus's court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia), but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to comply. Egeus asks for the full penalty of law to fall on Hermia's head if she flouts her father's will. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning her that disobeying her father's wishes could result in her being sent to a convent or even executed. Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander's aunt, some seven leagues distant from the city. They make their intentions known to Hermia's friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him even though he jilted her after meeting Hermia. Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of the elopement that Hermia and Lysander have planned. At the appointed time, Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover; Helena follows behind him.

In these same woods are two very different groups of characters. The first is a band of fairies, including Oberon, the fairy king, and Titania, his queen, who has recently returned from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a band of Athenian craftsmen (aka rude mechanicals) rehearsing a play that they hope to perform for the duke and his bride. Oberon and Titania are at odds over a young Indian prince given to Titania by the prince's mother; the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him a knight, but Titania refuses. Seeking revenge, Oberon sends his merry servant, Puck, to acquire a magical flower, the juice of which can be spread over a sleeping person's eyelids to make that person fall in love with the first thing he or she sees upon waking. Puck obtains the flower, and Oberon tells him of his plan to spread its juice on the sleeping Titania's eyelids. Having seen Demetrius act cruelly toward Helena, he orders Puck to spread some of the juice on the eyelids of the young Athenian man. Puck encounters Lysander and Hermia; thinking that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke, Puck afflicts him with the love potion. Lysander happens to see Helena upon awaking and falls deeply in love with

her, abandoning Hermia. As the night progresses and Puck attempts to undo his mistake, both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena, who believes that they are mocking her. Hermia becomes so jealous that she tries to challenge Helena to a fight. Demetrius and Lysander nearly do fight over Helena's love, but Puck confuses them by mimicking their voices, leading them apart until they are lost separately in the forest.



When Titania wakes, the first creature she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Athenian craftsmen, whose head Puck has mockingly transformed into that of an ass. Titania passes a ludicrous interlude doting on the ass-headed weaver. Eventually, Oberon obtains the Indian boy, Puck spreads the love potion on Lysander's eyelids, and by morning all is well. Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping lovers in the forest and take them back to Athens to be married—Demetrius now loves Helena, and Lysander now loves Hermia. After the group wedding, the lovers watch Bottom and his fellow craftsmen perform their play, a fumbling, hilarious version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When the play is completed, the lovers go to bed; the fairies briefly emerge to bless the sleeping couples with a protective charm and then disappear. Only Puck remains, to ask the audience for its forgiveness and approval and to urge it to remember the play as though it had all been a dream.

Reference: <http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/msnd/summary.html>



## Overview of the Writer



The most influential writer in all of English literature, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to a successful middle-class glove-maker in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582 he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and travelled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical success quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part-owner of the Globe Theatre. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) and James I (ruled 1603–1625), and he was a favourite of both monarchs. Indeed, James

granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by bestowing upon its members the title of King's Men. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two. At the time of Shakespeare's death, literary luminaries such as Ben Jonson hailed his works as timeless.

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. The unprecedented admiration garnered by his works led to a fierce curiosity about Shakespeare's life, but the dearth of biographical information has left many details of Shakespeare's personal history shrouded in mystery. Some people have concluded from this fact that Shakespeare's plays were really written by someone else—Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford are the two most popular candidates—but the support for this claim is overwhelmingly circumstantial, and the theory is not taken seriously by many scholars.

In the absence of credible evidence to the contrary, Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the thirty-seven plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to profoundly affect the course of Western literature and culture ever after.

Written in the mid-1590s, probably shortly before Shakespeare turned to *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of his strangest and most delightful creations, and it marks a departure from his earlier works and from others of the English Renaissance. The play demonstrates both the extent of Shakespeare's learning and the expansiveness of his imagination. The range of references in the play is among its most extraordinary attributes: Shakespeare draws on sources as various as Greek mythology (Theseus, for instance, is loosely based on the Greek hero of the same name, and the play is peppered with references to Greek gods and goddesses); English country fairy lore (the character of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, was a popular figure in sixteenth-century stories); and the theatrical practices of Shakespeare's London (the craftsmen's play refers to and parodies many conventions of English Renaissance theatre, such as men playing the roles of women). Further, many of the characters are drawn from diverse texts: Titania comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Oberon may have been taken from the medieval

romance Huan of Bordeaux, translated by Lord Berners in the mid-1530s. Unlike the plots of many of Shakespeare's plays, however, the story in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems not to have been drawn from any particular source but rather to be the original product of the playwright's imagination.

Reference <http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/msnd/context.html>

## Context of the Play

### Love

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is a reaction, both are transformed.

*Carl Jung*

There is always some madness in love. But there is also always some reason in madness.

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

Perhaps the feelings that we experience when we are in love represent a normal state. Being in love shows a person who he should be.

*Anton Chekhov*

Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.

*Sigmund Freud*

When love is in excess it brings a man no honour or worthiness.

*Euripides*

Where love reigns there is no will to power; and where the will to power is paramount, love is lacking. The one is but the shadow of the other.

*Carl Jung*

Love is the triumph of imagination over intelligence.

*H.L. Mencken*

There is no remedy for love but to love more.

*Henry David Thoreau*

One is very crazy when in love.

*Sigmund Freud*

The brain is viewed as an appendage to the genital glands.

*Carl Jung*

### Dreams

Dreams are often most profound when they seem most crazy.

*Sigmund Freud*

Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

*Carl Jung*

Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?

*Alfred Lord Tennyson*

In dreams begins responsibility.

*William Butler Yeats*

We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep...  
*The Tempest*, William Shakespeare

### **A Midsummer Night's Dream**

*The Dream* is the most erotic of Shakespeare's plays. In no other tragedy, or comedy, of his, except *Troilus and Cressida*, is eroticism expressed so brutally.  
*Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Jan Kott

The herb represents ambiguity. Everyone wishes to will other people to will what one wills. It can be done in (1) the exercise of power, as in rape, (2) the influence of one's essential worth: riches, etc., and (3) by sophisticated means by making people do what you want while thinking they want it. Puck's use of the herb shows how dangerous the general fulfilment of such daydreams would be.

*Lectures on Shakespeare*, W.H. Auden

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, mythological characters are used to describe certain universal experiences we cannot control.

*Lectures on Shakespeare*, W.H. Auden

I'll put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes.

**Puck, Act 2, Scene 1**

Shakespeare was not far wrong. The first Russian sputnik encircled the earth in forty-seven minutes.

*Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Jan Kott

The course of true love never did run smooth.

**Lysander, Act 1, Scene 1**

Things base and vile, holding no quantity,  
Love can transpose to form and dignity  
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind  
And therefore is winged cupid painted blind.

**Helena, Act 1, Scene 1**

## Character Summaries

**Puck** - Also known as Robin Goodfellow, Puck is Oberon's jester, a mischievous fairy who delights in playing pranks on mortals. Though *A Midsummer Night's Dream* divides its action between several groups of characters, Puck is the closest thing the play has to a protagonist. His enchanting, mischievous spirit pervades the atmosphere, and his antics are responsible for many of the complications that propel the other main plots: he mistakes the young Athenians, applying the love potion to Lysander instead of Demetrius, thereby causing chaos within the group of young lovers; he also transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass.

In this production the actor who plays Puck also plays Philostrate – servant to Theseus. *Costume* - He crosses over the worlds with his costume across the bounds as well. He is neither in formal dress nor stripped to his underwear, as are the faeries.

**Oberon** - The king of the fairies, Oberon is initially at odds with his wife, Titania, because she refuses to relinquish control of a young Indian prince whom he wants for a knight. Oberon's desire for revenge on Titania leads him to send Puck to obtain the love-potion flower that creates so much of the play's confusion and farce.

*Costume* – He wears the robe that you might expect his queen to wear - feather-edged negligee.

**Titania** - The beautiful queen of the fairies, Titania resists the attempts of her husband, Oberon, to make a knight of the young Indian prince that she has been given. Titania's brief, potion-induced love for Nick Bottom, whose head Puck has transformed into that of an ass, yields the play's foremost example of the contrast motif.

*Costume* – she is in pretty underwear but also when first we meet wears a tailcoat from a tuxedo – more befitting her king perhaps? Why have they been top and tailed?

**Lysander** - A young man of Athens, in love with Hermia. Lysander's relationship with Hermia invokes the theme of love's difficulty: he cannot marry her openly because Egeus, her father, wishes her to wed Demetrius; when Lysander and Hermia run away into the forest, Lysander becomes the victim of misapplied magic and wakes up in love with Helena.

**Demetrius** - A young man of Athens, initially in love with Hermia and ultimately in love with Helena. Demetrius's obstinate pursuit of Hermia throws love out of balance among the quartet of Athenian youths and precludes a symmetrical two-couple arrangement.

**Hermia** - Egeus's daughter, a young woman of Athens. Hermia is in love with Lysander and is a childhood friend of Helena. As a result of the fairies' mischief with Oberon's love potion, both Lysander and Demetrius suddenly fall in love with Helena. Self-conscious about her short stature, Hermia suspects that Helena has wooed the men with her height. By morning, however, Puck has sorted matters out with the love potion, and Lysander's love for Hermia is restored.

**Helena** - A young woman of Athens, in love with Demetrius. Demetrius and Helena were once betrothed, but when Demetrius met Helena's friend Hermia, he fell in love with her and abandoned Helena. Lacking confidence in her looks, Helena thinks that

Demetrius and Lysander are mocking her when the fairies' mischief causes them to fall in love with her.

*Costume* – the four lovers are robed in period clothing. The young men in tuxedo's – which also demonstrate their class, and the women in evening gowns with fur stoles – possibly 1920s or 1940s. After their mad visit to the forest they lose these garments to reveal themselves in their most vulnerable – undergarments and mud-covered.

**Egeus** - Hermia's father, who brings a complaint against his daughter to Theseus: Egeus has given Demetrius permission to marry Hermia, but Hermia, in love with Lysander, refuses to marry Demetrius. Egeus's severe insistence that Hermia either respect his wishes or be held accountable to Athenian law places him squarely outside the whimsical dream realm of the forest.

**Theseus** - The heroic Duke of Athens, engaged to Hippolyta. Theseus represents power and order throughout the play. He appears only at the beginning and end of the story, removed from the dreamlike events of the forest.

**Hippolyta** - The legendary queen of the Amazons, engaged to Theseus. Like Theseus, she symbolizes order.

So effective and theatrical an entrance – veiled and Amazonian (The actress Pamela Rabe is so much taller than the actor playing Theseus her Amazonian status is assured). She has given her an accent and they play on her opening speech to further indicate English is not her native tongue.

**Nick Bottom** - The overconfident weaver chosen to play Pyramus in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Bottom is full of advice and self-confidence but frequently makes silly mistakes and misuses language. His simultaneous nonchalance about the beautiful Titania's sudden love for him and unawareness of the fact that Puck has transformed his head into that of an ass mark the pinnacle of his foolish arrogance.

**Peter Quince** - A carpenter and the nominal leader of the craftsmen's attempt to put on a play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Quince is often shoved aside by the abundantly confident Bottom. During the craftsmen's play, Quince plays the Prologue. *Played as Miss Quince, by a woman.*

**Francis Flute** - The bellows-mender chosen to play Thisbe in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Forced to play a young girl in love, the bearded craftsman determines to speak his lines in a high, squeaky voice.

**Robin Starveling** - The tailor chosen to play Thisbe's mother in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. He ends up playing the part of Moonshine.

**Tom Snout** - The tinker chosen to play Pyramus's father in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. He ends up playing the part of Wall, dividing the two lovers. *Also played as a woman in this production.*

**Snug** - The joiner chosen to play the lion in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Snug worries that his roaring will frighten the ladies in the audience.

All are found onstage at the opening – craftsmen and women – demonstrating their trade. Costumed not unlike we might find these workers today.

**Philostrate** - Theseus's Master of the Revels, responsible for organising the entertainment for the duke's marriage celebration. A manservant – formal and almost a master of ceremonies as well.

**Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed** - The fairies ordered by Titania to attend to Bottom after she falls in love with him.

## Interview with the Director

### Edward Dick on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream is one of the most popular Shakespearian comedies. Why did you want to direct this particular Shakespeare?*

I think it's the most miraculous play. It is written by a playwright not yet 30 in love with language, who, with the stroke of a pen is able to move us between three completely distinct worlds, each extraordinary in their own right and which collide in a breathtaking way. It's fantastic to have a decent time to really investigate the play and explore it. Whose dream is it? Is it the lovers' dream? Is it the mechanicals' dream? Is it the fairies' dream? An overall literal understanding of the play is tantalisingly just out of reach.

There are very few plays that you want to keep coming back to but this is one of them. It is full of anguish, magic and joy. At its heart it's about what it is to grow up and become ready to be married, whatever that means. Four young lovers have to go through a terrifying baptism of fire. They run into the woods and are plunged into the heart of darkness. They play out their worst fears, go through every possible combination of loving each other and being abandoned by each other, and then they wake up with almost no memory of the night but somehow ready to be adult. What these people learn about themselves, through their experience, is very moving.

*Do you have a particular aesthetic approach to this production? How do you view the worlds of the play?*

We've been working over an extended period of time with an ensemble so the design decisions, which are obviously crucial in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, were able to be informed by the actors' work. Normally, a director and a designer come up with a concept and then the actors have to make that concept work - that's often what the rehearsal process is about. Because we had a workshop with the actors before the designs were finalised we were able to have a more organic process. We investigated what this play meant to this particular group of actors and created the aesthetic of the production together.

We discovered all sorts of things about fairies. It seems they inhabit a parallel universe in which they are invisible to the mortals. The argument between Oberon and Titania has repercussions which reverberate around the whole universe. The fairies are fascinated by human sexuality because they can't have reproductive sex themselves. We did a lot of work on invisibility and lightness which seemed to work well in contrast to the mechanicals being very heavy and real. We decided that every actor in the company was going to play a fairy and their fairy was going to be more about a state of being, a physical transformation and a way of moving in the space than it was about an externally applied 'look'.

The lovers' story doesn't work unless they are fleeing from something terrifying, paternalistic and autocratic. So we decided to give the world of Athens resonances of

Europe in the 20th century. The mechanicals are contemporary and Australian because there is a lot of humour to be had there.

*You've had experience with ensembles whilst working with Cheek by Jowl. How do ensemble dynamics interact with a play such as this?*

Shakespeare's plays are complex - linguistically, emotionally and psychologically - and investigating them takes time if you are going to do more than just skim the surface. The ensemble set up is the perfect starting point for that kind of exploration Jane Gibson [Associate Director] and I can work in a more sophisticated way from the beginning than we would be able to if the actors were meeting on the first day. They're already able to work courageously together – they know each other, there are few inhibitions and they've found a way of working collaboratively that is incredibly impressive. Normally in a rehearsal period you spend the first few weeks just getting to know each other. Here, we are able to plunge straight into the heart of the play. There is a sense of risk and collective endeavour - qualities you need to meet a play as challenging and as complex as this. It is an incredibly far-sighted piece of producing to have a group of actors grow together and it's been an absolute pleasure to work with them.

*Can you tell us about your collaboration with Jane Gibson?*

I think Jane is a genius. We first met five or six years ago working with Cheek by Jowl. We have done five or six shows subsequently so we know each other well and are able to work collaboratively without too much discussion. We are both fundamentally interested in the same thing, which is releasing the actors and revealing the scenes. What we've tried to do is quite audacious in terms of the way that one world will transform to another in front of the audience's eyes. Jane has been able to make those things happen alongside this group of very physically able performers. Her work is about releasing the actors into their bodies and allowing them to interact with each other and the space. The landscape of the play has to be provided by the actor's physical imagination because we're not illustrating it scenically.

*What role does the design play in the production? What are the reasons behind setting it in open, grand, neo-classical room?*

We really wanted to create an empty space because Shakespeare wrote this play for The Globe where the worlds were created almost entirely through language. It was enough for someone to come onstage and say "I'm a fairy" for us to believe that. We wanted to try to engage the audience's imagination in the way that very illustrated productions sometimes don't. We decided we didn't want to shift sets when the action moves into the forest, we wanted that to be done through lighting, sound and movement rather than scenically. It's really a huge space that offers many possibilities in the way it is used. It is a neo-classical room so it touches on the ancient Greece that the play is nominally set in, the ancient Athens, as well as something more recent and European. The whole thing is decaying in a post-war or apocalyptic way. We didn't want to be too literal about location. We wanted to provide an atmospheric space where the actors could create the worlds.

*You've recently directed Romeo and Juliet at The Globe Theatre. How has that informed your process on A Midsummer Night's Dream?*

Shakespeare wrote both plays in the same year. There are parallels between them – Friar Laurence says to Romeo "These violent delights have but violent ends." He wants Romeo to learn to love moderately but in that play the love does have violent

ends. In this play it doesn't. They do learn to love moderately and they marry. As a director I am really most interested in acting, providing high stakes opportunities for actors and both of those plays, indeed all of the plays of Shakespeare have those opportunities in abundance. So it's been a huge privilege to work on those plays back to back.

### *How is working in Australia different to working in the UK?*

Having an ensemble to work with is very different. It is very rare to have an ensemble anywhere in the western world which is why the opportunity here is so exciting. Robyn has succeeded in creating a building that allows people to do their best work. There is friendliness and openness about the people we have worked with and that opens you up to do better work. The actors are terrific. They remind me of Russian actors in that they are physically able and imaginatively courageous and spirited. There is a wonderfully refreshingly lack of cynicism.

### *What makes A Midsummer Night's Dream relevant to audiences today? What do you hope the audience will take from it?*

The play touches on some mythic and archetypal things - the anxiety of growing up, a father's anxiety about his daughter's burgeoning sexuality, a custody battle over a child, anxiety over fertility. It also raises wonderful questions about the theatre. What is good acting? What is bad acting? Why do we act? In what way is the theatrical experience a collaboration between the audience and the actor's imagination? I think all of these things remain fascinating and that's why we come back to Shakespeare's plays - for their unique insight into the human condition.

Interview by Laura Scrivano

## Set Design

We find our stage set as a ruin – from another era with Corinthian architraves and enormous walls and windows. All in an incredible state of disrepair. The Ruin as such often has a particular fancy for many an artist. The set designer takes us there.

An almost Greco-Roman revival. It must become 'Athens' after all. The scaffold lift/hoist brings in the workers and shields the fairy realm as Titania's bower. Worlds colliding.

Discovering the mechanicals onstage as we enter brings some aspect of hope for renovation and repair to this damp and mouldy darkened world. The outside creeps in through broken windows. The ever-changing people of the plays world dart about barely balancing the world they turn about in. The earth covers the floor – again the outside comes in. At one point in the production the heavens open and down comes the rain – is it cleansing? What madness in the lovers duels? Will nature take over? We find our revellers at the end beautifully lit by candlelight- a magic sight.



## Useful Teacher Resources

### **Black Box Shakespeare**

Finding quality information about Shakespeare on the internet can be as hard as finding a needle in a haystack. To help guide your search Black Box have created an annotated list of websites that not only contain information on Shakespeare, his life and plays, but also lesson plans, good classroom ideas, puzzles and quizzes. Happy searching!

### **Teaching Shakespeare**

<http://www.folger.edu/index.cfm> - Folger Shakespeare Library

If you click on the link 'Discover Shakespeare' there is a basic outline of his life, works and theatre. It's a good place to start for background knowledge. The 'Teach and Learn' link is a great place for ideas on teaching Shakespeare and making his life and works accessible to students of all ages with ready made lesson plans available to print. With slight adaptations the lessons/activities could be used in a secondary class as well.

<http://www.teachersfirst.com/shakespr.shtml> - Teacher First

Teaching resources for Grades 1 to 12 which contains a compilation of quizzes, lesson plans and activity ideas.

<http://www.shakespearemag.com> – Shakespeare Magazine for Teachers and Enthusiasts Click on 'teaching resources' link for lesson plans that coach students to look closely at the plays text, to engage students learning in active, multifaceted ways and that are adaptable to a variety of classroom contexts.

<http://www.bardcentral.com> – The Poor Yorick Shakespeare Catalogue

Click in link to 'Shakespeare in Short, the animated tales'. This area provides modern and innovative ideas on how to teach Shakespeare to less able readers. Using film and camera techniques the ideas allow for students to access and critique Shakespeare in a modern way, with activities such as creating storyboards of the plays, fifteen minute Shakespeare and performing student-written abbreviations of the scripts.

<http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/technology/> - Teaching Shakespeare with Technology. Includes links to professional development, lesson plans, resources and how to teach Shakespeare in a technological world. The lesson plans are based upon the following themes:

- Shakespeare on Film
- Shakespeare for Elementary Studies
- Shakespeare's language
- Shakespeare in performance

### **Background Information**

<http://ise.uvic.ca/index.html> - Internet Shakespeare Editions. Information on Shakespeare's life and times, such as the stage, society, history and politics of the Renaissance period. Provides links to essays on:

- Festivals and Theatres Companies
- Shakespeare: Criticism
- Shakespeare: Performance
- Shakespeare: Research resources

Very similar to this information, the site provides a list of sites to visit that have information under each of the above topics.

<http://www.stratford.co.uk/shakespeare.asp> - William Shakespeare  
Information on the life of Shakespeare, where he grew up and some of the basic details on his education, family and marriage. Provides links to the theatre and to some background information on Stratford.

<http://www.columbia.edu/~tdk3/earlymodern.html> - The Early Modern Database  
Covers drama in London from 1576 till 1642. A list of plays and playwrights from this time period, when they wrote their specific plays and where these were performed. Very basic information, with no analysis or summaries of the texts themselves.

<http://shakespeareauthorship.com> – The Shakespeare Authorship Page  
Dedicated to the proposition that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare. A funny and intriguing site with an easily accessible collection of essays on Shakespeare, his life, and why it was definitely Shakespeare that wrote Shakespeare. Reading these articles may be a great way to begin a class discussion on who Shakespeare was, and perhaps could be the stimulus for a short debate over whether or not Shakespeare did write Shakespeare.

Compiled by Sarah Peters, Dramaturg - *Black Box Shakespeare* -  
<http://www.usq.edu.au/performancecentre/education/blackbox.htm>

## Before Seeing the Production

### For students who haven't read the play

- Discuss with students the nature of Shakespearean society and class difference. As in the play there are three distinct groups, as well as the supernatural world of faeries. The Duke and his betrothed (Theseus and Hippolyta) the upper class of Hermia and her betrothed, her friend Helena and Lysander her beloved (acting against her fathers wishes) and the popular mechanicals, the working class tradesmen who desire to stretch their talents to develop a playlet for the upcoming nuptials at court.
- What do we find that's funny in relationships and courting – can we brainstorm a list of things that we have perhaps seen before to do with romance and attraction?
- What would you do if your parents wanted you to participate in an arranged marriage or betrothal/engagement?
- Have you ever had a crush on someone? What did you do about it? What did you want to do about it?
- Can someone with a big ego be funny? How? Why?

### For students who have read the play

- What do you think the 'worlds' of the play should look like? Thinking in terms of set design. Ask students to describe the court, the woods and the faery kingdom as we see them in the play. In Shakespeare's time there was no scenery and few props. What might we expect today?
- What do you think of the faery kingdoms interference in the human world? – what were Puck's motives, and Oberon's in magically altering the four's lovers relationships? (Lysander, Helena, Demetrius and Hermia)

## After Seeing the Production

### For students who hadn't read the play

- What did you understand as the main journey of the play and its characters? Were you at all confused by the changing places?
- Who were the most important character(s) and why?
- Describe the set and how it was used – what it might have represented.
- Discuss the lighting for the various scenes and worlds.
- Discuss the costume designer's choices.
- What music and sound was used – for what effect?

### For students who had read the play

- Describe the locations and the people of this world and how they may have differed from or supported your vision for the play.
- Has the director brought a darker perspective to the play and its inhabitants?
- Research other productions and from descriptions and/or pictures compare to this version.
- What is the play about? – Now that you have seen it performed.
- How effective was the use of the ensemble (Chorus) and how effective in transitions onstage.

### Theme activities – before or after you read or see the play

#### Summary:

Love and magic rule the world of this fanciful comedy set in ancient Athens and a nearby woods. The fair maiden Hermia loves Lysander, but her father insists that Demetrius be her mate. To escape a forced marriage, Hermia runs away with Lysander to the woods, followed by Demetrius (who is madly in love with Hermia) and Helena (her friend who hopelessly loves Demetrius). Unknowingly, the lovers enter the kingdom of fairies, where love potions and magical transformations are the order of the night. After a wild night of confusion, harmony is restored, love is set right, and weddings are celebrated.

#### Chart.

Have students work in small groups to create a chart that lists different sources of romantic attraction. Encourage students to be as specific as possible. For example, one column of the chart might list physical attributes, such as sparkling eyes, a delicate complexion, luxurious hair, athleticism, and so on. A second column might list personality characteristics, such as a sense of humour, kindness, intelligence, and so on. Challenge students to go beyond the obvious in their lists. Have each group share its completed chart with the class. Discuss what the charts reveal about the nature of romantic attraction.

## Play with these speeches in class workshops

### ACT I

#### SCENE I. Athens. The palace of THESEUS.

##### LYSANDER

How now, my love! why is your cheek so pale?  
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

##### HERMIA

Belike for want of rain, which I could well  
Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.

##### LYSANDER

Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,  
Could ever hear by tale or history,  
The course of true love never did run smooth;  
But, either it was different in blood,--

##### HERMIA

O cross! too high to be enthrall'd to low.

##### LYSANDER

Or else misgraffed in respect of years,--

##### HERMIA

O spite! too old to be engaged to young.

##### LYSANDER

Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,--

##### HERMIA

O hell! to choose love by another's eyes.

##### LYSANDER

Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,  
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,  
Making it momentary as a sound,  
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;  
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,  
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,  
And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold!'  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:  
So quick bright things come to confusion.

##### HERMIA

If then true lovers have been ever cross'd,  
It stands as an edict in destiny:  
Then let us teach our trial patience,  
Because it is a customary cross,  
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,  
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers.

##### LYSANDER

A good persuasion: therefore, hear me, Hermia.  
I have a widow aunt, a dowager  
Of great revenue, and she hath no child:  
From Athens is her house remote seven leagues;  
And she respects me as her only son.  
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;  
And to that place the sharp Athenian law  
Cannot pursue us. If thou lovest me then,  
Steal forth thy father's house to-morrow night;  
And in the wood, a league without the town,  
Where I did meet thee once with Helena,

To do observance to a morn of May,  
There will I stay for thee.

**HERMIA**

My good Lysander!  
I swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow,  
By his best arrow with the golden head,  
By the simplicity of Venus' doves,  
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,  
And by that fire which burn'd the Carthage queen,  
When the false Trojan under sail was seen,  
By all the vows that ever men have broke,  
In number more than ever women spoke,  
In that same place thou hast appointed me,  
To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

**Then play with this exchange:**

**HERMIA**

God speed fair Helena! whither away?

**HELENA**

Call you me fair? that fair again unsay.  
Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!  
Your eyes are lode-stars; and your tongue's sweet air  
More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear,  
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.  
Sickness is catching: O, were favour so,  
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go;  
My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,  
My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.  
Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,  
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.  
O, teach me how you look, and with what art  
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

**HERMIA**

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

**HELENA**

O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

**HERMIA**

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

**HELENA**

O that my prayers could such affection move!

**HERMIA**

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

**HELENA**

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

**HERMIA**

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

**HELENA**

None, but your beauty: would that fault were mine!

**HERMIA**

Take comfort: he no more shall see my face;  
Lysander and myself will fly this place.  
Before the time I did Lysander see,  
Seem'd Athens as a paradise to me:  
O, then, what graces in my love do dwell,  
That he hath turn'd a heaven unto a hell!