

SYDNEY  
THEATRE  
CO  
EDUCATION



**ON CUE**

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The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Lisa Mumford is the Education Projects Officer for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Lisa on [lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au)

This Study Guide to *The Popular Mechanicals* was written by Robyn Brookes & Georgia Brass (Ed intern) at the State Theatre Company of South Australia © 2015

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# ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

## ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 40 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

[sydneytheatre.com.au](http://sydneytheatre.com.au)

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS



## SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 9 to 12

## SUBJECTS

Drama Stages 5 and 6  
Clowning  
Shakespearean Intertextuality  
Australian Theatre

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS  
A STATE THEATRE COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA PRODUCTION

# THE POPULAR MECHANICALS

BY KEITH ROBINSON, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & TONY TAYLOR  
ORIGINAL DIRECTION BY GEOFFREY RUSH

TOM SNOOT  
LORI BELL

ROBIN STARVELING  
JULIE FORSYTH

NICK BOTTOM/MOWLDIE  
CHARLES MAYER

SNUG  
AMBER MCMAHON

FRANCIS FLUTE  
TIM OVERTON

PETER QUINCE  
RORY WALKER

DIRECTOR  
SARAH GILES

DESIGNER  
JONATHON OXLADE

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
MARK PENNINGTON

SOUND DESIGNER/COMPOSER/MUSICAL  
DIRECTOR  
DAVID HEINRICH

CHOREOGRAPHER  
GABRIELLE NANKIVELL

PRODUCTION MANAGER (STC)  
JOHN COLVIN

PRODUCTION MANAGERS (STCSA)  
GAVIN NORRIS  
BRUCE BOLTON

STAGE MANAGER  
JESS NASH

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER  
MARK HEUER

VENUE TECHNICIAN  
CAMERON MENZIES

HEAD MECHANIST  
ERIC DUFFY

1 HOUR 35 MINUTES, NO INTERVAL.

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT THE  
SPACE THEATRE, ADELAIDE FESTIVAL  
CENTRE, ON 10 NOVEMBER 2015.

THE SYDNEY SEASON OF THIS PRODUCTION  
PREMIERED AT WHARF 2 THEATRE ON  
8 APRIL 2017.

STATE  
THEATRE  
COMPANY  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA



ARTS  
SOUTH  
AUSTRALIA



Australia  
Council  
for the Arts



SYDNEY  
THEATRE  
CO

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

SARAH GILES

SARAH GILES GRADUATED FROM NIDA IN 2008 WITH A GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN DRAMATIC ART SPECIALISING IN DIRECTING, AND HAS A BACHELOR OF ARTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE WITH A DOUBLE MAJOR IN HISTORY AND ITALIAN.

She has been involved in a range of productions including: operas *Pas a Pas – Nulle Part* and *Into the Little* for the Sydney Chamber Opera; classic and contemporary productions such as *Perplex*, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Mariage Blanc*, *Money Shots*, *Ruby Moon*, (Sydney Theatre Company); *Die Plantage* (The Farm) (NIDA); *Vernon God Little* (WAAPA); *The Ugly One*, *The Pigeons* (Griffin Independent); *Kreutzer VS Kreutzer* (The Australian Chamber Orchestra); *That Face* (Red Stitch); *The Herbal Bed* (The New Theatre); *The Bear* (Theatre Forward); *The Bald Soprano*, *Face to the Wall* (NIDA) and *The Maids* (La Mama).

Sarah was the Affiliate Director in Residence at Griffin Theatre Company in 2009, the Richard Wherrett Fellow at Sydney Theatre Company in 2011 and was Co-Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company in 2013. In 2011 Sarah won a Sydney Theatre Award for Best Direction of an Independent Production for her production of *The Ugly One* at Griffin Theatre.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

1. ***The Popular Mechanicals* is about amateur thespians who put on *Pyramus and Thisbe* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. What do we see in this production that we don't see in a Shakespeare play?**

We see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from their perspective. While the rest goes on and people do all sorts of ridiculous things, we stay with this group of amateur actors as they rehearse the play they want to perform at the Royal Wedding. It follows the very basic, and sadly all too true rule of theatre: what can go wrong, will go wrong, but nonetheless the play must go on!

2. **What do you think is the enduring appeal of Bottom and his mates?**

That they are really trying to do a good job, but unfortunately are very bad at that job.

3. **We are promised bad puppetry. How bad can it get?**

So bad that it's good.

4. **We're also promised fart jokes. Why are farts funny?**

Everyone farts – the rich, the famous, the poor, the powerful – yet our very Victorian stitched-up sense of shame and embarrassment about our bodies, tells us that it's wrong to fart. We are told it is socially unacceptable, rude and that we should control our sphincters. This sense of shame at doing something extremely natural is taken very seriously. So when this veneer of civility is stripped back we are shocked. When a politician in a suit farts mid-sentence, we see the ridiculous naked body wiggling beneath the suit. That is why we laugh.

I firmly believe fart jokes are best shared when the fart is true and audible, so very hard to do when not in person!



ALSO AVAILABLE ONLINE IS OUR DESIGNER SKETCHBOOK WITH COSTUME DRAWINGS BY JONATHON OXLADE

# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

TONY TAYLOR AND KEITH ROBINSON

*THE POPULAR MECHANICALS WAS CO-WRITTEN BY TONY TAYLOR AND KEITH ROBINSON, USING THE ORIGINAL WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.*

Tony Taylor is an actor, playwright and director. Prior to *The Popular Mechanicals*, Taylor worked in productions such as *As You Like It*, *The Hills Family Show*, and *The Venetian Twins* as an actor. In the original Company B 1987 production directed by Geoffrey Rush, which toured to Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne, Taylor played the character of Francis Flute. After this, he continued to feature as an actor in productions of *Henry IV*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Tempest*, *The 39 Steps* and *As You Like It*. Taylor tried his hand at directing as well, working on *A Porthole into the Minds of the Vanquished* and even directing *The Popular Mechanicals* in Newtown in 2005. His other works as a collaborative playwright include *Gentlemen Prefer Blokes* and *Horrortorio*.

Keith Robinson is an Australian actor and playwright. Robinson is predominantly known for his acting, having performed in many productions including *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *Art* and most recently *The Underpants*. In the premiere 1987 production of *The Popular Mechanicals* by Company B, Robinson played the character of Peter Quince. *The Popular Mechanicals* is his only known work as a playwright.

William Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright, and performer. In the late 1500s, he began his successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of the most infamous Elizabethan playing company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. His works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays varying in genre between tragedy, comedy, history and tragicomedy; 154 sonnets; two long narrative poems and a few other verses. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English vernacular and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. His plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* have been translated into every major language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. In the 20th and 21st centuries, his works remain highly popular and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in theatres throughout the world; an example of this being Taylor and Robinson's *The Popular Mechanicals*, which was adapted from his original comedy play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

# PLAY HISTORY

*The Popular Mechanicals* was developed out of the 1987 'Stand up for Shakespeare' jigs that occurred after the productions of *Hamlet* and *Henry IV, Part One* at Sydney's Wharf Theatre. *The Popular Mechanicals* was a piece working Australianness into the Shakespearean text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The original production in 1987 performed by Company B at Belvoir Street Theatre was directed by Geoffrey Rush and featured the playwrights Taylor and Robinson in the cast. Rush described the play as "Shakespearean vaudeville, consisting, as it does, of songs, sketches, novelties, dance – something to celebrate the traditions of theatre clowning. It mines silliness, rudeness, it deploys surreal routines that seem to go on and on, and, like many farces, jigs or vaudeville sketches, *The Popular Mechanicals* performs better than it reads."

He also said the play highlighted "collective childhood memories and all the good and bad Shakespeare we've ever done or seen."

Since this first production, there have been a number of performances of *The Popular Mechanicals* across Australia by a variety of theatre companies, including La Boite Theatre Company (2000), Riverina Theatre Company (1997), Freewheels Theatre Company (1991), Western Australia Theatre Company (1991), TN Theatre Company (1989) and State Theatre Company SA (1988).





# PLOT SUMMARY

## ACT I SCENE I

A voiceover introduces the mechanicals who come onstage with percussion instruments and begin performing a musical number called *'Monster in the Dark'*, which ridicules common annoying audience behaviour during a performance like: talking, giving away the plot, burping, taking photos, coming in late, eating, being critics, sneezing, wheezing, coughing, knitting, listening to music, dying, knuckle-cracking, denture-clacking, shouting, calling out, sleepers, drunkards, snorting, chewing gum and the annoyance of alarms.

Halfway through the song, the mechanicals begin singing Balthasar's song from Act II, Scene III of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Having trouble with the words they all stop to work out who is singing it wrong, before remembering the audience and finishing the song. Snug twice refers to Macbeth's most infamous line – "*is this a dagger which I see before me?*"

# PLOT SUMMARY (CONT.)

## ACT I SCENE 2

Set in a rehearsal hall on Thursday evening at cocktail hour, the scene begins with the mechanicals waiting for Bottom, complementing the room's décor. Quince quotes Viola from *Twelfth Night*, "Yes I fell in love with the willow cabin at the gate." A discussion ensues about the state of the sausage rolls. Snout reads the announcement of Theseus (the Duke of Athens) and Hippolyta's (the Queen of the Amazons) search for a group to perform at their wedding reception from the newspaper. Commenting on the late hour the men begin quoting lines from *Twelfth Night*, "the clock upbraids us with the waste of time" and *Macbeth*, "Light thickens and the crows make wing to the rooky wood." Bottom hurries in the door.

The remainder of the scene follows the script of Act I, Scene II of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with occasional interjections from the group in response to lines. During this scene, Quince calls upon each mechanical member of the troupe and allocates each their role in the play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Bottom is given Pyramus, Flute to his distress is given Thisbe, Starveling is given Thisbe's mother, Snout is given Pyramus' father, Snug the lion's part and Quince allocates himself as Thisbe's father; yet Bottom insists throughout he play all the roles and demonstrates, or rather brags about his ability to do so. Quince cunningly convinces Bottom to play only Pyramus as he needs, "a sweet-fac'd man; a proper man as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely, gentleman-like man." Bottom concedes. Quince tells the group to learn their parts and meet in the woods the next night to rehearse away from the townspeople, reminding them the performance is Saturday night and "two days be not an ideal rehearsal period one is forced to admit – and we've got our day jobs to think about!"

## ACT I SCENE 3

During the following day, each of the mechanicals goes about their day jobs while learning lines and practicing gestures. Starveling begins the scene on the phone with a customer, discussing their requirements, "linen bossed with pearl", (*The Taming of the Shrew*) before calling Snout, who he has to call back as another customer rings. When Starveling calls Snout again, Snout answers with his hot iron burning himself before answering the phone. Starveling is once again interrupted by another customer ringing before he returns to ask Snout if he has learnt any of his lines today. Snout replies all that he has learnt, "If the iron rings, don't answer it".

## ACT I SCENE 4

That evening in the wood of the Duke's Oak, Flute, Snout, Starveling and Snug are waiting in the dark for Quince and Bottom to arrive, meddling around with their torches and flitting about to music. When Quince arrives he orders the lights up and asks as to Bottom's whereabouts. The group begin to ridicule Bottom's name, laughing all the while. When Bottom arrives, they continue to make Bottom 'the butt of their feeble wit' until he goes to storm off, but Quince assures him it's all in good humour.

The remainder of the scene follows the script of Act III, Scene I of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the exemption of Puck and his lines. Quince sets the rehearsal area for the group before Bottom begins to raise many of the issues within the play *Pyramus and Thisbe*, such as the use of a sword and the performance of the Lion which would terrify the ladies of the audience. Bottom suggests a prologue be written to say they will do no harm with their swords and the Lion is merely a man in a costume to put them out of their fear.

Quince then asks as to how to resolve the 'two hard things' – bringing moonlight into the chamber and how to represent the wall that Pyramus and Thisbe talk through. They decide to have men represent the moonshine and the wall onstage. The group begin to rehearse rather haphazardly, before Flute sees Bottom offstage metamorphosing into an ass. At this sight, the entire group onstage throw their scripts in the air, run around in a panic, falling over one another, screaming for their lives in fear.

# PLOT SUMMARY (CONT.)

## ACT I SCENE 5

The next morning, Quince, Snout, Snug and Flute sit wrapped in a rug at the rehearsal hall, drinking tea in sadness over the previous night's events. The men discuss how the sun hasn't risen, taking lines from *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*. Starveling enters and the men ask if Bottom has been home yet. Starveling replies that he has not. They all begin to weep and wonder what happened to Bottom and how he came to look like a donkey. Snug suggests he's just having breakfast, while Starveling believes he's gone off in a huff as their performances stink, which Flute takes great offense to, which starts a war of Shakespearean insults between the two mechanicals.

The men all say they shouldn't have gone to the wood to rehearse. They suspect that something bad has happened to Bottom, quoting *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare's *Sonnet 71* and *King John*. Quince blames himself to which all the men agree. Upset Quince begins to hysterically rant about how hard he works as a director using phrases from *The Life and Death of Richard II*. Flute slaps Quince back into reality who slaps him back.

Snout announces the sun has risen, "*jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top*" (*Romeo & Juliet*). The men gather around the radio to hear the morning news about the wedding, which reduces Quince to tears again. Snug tries to convince Quince not to get upset as they have a show to do. Quince is struck with an idea and calls The Frog and Parsnip, and waits on hold. Remembering the audience is watching, Quince instructs the group to 'fill in' the stage with an act. The men argue over what to perform before Starveling suggests a song about Queen Elizabeth I called, "*I Grieve and Dare Not Show My Discontent*", otherwise known as "*Upon Mounzeur's Departure*". The scene ends with him singing to the audience.

## ACT I SCENE 6

Later that day, Quince announces, "*a replacement is arriving imminently to take over from Bottom in the role of Pyramus*" someone who "*hath served many years once with the King's Players in London*". Quince announces Ralph Mowldie as the replacement and all the group gush over the stories they have heard about the great professional actor. Mowldie enters with a dramatic performance which the group reveres.

Quince thanks Mowldie for coming to their aid and introduces everyone, going blank with nerves on each introduction. Flute calls for a speech from Mowldie who begins performing excerpts from *The Comedy of Errors*, swigging a drink from his hip flask as he performs. He moves himself and the others to tears, with Quince telling Mowldie the men will carry the memory of his performance to their graves. As the men rush to aid the 'tired' Mowldie and ask if he needs anything, he requests they perform for him. Snug again suggests "*That*" which the men again say no to, but then agree on "*The fig*."

# PLOT SUMMARY (CONT.)

## ACT I SCENE 7

This scene sees for the performance of “The Jig” called “*Beryl the Widow*” set to the tune of the song, “*Minnie the Moocher*”, during which Mowldie drinks at an alarming rate. The mechanicals then enact a play in which a man named Johnny visits Susan in her bed to engage in ‘*the sweet sports of the night*’, when Susan’s mother enters and chastises the two before dragging Susan off. A witch and her friend enter and Johnny approaches the witch asking for a way to soften Susan’s mother. The witch says she has a potion that must be put into Spanish soup that will make her fart. Johnny enlists Susan to help give her mother the soup, while he plays a ghost to frighten her to death. When Susan’s mother demands her dinner, Susan feeds her the Spanish soup and waits for it to work. When midnight strikes, Mother prays that spirits don’t begin walking abroad and starts farting uncontrollably as John enters and scares her as the Ghost. Susan offers her mother a phial to sniff to make her feel better, at which her mother suddenly has a change of heart and asks after Johnny. When Susan asks if they can marry, Mother agrees “*with all her heart*” and the couple celebrate their triumph and plan to continue to ply Mother with the soup the next week. Snug concludes the scene with a reprise of the opening song, to which Mowldie erupts with applause before falling down dead drunk in front of the troupe.

## ACT I SCENE 8

Snug finds himself in front of the curtain, where he alone is left to pack up everything from “The Jig” while the others have gone to deal with Mowldie. What follows is maybe a dream, or a day-dream, or a fantasy. Maybe a silent clown routine. Maybe he plays music to clean to and gets carried away. Maybe he starts talking to the audience. Whatever. (In this version, although it is rehearsed, this scene is also ad-libbed – so expect anything!)

Snout joins him onstage doing his own impressions and telling jokes. The two start discussing the difference between poetry and prose, before bursting into song and dance to “*Merry England*” and are gradually joined by the full company. The scene ends with the men standing in perfect tableau same as the end of Scene 7.



The cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

# PLOT SUMMARY (CONT.)

## ACT I SCENE 9

The men try to shake Mowldie awake, but realise that he's out cold because he's drunk. They all begin to wonder how they're going to rehearse, with Flute suggesting to cut out Pyramus and call the play just *Thisbe*. Snug suggests doing "*That*" as he has everything he needs for it in his bag and it's cheery. Reluctantly Quince instructs the men to do it. As they all start setting up, Snout re-enters and realising what's going on, turns to the audience and apologises. The chicken royale begins. A performance where the mechanicals use rubber chickens in trunk hose and ruffs on sticks to perform a comedic and crude show. During the performance, Mowldie stirs and sees the alarming display and passes out once again.

At the end of the performance, Snout presents the list of the finalists selected to perform at the wedding. When the group discovers they have been billed poorly, Quince is outraged. Behind him, Mowldie awakens and drunkenly begins performing *Pyramus and Thisbe*, swigging from his flask as the troupe try to get to their places around him. The phone rings and Quince answers, to be told that the Duke is on his way to the reception. The men lament Bottom's absence and Quince asks Mowldie to leave, eventually pushing him out of the door. Offstage Bottom calls for the men. The group waits in fear of whether he will enter as a donkey or a man, but when Bottom comes in human, they all clamour around him overjoyed.

Bottom instructs the group to get ready to perform at the reception. Mowldie re-enters and calls the mechanicals amateurs, at which they retort he is unprofessional. Quince strips down, freshens himself up and changes into a tuxedo reciting Act III, Scene I of *The Life of King Henry V*. The other men gather onstage dressed in tuxedos and Flute in a dress and to the sound of '*Mendelssohn's Wedding March*' they head to the reception and begin warming up.

## ACT I SCENE 10

A fanfare sounds and the men nervously make their way to the stage at the reception. What follows is an avant-garde conceptual production of *Pyramus and Thisbe* gone terribly wrong: Quince dries up during his prologue, Flute consumed with nerves vomits before the show begins, words are muddled up, props are forgotten, discordant music is played, Bottom overplays his character and extends his dialogue, Snug's costume falls apart, the audience struggle to understand Starveling's role as moonshine, the lighting blinds the actors and four 'Sisters Three' appear onstage. At the performance's end, Quince asks if the Royals would like to see the epilogue or hear a Bergamask dance between two of the mechanicals, which they obviously decline as the group exits bowing and prostrating themselves.

## ACT I SCENE II

The men stand around drinking and congratulating one another at the after-show party. Bottom breaks away and comes to a spot downstage, and while the others freeze, he recites his final lines from Act IV, Scene I of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When Bottom re-joins the group, the company all begin to say farewell to another, quoting *Troilus and Cressida*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*. Snug simply says "*see ya*" before turning and stepping in a cow pat.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS



The cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

## NICK BOTTOM

A weaver chosen to play Pyramus in the mechanicals' play. Bottom is full of advice and self-confidence, but frequently makes silly mistakes and misuses language. He believes himself to be the most talented member of the group, insisting he plays everyone's roles and extending his own dialogue when performing. He is shown to have diva tendencies, threatening to "go back to me loom." However, Quince convinces him he must only play Pyramus. Bottom's arrogant attitude is what sees him being targeted by Puck, an unseen character, who turns him into an ass and makes him absent for most of the play's action.

## PETER QUINCE

A carpenter and the nominal leader of the mechanicals' attempt to put on a play. Quince is often shoved aside by the abundantly confident Bottom. Originally allocated the role of Thisbe's father in *Pyramus and Thisbe*, Quince instead reads the Prologue. Quince is the most driven member of the group when it comes to the performance, refusing to let anything such as missing props and actors get in the way, directing the troupe aggressively from side stage, and becoming extremely frustrated when they are billed poorly. Quince can also get quite hysterical, blaming himself for Bottom's disappearance and again when the group suggests he resigns as director.

He is very conscious of the audience's presence and will not leave the stage empty. He seems organised, preparing sausage rolls, coming up with a bill of properties and has inspired ideas such as performing in the woods and having Mowldie replace Bottom. However, in reality he isn't: the sausage rolls burn, props are forgotten and his ideas put the group in more trouble than they were to start with. Quince is also seen to become easily tongue-tied, when he is star struck by Mowldie and forgets everyone's names, and later when he forgets his lines and muddles up his Prologue.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)

## FRANCIS FLUTE

A bellows-mender, unhappily chosen to play the female role of Thisbe in the play. Forced to play a young girl in love, the bearded craftsman speaks his lines in a high, squeaky voice. He is overly enthusiastic about Mowldie's acting abilities and involvement in the play. Flute is also seen to be the most nervous about performing, as he vomits onstage before the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

## ROBIN STARVELING

A tailor originally chosen to play Thisbe's mother, he ends up playing the part of the moonshine. Starveling is one of the most easygoing of the group members, accepting her role without dispute, and attempting to learn her lines between work calls.



The cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)



The cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

## TOM SNOT

A tinker originally chosen to play Pyramus' father, Snout ends up playing the part of Wall, dividing the two lovers. Snout features in Snug's dream of a stand-up comedy routine, showing he is very comedic but sensible as he reins in Snug's dirty jokes. Snout's wife Dorothy dotes on him, travelling to Devon to get him Devon sausages, providing him with the list of finalists to perform at the Duke's wedding, and calling Snout to tell him the Duke is heading to his reception.

## SNUG

A joiner chosen to play the Lion, as she is 'slow of study' – for example, she struggles to understand the group's jokes and references. Snug worries that her roaring will frighten the ladies in the audience. In this play, Snug is perhaps the most crude of the company, insisting constantly the group perform "That", which turns out to be a cheeky performance with rubber chickens, and making dirty jokes during her stand-up comedy routine in her dream.

## MOWLDIE

The retired professional actor, who "*hath served many years once with the King's Players in London*", and replaces Bottom in the role of Pyramus. Mowldie is very dramatic and self-confident, but is also a drunk who drinks throughout the rehearsal period. Once they discover his misdemeanour he begs not to be turned away, and when he is, he abuses the others and calls them amateurs, believing to be above them.



# GENRE



The cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

*The Popular Mechanicals* is labelled a play with music. Adapted from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Popular Mechanicals* has been described as, "a low-brow, absurdist and occasionally poetical play without the play." Using most of the Mechanicals' dialogue from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, playwrights Robinson and Taylor have inserted into its narrative a combination of songs, puppetry, jokes and excerpts from Shakespeare's plays – all depicting the antics the mechanicals were getting up to whilst offstage during the original play.

It is a comedy with clowning, vaudeville, farce, wordplay both high and low-brow, moments of grotesquery and assaults on the fourth wall. It is also rough, hammy, crude and obscene, but all in the very best of fun. The writers poke fun at the world of theatre both overtly and stylistically using theatrical techniques including slapstick, stand-up comedy, musical theatre, puppetry and more.

## DEFINITIONS OF THE TYPES OF COMEDY USED IN *POPULAR MECHANICALS*:

### **Slapstick**

A style of humour involving exaggerated physical activity which exceeds the boundaries of common sense.

### **Stand-up**

Where a comedian performs in front of a live audience, usually speaking directly to them.

### **Musical theatre**

A form of theatrical performance that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting and dance.

### **Farce**

A comic dramatic work using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterisation and ludicrously improbable situations.

### **Puppetry**

The skill or activity of using puppets in performances.

### **Clowning**

Entertaining by pantomiming common situations or actions in exaggerated or or ridiculous fashion, by juggling or tumbling, etc.

### **Vaudeville**

A type of entertainment popular in the US in the early 20th century, featuring a mixture of speciality acts such as burlesque, comedy, song and dance.

### **Wordplay**

The witty exploitation of the meanings and ambiguities of words, especially in puns.

# THEMES



## ACTING DILEMMAS

Opening with a song both decrying and celebrating live audiences, the script is really a celebration of theatre. The Mechanicals enjoy acting and coming together to create something. Bottom says, *“We may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains, be perfect.”*

Quince the director also laments about the trials of being an amateur and the short rehearsal time, *“Two days be not an ideal rehearsal period one is forced to admit – and we’ve got our day jobs to think about!”*

The opening song talks about bad audience behaviour entitled, *“The Monster in the Dark”*. This behaviour includes: chatting, giving away the plot, burping, eating, and coming in late.

## TASK

*Students create a list of other bad audience behaviours – see if they remember any from the play.*

### Review

After you come back from seeing the show, review the experience with your students. Were they ‘good’ or ‘bad’ audience members? How was the experience of watching the show given their behaviour and the behaviour of other audience members?

# THEMES (CONT.)

## FRIENDSHIP

Bottom, Quince, Flute, Snug, Snout and Starveling are all good friends. They all have other jobs, but enjoy coming together to work on a performance piece. Quince is clearly the leader of the group and keeps them in order during rehearsals and discussions. Even though they make fun of Bottom's name, they are scared when he changes into a donkey and know that the play can't go on without him. They are ecstatic when Quince gets Mowldie as a replacement. However, they discover that Mowldie is a drunk and long for their friend, Bottom "O sweet bully Bottom!" When they hear him approach they are most happy, but fearful that he is still a donkey.

After the performance they celebrate together and Starveling says, "Farewell all! If we do meet again, why we shall smile! If not, why then, this parting was well made."

### TASK

*Explore friendship. Who are you friends with? Create a Mind Map/ Radial hierarchy of who your friends are. Maybe your friends include family, or cousins or even pets?*



The cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

# THEMES (CONT.)



Julie Forsyth in *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

## AUSTRALIANNES

The *Popular Mechanicals* is riddled with Australian references such as:

### Food

Twisties, Minties, (*Twistie-Crunching*, *Mintie Munching*) Sausage rolls and tomato sauce (*There are sausage rolls without, and tomato sauce*)

### Performers

Colin Friels (*Which one's Colin Friels?*)

### Expressions

Dag and Brekkie

### The Iconic

Avon Lady (*Ding Dong. Ding Dong. It's the Avon Lady.*)

There is also a sense of Englishness in the show, with many English references made throughout, such as Mowldie's career in the Kings Players of London, and in the songs of "Merry England" and "I Grieve and Dare Not Show My Discontent"

## FOOLISHNESS

The central theme of the original text, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is the foolishness of humankind, which carries through into *The Popular Mechanicals*. While the troupe intentionally play the fools in trying to entertain and amuse their audience through many forms of comedy, much of the play's hilarity comes from moments when the group become caught in their own stupidity.

### TASK

Explain how Australianness and Englishness can be used as a comedic tool.

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM REFERENCES

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare was believed to be written between 1590 and 1597, and first performed in its entirety in the 1840s. The play is recognised as one of the most popular of Shakespeare's comedies, still being performed on stages across the world today.

The play consists of five Acts of one or two scenes each, and three parallel plots, each connected by the event of the Duke Theseus of Athens and the Amazon Queen Hippolyta's wedding. As the play progresses, the plots overlap and the characters of each distinct story have some form of interaction with others. The majority of the play takes place at night in enchanted woodlands just outside of Athens.

The play tells the stories of four young lovers caught in a love quadrangle who have set out into the forest in pursuit of one another, and a group of amateur actors poorly rehearsing a play in the same woods to be performed at the Duke's wedding, who all find their worlds turned upside down by the actions both intentional and incidental of the warring king and queen of the fairies and their servant sprite.

Through a combination of madness, mistaken identity and magic, a classic comedy takes shape that allows Shakespeare to explore the universal theme of love and the complexities that come with it: lust, obsession, jealousy, disappointment, confusion, commitment. Overall, Shakespeare uses his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to comment on how love can ultimately make fools of us all.

## RESEARCH TASK

*Find a plot summary of A Midsummer Night's Dream online, read the play, watch a film adaptation.*



Charles Mayer and the cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

# OTHER SHAKESPEARE REFERENCES

## THE POPULAR MECHANICALS IS RIDDLED WITH REFERENCES TO OTHER SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS:

### **As You Like It**

Act II, Scene I – “Living on the edge of the woods one finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything.”

### **Coriolanus**

Act II, Scene I – “I have heard that dumb men throng to see him, and the blind to hear them speak... All the gallery they say bends as if to Jove’s statue, and the pit make a shower and thunder with their caps and shouts.”

Act IV, Scene V – “My father saw him once. His voice, he said, was of trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries and fifes; tabors and cymbals, and his shouting made the sun dance!”

### **Cymbeline**

Act IV, Scene II – “Golden lads and lasses must, as chimney sweepers, come to dust.”

Act I, Scene VI – “Your cause doth strike my heart with pity that doth make me sick.”

### **Hamlet**

Act I, Scene I – “The morn in russet mantle clad walks o’er the dew of yon high eastward hill.”

Act III, Scene I – “Perhaps he’s gone to that undiscovered country [...] that country from whose bourn no traveller returns.”

### **Henry V**

Part I, Act II, Scene IV – “No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Quince’s company; banish not him thy Quince’s company. Banish plump Jack and banish all the world.”

### **Julius Caesar**

Act V, Scene I – “For ever, and forever, farewell, all! If we do meet again, why we shall smile! If not, why then, this parting was well made.”

### **King John**

Act II, Scene II – “I was never so bethumped with words since first I called my father’s brother Dad.”

### **King Lear**

Act I, Scene IV – “Prithee nuncle, I had rather be any kind of thing than a fool.”

### **The Life and Death of King John**

Act III, Scene IV – “Death, death: O, amiable lovely death? Thou odoriferous stench! Sound rottenness! Arise forth from the couch of lasting night, thou hate and terror to prosperity, and I will kiss thy detestable bones, and put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows, and ring these fingers with thy household worms!!!”

### **The Life and Death of Richard II**

Act III, Scene III – “O, that I were as great as is my grief, or lesser than my name, or that I could forget what I have been, or not remember what I must be now! What must the director do now? Submit? [...] Swell’st thou proud heart? I’ll give thee scope to beat since foes have scope to beat both thee and me.”

# OTHER SHAKESPEARE REFERENCES (CONT.)

## ***The Life of King Henry V***

Act III, Scene I – “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; Or close the wall up without English dead! In peace there’s nothing so becomes a man, as modest stillness and humility; but when the blast of war blows in our ears, then imitate the action of the tiger; stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, disguise fair nature with hard-favour’d rage; then lend the eye a terrible aspect, let it pry through the portage of the head Like the brass canon; let the brow o’erwhelm it, as fearfully as doth a galled rock o’erhang and jutty his confounded base, swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean. Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide; hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit to his full height! – On, on, you noblest English! Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof; fathers that, like so many Alexanders, have in these parts from morn till even fought, and sheath-d their swords for lack of argument. Dishonour not your mothers; now attest that those whom you call’d fathers did beget you. Be copy now to men of grosser blood, and teach them how to war! I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips, straining upon the start. The game’s afoot: follow your spirit; and upon this charge, cry ‘God for Harry, England and Saint George!’”

## ***Macbeth***

Act II, Scene I – “Is this a dagger which I see before me?”

Act III, Scene II - “Light thickens and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood.”

Act II, Scene IV – “By th’ clock ’tis day, and yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp. Is’t night’s predominance or the day’s shame that darkness does the face of Earth entomb when living light should kiss it?”

## ***Merry Wives of Windsor***

Act I, Scene III – “Hence! Avaunt! Vanish like hailstones, go!”  
“Trudge.” “Plod away o’ the hoof.” “Seek shelter.”

## ***Much Ado About Nothing***

Act II, Scene III – “Fear, fear, fear, no more, darlings, fear no more, we are deceivers ever. One aim to please, one to deplore, in one thing constant never. Then sign not so, but let us show that we be fair and funny, converting all your worldly woe into hey no nonny...”

## ***Othello***

Act V, Scene II – “Here is my journey’s end. Here is my butt.”

# OTHER SHAKESPEARE REFERENCES (CONT.)

## **Richard III**

Act V, Scene III – “Who saw the sun today?” “Not I, my lord.” “Then he disdains to shine; for by the book he should have braved the east an hour ago. A black day it will be to somebody.”

## **Romeo and Juliet**

Act II, Scene II – “Arise, fair sun and kill the envious moon.”

Act II, Scene III – “The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night, chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light.”

Act III, Scene V - “Jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top.”

Act II, Scene II – “Goodnight, goodnight; parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say goodnight till it be morrow.”

## **The Taming of the Shrew**

Act II, Scene I – “Linen bossed with pearl, valance of Venice gold in needlework”

## **Two Gentlemen of Verona**

Act II, Scene III – “I think Crab my dog be the sourest-natured dog that lives.”

Act III, Scene I – “Cease to lament for that which thou canst not help.”

## **Troilus and Cressida**

Act V, Scene VIII – “Look how the sun begins to set; how ugly night comes breathing at his heels... The dragon wing on night o’er spreads the earth.”

Act III, Scene III – “Time is like a fashionable host, That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, And with his arms outstretched as he would fly, Grasps in the comer: Welcome ever smiles, And farewell goes out sighing.”

## **Twelfth Night**

Act I, Scene V – “I fell in love with the willow cabin at the gate...”

Act III, Scene I - “The clock upbraids us with the waste of time’



Amber McMahon in *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid



# OTHER SHAKESPEARE REFERENCES (CONT.)

## PYRAMUS AND THISBE

In both Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act V, Sc 1) and in *The Popular Mechanicals*, the troupe of amateurs enact the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Their production is crude and, for the most part, badly done.

Pyramus and Thisbe are a pair of ill-fated lovers whose story forms part of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The story has since been retold by many authors.

In the Ovidian version, Pyramus and Thisbe are two lovers in the city of Babylon who occupy connected houses/walls, forbidden by their parents to be wed, because of their parents' rivalry. Through a crack in one of the walls, they whisper their love for each other. They arrange to meet near Ninus' tomb under a mulberry tree and state their feelings for each other. Thisbe arrives first, but upon seeing a lioness with a mouth bloody from a recent kill, she flees, leaving behind her veil. When Pyramus arrives he is horrified at the sight of Thisbe's veil, assuming that a wild beast has killed her. Pyramus kills himself, falling on his sword in proper Roman fashion, and in turn splashing blood on the mulberry fruits, turning them dark. Thisbe returns, eager to tell Pyramus what had happened to her, but she finds Pyramus' dead body under the shade of the mulberry tree. Thisbe, after a brief period of mourning, stabs herself with the same sword. In the end, the Gods listen to Thisbe's lament, and forever change the colour of the mulberry fruits into the stained colour to honour the forbidden love.



The cast of *The Popular Mechanicals*. © Shane Reid

# THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

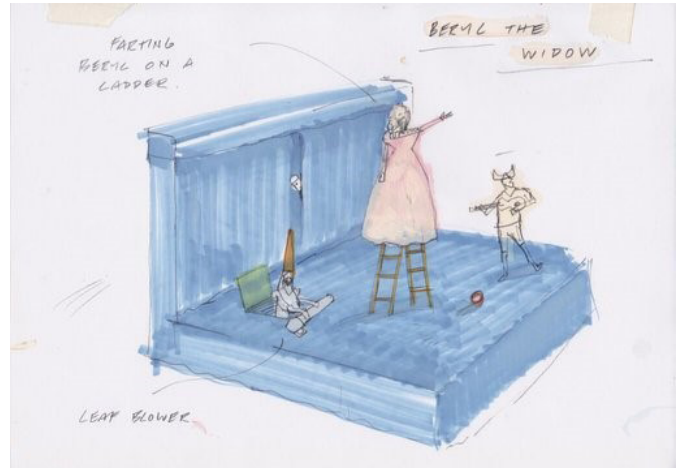
## SET DESIGN

In the script there is little reference to the design of the play other than the note, “*the play is set Now and Then.*” Essentially this leaves the director and designer with a blank canvas on which to begin. The language is a mixture of Shakespearean and contemporary language, and the confusion which lies therein. There are only two locations in the play, that of the woods and the rehearsal hall.

In this production, the stage has been designed like a traditional travelling performance, with a stage curtain, raised stage/apron, wooden floors, trap doors and changing backdrops. The trap doors open to reveal the forest.

There are also three performances within the play: the crude and crazy “*Chicken Royale*” that sees 100 rubber chickens move along to the music of Prokofiev’s *The Montagues and the Capulets*, “*Beryl The Widow*” – a jig and crude performance about a lady who farts profusely, and the final performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which is a debacle from beginning to end.

Because of the nature of the behind-the-scenes rehearsal and the performances within the play, the director and designer talked about creating a world like the TV show *The Extras*. In this show the actors are on stage with scenery behind them, then walk offstage in costume to eat or have a cup of coffee. This idea of mixing the two worlds was the inspiration for the design.



Set drawing Jonathon Oxlade ©

# THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION (CONT.)



Costume drawing Jonathon Oxlade ©

## COSTUME DESIGN

The costumes in *The Popular Mechanicals* are all period costumes or 'Tudor' costumes, referencing Shakespeare's time. This includes the 'ruff' collar and tights.

Some of the design inspiration came from the television series, *The Blackadder*.

# THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION (CONT.)

## DESIGNER BIOGRAPHY

Jonathon Oxlade studied Illustration and Sculpture at the Queensland College of Art.

Jonathon has designed sets and costumes for Windmill Theatre, The Queensland Theatre Company, *Is This Yours?*, *Aphids*, *Circa*, Arena Theatre Company, *Polyglot*, *Bell Shakespeare*, *Polytoxic*, *Men Of Steel*, *The Real TV Project*, *Terrapin Puppet Theatre*, *The Escapists*, *The Border Project*, State Theatre Company of South Australia and LaBoite Theatre.

His designs has been seen at venues and festivals including the Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Festival, Adelaide Festival and Fringe, The Malthouse, Performance Space and the Queensland Art Gallery. Jonathon has illustrated the picture book *The Empty City* for Hachette Livre/Lothian and *The Edie Amelia* series by Sophie Lee, was Festival Designer for the 2010 *Out Of The Box* festival and is currently the Resident Designer at Windmill Theatre.

He has received a 2005 'Best Designer' Matilda Award for *A Christmas Carol* and Contribution to Queensland Theatre, and a 2009 'Best Designer' Matilda Award for *Attack of the Attacking Attackers*. He was nominated for a 2010 Greenroom Award for *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mud* for Best Design, a 2011 Ruby Award for *School Dance*, a 2013 Helpmann award, 'Best Scenic Design' for *School Dance*, and in 2014 for *Pinocchio* along with a Greenroom nomination for *Skeleton* and *I Heart John McEnroe*.

Jonathon was awarded the Lord Mayors Fellowship Grant to attend the Prague Quadrennial of Scenography and Theatre Architecture.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE DESIGNER

### 1. What attracted you to the play *The Popular Mechanicals*?

*The Popular Mechanicals* is one of the silliest and most well-known comedic plays in Australia. Being originally invented by some of Australia's most hilarious theatrical humans, it's a great opportunity to develop a new version of this riotous romp with a new team of Australia's finest. What fun!

### 2. What sorts of references have you used to help in the design and how does this help?

Sarah the director and I looked at everything from traditional Tudor costumes, medieval workers outfits, *The Blackadder* TV Series, to other references including *the Simpsons*, *Dumb 'n' Dumber* and *the Young Ones*. We wanted a quite traditional Tudor English look, with slight fractures in hairstyle and silhouette, to bring out the humour in physicality.

### 3. What are the challenges in the design of the play?

The amount of time for these comedy based shows is quite limited, there is a lot to do in such a short time. Rehearsing a comedy is different to a drama, the beats are different. Also, when you are dealing with jokes, you need props that work and rehearsals to be quite rigorous.

### 4. What training have you done as a designer?

I studied Illustration and Sculpture. I kind of fell into theatre through designing a small puppet show for a friend to tour, I think the training in art really helps to think about designing for the Theatre.

# THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION (CONT.)

## MUSIC

*The Popular Mechanicals* is a play with music. The text takes quotations from various Shakespearean plays, and is interspersed with songs written to either well known tunes or music that has been specifically composed for the show. The company is directed to play various percussion and other instruments throughout the play – playing along to the music, setting the mood, or adding to the comical element.

The first song, *Monster in the Dark* is about the audience and its behaviour during performances. There are several verses of the song followed by the chorus:

*We love ya, we love ya*

*What a jape, what a joke, what a lark!*

*You Twistie-crunching, mintie-munching*

*Monster in the Dark*

It is comical and very repetitive, finishing with one-liners by the various characters:

*Bronchial-wheezing*

*Multiple-Sneezing*

*Knuckle-Cracking*

*Denture-Clacking*

*Mucus-Clearing*

*Hard of Hearing*

*Bangle-Rattling*

*Domestic-Battling*

*Chewing-Gumming*

*Off-Key-Humming*

*Garlic-Ponging*

*Singalonging*

*Never-Clapping*

*Chocolate-Wrapping*

*Loudly-Snoring*

*Deadly-Boring*

*Monster in the Dark*

Starveling later sings “*Upon Monzuer’s Departure*”. This short lyric is often said to be written by Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603). The title given to the poem suggests that it may have been written by the Queen in response to the French Duke of Anjou’s departure from England in 1582, with whom she had been discussing the possibility of marriage. She knew he’d be one of her last suitors as she was 46. He was only 24 and the only suitor she actually got to know. The idea wasn’t very popular in England and she was forced to call the whole thing off. Some editors are confident that the poem really is Elizabeth’s, others are less certain. The music for this has been composed specifically for this production.

In Scene 7, the mechanicals do a jig to the tune of “*Minnie the Moocher*.” “*Minnie the Moocher*” is a jazz song first recorded in 1931 by Cab Calloway and His Orchestra. The song is most famous for its nonsensical adlibbed “scat” (for example, “Hi De Hi De Hi De Hi”). Calloway would get the audience to participate by repeating each scat phrase in a form of call and response. Eventually Calloway’s phrases would become so long and complex that the audience would laugh at their own failed attempts to repeat them. The actors on stage also encourage the audience to join in.

The next song, “*Merry England*” talks of Tudor England with nostalgic overtones, incorporating English images such as thatched cottages, the country inn, cup of tea and the Sunday roast. This version uses some English symbols – mostly negative:

*If the black death doesn’t get you, then the fire of London will*

*We never bathe in water. . . . We haven’t any toilets, so we do it on the floor*

*When pointing out a witch we must be sure there’s no mistake, we take the dear old lady and we throw her in a lake, if she sinks she’s not, but if she floats, we burn her at the stake*

*We all went into mourning when Queen Bess’s day was done, they put her in a coffin but they left it in the sun, and when the thing exploded she reigned over everyone*

The final song is for the “*Chicken Royale*” – a piece to accompany the crude performance of 100 rubber chickens.

# THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION (CONT.)

## COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

David Heinrich is an experienced performer, composer and sound designer, with a background in theatre and live music.

He has produced composition/sound design for numerous theatre projects including *Last Days of the new Theatricals* (The Restaged Histories Project), *Whore* (B Sharp @ Belvoir), *Escape From Peligro Island* (Windmill), *Vs Macbeth* (Border Project/Sydney Theatre Co), *I Am Not An Animal*, *Highway Rock n Roll Disaster* (The Border Project), *Quack* (Griffin Theatre), *The Coming World* (Darlinghurst Theatre), *I, Animal* an interactive audio tour at Melbourne Zoo, *Mariage Blanc* (Sydney Theatre Co), *Fight Night* (Ontroerend Geod/Border Project). His composing credits for State Theatre Company include *Little Bird* and *The Comedy of Errors* (with Bell Shakespeare).

His other works as a performer and musician include *The Mouse*, *The Bird*, and *The Sausage* (Slingsby), *You Me and the Bloody Sea* (Mumpsimus/Adelaide Caberet Festival), *The Smile Off Your Face* and *Fight Night* (Ontroerend Geod), *Boom Bah!* and *Escape From Peligro Island* (Windmill Theatre), *Mr McGee and The Biting Flea* (Patch Theatre), Robyn Archer's *Boy Hamlet* (Brisbane Festival), Aaron Copeland's *The Second Hurricane* (Adelaide Festival), *Couch Potato* (Host, ABC Children), and *Elephantaisis* (Closer Productions)

David was a founding member of the Adelaide based ensemble The Border Project, and has co-created and performed in nearly all their works including *Half Real* (Malthouse Theatre/Border Project), *Please, Go Hop!* and *Trouble on Planet Earth*.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE COMPOSER

### 1. What is the importance of music in *The Popular Mechanicals*?

Music is pretty central to the show - there are several songs throughout and they are a central part of the comedy. The music is also part of communicating the kind of show it is and the kind of world these characters live in.

### 2. After reading the script, what is your first approach to beginning the music design?

I began by having a conversation with the director Sarah Giles, about what kind of world the play existed in - what would it look like, what would it sound like, what kind of songs did we want? We looked at YouTube clips of things we found funny, listened to songs for inspiration and considered how the songs would be performed - i.e. would we play backing tracks, or would the cast be able to play instruments?

So the musical decisions we make have to work in the context of the other design choices, so the production as a whole is coherent, and take into account the relative skill level of the cast as musicians and singers. Generally, you need to make some decisions and write most of the songs before rehearsals start, but also be able to evolve the design to suit discoveries made during rehearsals.

### 3. As this play requires musical skills of the cast, how much do you work with them when designing the songs?

Quite a bit, more than normally because of this very reason. They've had to learn how to play and sing the songs, and we've worked together in the rehearsal room quite a bit to achieve this.

### 4. What are the two main challenges for you in your design?

Deciding on the arrangements for the songs, and what instruments to use and how to use them in the show. As well as making sure that songs played on glass bottles and made up instruments also sound good!

### 5. What training have you done?

I am a Flinders Drama Centre graduate from 2000.

# GLOSSARY

<i>Agog</i>	Very eager or curious to hear or see something.
<i>Apothecary</i>	A person who prepared and sold medicines and drugs.
<i>Avaunt</i>	Go away.
<i>Bellows-mender</i>	Someone who repairs bellows, the instrument which puffs air into a fire to make it hotter.
<i>Bethumped</i>	To beat or thump soundly.
<i>Capons</i>	Castrated domestic cocks fattened for eating.
<i>Casement</i>	A window with such a sash or sashes.
<i>Conned</i>	Study attentively or learn by heart.
<i>Cozenage</i>	To deceive, win over, or induce to do something by artful coaxing and wheedling or shrewd trickery.
<i>Degas</i>	A picture by French impressionist painter and sculptor Hilaire Edgar 1834–1917.
<i>Doublet</i>	A man's short close-fitting padded jacket, commonly worn from the 14th to the 17th century.
<i>Gramercy</i>	Used as an exclamation expressing surprise or sudden strong feeling.
<i>Hawthorn-brake</i>	The room or place where players dress for the stage.
<i>Jocund</i>	Cheerful and light-hearted.
<i>Loam</i>	Mixture of clay, sand, straw etc. used in founding and plastering walls.
<i>Mead</i>	An alcoholic liquor made by fermenting honey and water.
<i>Nonny</i>	Used in refrains of songs from Elizabethan era.
<i>Odious</i>	Highly offensive, repugnant, disgusting.
<i>Pismire</i>	An ant.
<i>Prithie</i>	Please (used to convey a polite request).
<i>Prologue</i>	An introductory speech, often in verse, calling attention to the theme of a play.
<i>Tinker</i>	A person skilled in various minor kinds of mechanical work, a jack-of-all-trades.
<i>Upbraids</i>	Find fault with someone, scold.
<i>Unbegot</i>	Not yet made or born.
<i>Withal</i>	In addition, as a further factor or consideration.
<i>Wither</i>	Become dry and shrivelled, fall into decay or decline.
<i>Whit</i>	A very small part or amount.

# REVIEW WRITING

## Paragraph 1

- What is the name of the play you are reviewing?
- Who are the main characters in the story?

## Paragraph 2

- Write/draw a favourite scene/part of the performance.

## Paragraph 3

*Give your opinion*

- Write/draw the best part of the performance for you
- Was there a part of the play that you didn't like or understand? – Write/draw your response.
- Give the play a rating in stars: \* poor ; \*\*\*okay; \*\*\*\*very good; \*\*\*\*\*excellent

## Paragraph 4

*For your final summation discuss the technical elements*

- How did the lighting impact on the mood/atmosphere of the production?
- How did the sound effects evoke the person/place?

*Opinions must have reasons*

- Consider the integrations of dramatic elements
- Can you determine the purpose/aims and the achievements of the production?
- Tell it in a personal voice

## RESEARCH TASK

*Find reviews online for the production you have seen.*



# ESSAY QUESTIONS

## ENGLISH QUESTIONS

1. *The Popular Mechanicals* is set 'Now and Then.' How has the playwright created a sense of this in the script? E.g. dialogue, song choices, references.
2. Why have the playwrights chosen to adapt/reimagine this classic text?
3. What is the effect of the playwright's decision to include quotations from a variety of Shakespeare plays in the script? Why do you think they made this decision?
4. Discuss the comedy device of word play. How does it work in the play and why is it funny?
5. Choose one style of comedy represented in the play *The Popular Mechanicals*. Research its history and how the style has been used, giving examples of plays, television shows or films.
6. Discuss the theme of foolishness and how it relates to *The Popular Mechanicals*.

## DRAMA QUESTIONS

1. *The Popular Mechanicals* is set 'Now and Then.' How has the designer created a sense of this in the visual/audible elements? E.g. costumes, set.
2. What is the purpose of having the characters of Bottom and Mowldie played by the same actor?
3. What forms of comedy can be found in *The Popular Mechanicals*? E.g. word play, slapstick etc. Give examples of each.
4. What visual forms of comedy were used? Give examples.
5. The music plays an important role in *The Popular Mechanicals*. Discuss.

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