

**PR✦PELLER**

# POCKET DREAM



**SHAKESPEARE'S  
A MIDSUMMER  
NIGHT'S DREAM  
FOR YOUNG  
AUDIENCES**

**"HOW TO GET  
YOUR CHILD  
HOOKED  
ON SHAKESPEARE"**  
DAILY TELEGRAPH

DIRECTED BY  
**EDWARD HALL**

[www.propeller.org.uk](http://www.propeller.org.uk)



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# A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare

a sixty minute version entitled

## POCKET DREAM

Directed by Edward Hall

Designed by Michael Pavelka

Adapted by Roger Warren

### Cast

#### The Fairies

Titania	Richard Dempsey
Oberon	Vince Leigh
Puck	Tam Williams

#### The Lovers

Lysander	Babou Ceesay
Demetrius	Alasdair Craig
Helena	Richard Dempsey
Hermia	Jonathan McGuinness

#### The 'Mechanicals'

Peter Quince	Alasdair Craig
Nick Bottom	Vince Leigh
Francis Flute	Tam Williams
Tom Snout	Babou Ceesay
Snug	Jonathan McGuinness
Robin Starveling	Richard Dempsey

### Production team

Company Manager	Julia Reid
Costume Supervisor	Vanessa Hingley



The Mechanicals Photo: Nobby Clark

# Propeller

## Introduction by Edward Hall

'Propeller is an all male Shakespeare company which mixes a rigorous approach to the text with a modern physical aesthetic. We look for as many ways as possible to inform the physical life of the production with the poetry of the text, and we give as much control as possible to the actor in the telling of the story.'

The company is as all companies should be: defined by the people in it and not owned by an individual. Indeed, I find it hard to describe Propeller when we are in between shows, as I become aware of our identity only when looking at our work, which I hope changes all the time.

We want to rediscover Shakespeare simply by doing the plays as we believe they should be done: with great clarity, speed and full of as much imagination in the staging as possible. We don't want to make the plays 'accessible', as this implies that they need 'dumbing down' in order to be understood, which they don't. We want to continue to take our work to as many different kinds of audiences as possible, and so to grow as artists and people. We are hungry for more opportunity to explore the richness of Shakespeare's plays and, if we keep doing this with rigour and invention, then I believe the company, and I hope our audiences too, will continue to grow.'



Puck and the Fairies Photo: Nobby Clark

## Pocket Propeller

Pocket Propeller offers me the chance as an artist to revisit and develop a piece of established work by going through a process of 'concentration' i.e. focusing down a drama to its bare bones and in doing so, hope to recognize the essence of the work. This can often be a surprising and informative experience which helps to make me more aware of what has made up the core of a full scale production and can make me aware of areas to develop into for the next full scale show.

The performances are enormously satisfying as they give me an opportunity to engage a young audience who have not necessarily seen Shakespeare before and perhaps not even been to the theatre.

Their reactions are vocal, honest and immediate giving the actors plenty to bounce off as they develop their relationship with their audience, sometimes in very vocal situations which are at the core of a good Shakespearean performance. The performances are delivered by top level Propeller actors, some of whom will have enormous performance experience of the text they are performing allowing them the freedom to concentrate on improvising with their young and very lively audience. It is of particular importance to me that our young audience are being given access to an experience of the highest standard delivered by experienced and skilled classical actors who are as dedicated to their audience as they would be to an opening night in New York or Milan. In short, it is a way of giving young people access to the best drama as their first and vital taste of Shakespeare; an experience that will contribute to the audiences and theatre makers of tomorrow.

**EDWARD HALL**

## Synopsis

Preparations for the wedding of Theseus, Duke of Athens and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons are in full flow. Egeus, one of his lords, complains that plans for the marriage of his daughter Hermia to Demetrius have been sent into turmoil by Lysander, who has bewitched her into loving him instead. The Duke orders Hermia to marry Demetrius or become a nun. The two lovers plan to elope and arrange to meet in the enchanted wood outside Athens the following night, confiding only in Helena who is herself in love with Demetrius. She in turn, hoping to win his affection, tells Demetrius of the lovers' plan.

In the same woods a group of workers led by Peter Quince, a carpenter, and Nick Bottom, a weaver, are rehearsing a play that they plan to perform in honour of Theseus and Hippolyta's marriage.

Meanwhile Oberon and Titania, the fairy King and Queen, have quarrelled over the fact the Titania has adopted a changeling boy for her own, and refuses to allow Oberon to take him for his entourage. As a way of revenge Oberon asks his servant Puck to collect the juice of a magic plant which, if sprinkled on the eyelids of anyone as they sleep, will have the effect of making them fall in love with the first person they see upon waking. Puck is ordered to use the juice on Titania and also, having witnessed the four lovers, Oberon asks him to do the same to Demetrius in order for him to fall for Helena. However, mistaking one man for the other, Puck enchants Lysander instead.

During a break in the workers' rehearsals, Puck turns Bottom's head into that of an ass and the other players run in fear. Bottom is mystified as to what has happened and even more so when Titania awakes and dotes on him, asking her fairy followers to 'do him all courtesy'. In the

meantime Oberon realising Puck's mistake with the lovers, attempts to put it right but instead makes things worse by making both men fall for Helena which causes a rift between the two friends.



Oberon, having gained possession of the changeling child from Titania, releases everyone from the love spell and Puck removes the ass's head from Bottom, returning his own.

The lovers' experience having changed them from indulgent aristocrats into more human and sensitive characters, are able to fall in love with their proscribed suitors (Lysander with Hermia and Demetrius with Helena). The four friends return to Athens for the wedding and the artisans are able to perform their play.

At the end of the day Puck leads a torch-lit procession of the fairies through the palace and blesses the marrying couples with happiness.



## Main Characters

### At Court

- Theseus** The Duke of Athens who is to marry Hippolyta at the climax of the play. Theseus is a figure of Greek legend. He is a great hero and warrior. During the course of the play he is a strong and reasonable leader who sets an example of upholding the law. He helps to restore balance and brings common sense back to the proceedings.
- Hippolyta** Queen of the Amazons and betrothed to Theseus. She is a warm and insightful character who accepts the lovers' story as real rather than fantasy, as do other members of the court. She also encourages the 'Mechanicals' in performing their play at her wedding to Theseus.

### The Lovers

- Lysander** A romantic character, he is in love with Hermia to whom he remains faithful until Puck's accidental bewitchment causes him to dote on Helena instead.
- Demetrius** At the beginning of the play he is self-centred and described by Lysander as an 'inconsistent man'. The suitor of Hermia, he is also pursued by Helena who he eventually falls in love with after Oberon's bewitchment, allowing Hermia and Lysander's love of each other to be accepted by her family.
- Hermia** She is in love with Lysander and has a spirited character. She is devastated when Lysander suddenly falls in love with Helena. Her friendship with Helena is severely tested when, bewitched, Helena falls for Lysander too.

**Helena** She is in love with Demetrius and is rather more timid than her friend Hermia. She pursues him with such a determination that no matter how much he discourages her she still perseveres.

## The Fairies

**Oberon** The King of the Fairies, Oberon uses his magical powers to take revenge on his Queen, Titania, when she refuses to hand over her adopted 'changeling' son to him. He gives Puck the magical juice which has the effect of making those bewitched by it fall in love with the first person they see upon waking.

**Titania** The Queen of the Fairies, she encourages Puck to bewitch the lovers so that Demetrius falls in love with Helena and therefore all can be happy. When she angers Oberon he bewitches her into falling in love with Bottom.

**Puck** A servant of Oberon, also known as Robin Goodfellow. He is a good-hearted trickster and the embodiment of fairy amorality. Puck causes much misunderstanding when, instructed by Oberon, he attempts to administer a magical juice to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena. However he mistakenly bewitches Lysander instead because the 'Athenian garments he hath on' are similar to those of Demetrius.

## The 'Mechanicals'

**Peter Quince** A carpenter, he is the leader of a group of artisans who plan to put on a play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, to be performed in honour of the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta.

**Nick Bottom** A weaver who plays Pyramus in the artisan's production of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. He becomes the unlikely attention of Titania's affections when she is bewitched by Oberon.



# William Shakespeare

The person we call William Shakespeare wrote some 37 plays, as well as sonnets and full-length poems, but very little is actually known about him. That there was someone called William Shakespeare is certain, and what we know about his life comes from registrar records, court records, wills, marriage certificates and his tombstone.

The earliest record we have is of his baptism, which took place on Wednesday 26th April 1564. Traditionally it is supposed that he was, as was common practice, baptised three days after his birth, making his birthday the 23rd of April 1564 – Saint George's Day. There is, however, no real proof of this.

William's father was a John Shakespeare, a local businessman who was involved in tanning and leatherwork. John also dealt in grain and sometimes was described as a glover by trade. John was also a prominent man in Stratford. By 1560, he was one of the fourteen burgesses who made up the town council. William's mother was Mary Arden who married John Shakespeare in 1557. They had eight children, of whom William was the third. It is assumed that William grew up with them in Stratford, one hundred miles from London.

Very little is known about Shakespeare's education. We know that the King's New Grammar School taught boys basic reading and writing. We assume William attended this school since it existed to educate the sons of Stratford but we have no definite proof. There is also no evidence to suggest that William attended university.

On 28th November 1582 an eighteen-year-old William married the twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. Seven months



later, they had their first daughter, Susanna. Anne never left Stratford, living there her entire life.

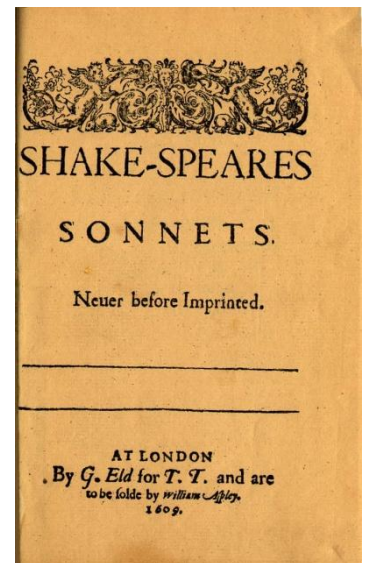
Baptism records reveal that twins Hamnet and Judith were born in February 1585. *The Taming of the Shrew* was probably written later that year. Hamnet, the only son, died in 1596, just eleven years old.

At some point, Shakespeare joined Burbage's company the Chamberlain's Men in London as an actor, and was their principal writer. He wrote for them at the Theatre in Shoreditch, and by 1594 he was a sharer, or shareholder in the company. It was through being a sharer in the profits of the company that William made his money and in 1597 he was able to purchase a large house in Stratford.

The company moved to the newly-built Globe Theatre in 1599. It was for this theatre that Shakespeare wrote many of his greatest plays. In 1613, the Globe Theatre caught fire during a performance of *Henry VIII*, one of Shakespeare's last plays, written with John Fletcher, and William retired to Stratford where he died in 1616, on 23rd April.

# Shakespeare Chronology

- 1564 Baptised on 26th April
- 1582 Marriage of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway
- 1583 Baptism of Susanna, Shakespeare's first child
- 1585 Baptism of Hamnet and Judith, Shakespeare's twins
- 1587 Approximate time of Shakespeare's move from Stratford to London
- 1590-1 *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*  
*The Taming of the Shrew*
- 1591 *Henry VI, parts 2 & 3*
- 1592 *Henry VI, part 1*  
*Titus Andronicus*
- 1592-3 *Richard III*  
*Venus and Adonis* (poem)
- 1593-4 *The Rape of Lucrece* (poem)
- 1593-1603 *The Sonnets* (poems)
- 1594 *The Comedy of Errors*
- 1594-5 *Love's Labour's Lost*
- 1595 Shakespeare first recorded as belonging to the Chamberlain's Men  
*Richard II*  
*Romeo and Juliet*  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- 1596 The death of Hamnet, Shakespeare's son  
*King John*
- 1596-7 *The Merchant of Venice*  
*Henry IV, part 1*
- 1597-8 *The Merry Wives of Windsor*  
*Henry IV, part 2*
- 1598 Shakespeare's plays start to appear in print  
*Much Ado About Nothing*
- 1598-9 *Henry V*
- 1599 *Julius Caesar*  
First record of a performance at the Globe
- 1599-1600 *As You Like It*
- 1600-1 *Hamlet*  
*Twelfth Night*
- 1602 *Troilus and Cressida*
- 1603 *Measure for Measure*  
The Chamberlain's Men become known as the King's Men  
Performances of all plays banned in Stratford
- 1603-4 *A Lover's Complaint* (poem)  
*Sir Thomas More* (in part)  
*Othello*
- 1604-5 *All's Well that Ends Well*
- 1605 *Timon of Athens*
- 1605-6 *King Lear*
- 1606 *Macbeth*  
*Antony and Cleopatra*
- 1607 *Pericles*
- 1608 *Coriolanus*



1609	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>
1610	<i>Cymbeline</i>
1611	<i>The Tempest</i>
1612	It is about now that Shakespeare returns to Stratford
1613	<i>Henry VIII</i> (originally known as <i>All is True</i> ) <i>The Globe</i> burns down during a performance of <i>Henry VIII</i> <i>Cardenio</i> (lost)
1613-14	<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i>
1614	<i>The Globe</i> is rebuilt
1616	Buried in Stratford having died on 23rd April
1623	First Folio of Shakespeare's works published



# Themes

**Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.**

## Love & Marriage

Love in its many forms gets an exploration in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – whether it be a mature, regulated marriage between a Prince (Theseus) and his bride (Hippolyta); the young impetuous love of Hermia and Lysander, or the renewal of a relationship such as that between Titania and Oberon. But unsuitable love also features – in bold, physical comedy between Titania and Bottom, and in the darker, more psychologically irrational relationship between Helena and Demetrius. Helena knows that Demetrius has treated her badly, but she can't stop loving him.

*'The course of true love never did run smooth.'* [i.i.134]

As Lysander comments, one of the major themes of the play is the difficulty of love. But the light-hearted tone of the play ensures that this never veers towards tragedy for long. Mostly we enjoy watching the undignified struggles of the Lovers, secure in the knowledge that all will 'come good' in the end.

## Gender

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* opens with a woman presented with a stark choice: marry the man of her father's choice, or spend the rest of her life in a monastery.

Renaissance society was a predominantly patriarchal one – just as the King was the Father of the nation, so the Father was the king of his own family. Any threat to this threatened the whole hierarchy of a structured society.

According to Church doctrine, a father had the right to marry his daughter or keep her a single woman, unless it was against the woman's own conscience.

Marriage, as the means of perpetuating patriarchal power, was important, and rebellion against this was a serious matter. So serious, in fact, that women who rebelled in Shakespeare's plays were often seen as mad. And in the tragedies, women like Ophelia and Lady Macbeth actually *are* mad.

Hermia herself acknowledges that she is being irrational:

*'I do entreat your grace to pardon me,*

*I know not by what power I am made bold,'* [i.i.60]

And Theseus tells her that her father 'should be as a God'.

The serious, threatening reality of the Athenian court is far too heavy and aggressive for a comedy. The lovers escape male oppression by retreating into the natural, magical world of the forest. But here the order is also threatened by Titania's fight with Oberon. 'Am not I thy Lord?' he asks her – a radical question repeating throughout the play.

Ultimately, Puck – himself practically genderless – utters the final stereotypes: 'Jack shall have Jill, Nought shall go ill'. The final order will be restored, the women will marry who they choose, but only because Theseus, the highest patriarch, agrees.

## Magic & Dreams

As soon as we reach the woods, the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of raucous chaos, pervaded with magical people and their magical powers.

It gives the play its sense of festival, of holiday-making, in which the normal order is turned upside down, and the unexpected can happen at any moment.

The human characters try to explain these mystifying events by assuming they have had some sort of a dream. Shakespeare is interested in the workings of dreams themselves – how one loses a sense of time, of purpose, of logic. And this, of course, relates to the experience the audience is having – of witnessing a fantastical illusion in which nothing is quite what it seems.

## Order & Chaos

Theseus and Hippolyta, as representatives of a structured, ordered society, bookend *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. At the beginning of the play this order is seen as repressive and cruel by the lovers, but at the end Theseus overrules Egeus and allows the happy reunion of the couples to be acknowledged and celebrated by the Athenian court. They appear in daylight, like the antithesis of Oberon and Titania, to bring the magical, unstable world of the forest to an end. Often in productions, the parts of Titania / Hippolyta and Oberon / Theseus are played by the same actress and actor, to underline this parallel.

## The Ending

*'Think no more of this night's accidents /  
But as the fierce vexation of a dream.'*  
[V.i.65]

Is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* itself a dream? The play has several 'endings' – one where the Lovers finally leave the wood, one where the mechanicals' play ends, and then one after Puck makes his final speech. This blurs the distinction between the play's illusion and the reality of the audience going back to their lives. Puck:

*What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor*

*An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.'*  
[III.i.731f]

Any play which itself includes a play is reminding us of the very *nature* of theatre, we are looking at actors looking at actors, and in doing so we are holding up a mirror to ourselves. We're forced to ask questions about ourselves as an audience: what is it like to watch a play? Why do we do it? And how can it change our perceptions of life?

We're asked to believe that the Love Potion on Demetrius' eyes makes him finally see the truth of his love for Helena. Just as Theseus refuses to believe the Lovers' story of what happened in the wood, so we may choose to disbelieve the action we have seen on stage – but that's where we need a little Love Potion ourselves. Perhaps sometimes the very things we think we see with our own eyes need to be adjusted by the magic of theatre....

**BETH FLINTOFF**

# Adapting Shakespeare

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's most original and skilfully constructed works. Although he took hints from other sources - such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for Titania's name and the mechanicals' play *Pyramus and Thisbe* - the basic narrative seems, unusually for Shakespeare, to have been his own invention.

Largely because of its subject matter and style, it has been suggested that the *Dream* might have been written for the celebration of an Elizabethan court marriage; but if so, it was also given at the public theatres, since the title page of the first printed edition (1600) says specifically that it was 'sundry times publicly acted... by the Lord Chamberlain's servants', the company to which Shakespeare belonged.

The *Dream* is about love and marriage; Shakespeare cleverly interweaves four distinct groups of characters - the court, the lovers, the mechanicals and the fairies - in order to dramatise various aspects of the lovers' experience. The wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta is the event towards which the stories of the four groups move, and which finally unites all four in the final scene: the mechanicals have prepared their play to celebrate the occasion, which also marks the marriages of the four young lovers and the resolution of the still more acrimonious conflict between Oberon and Titania. The fairies' blessing of the palace at the end of the play is a powerful image of the harmony to which the play has been moving. The final harmony has only been achieved by characters who have endured extreme dispute.

As always with Shakespearean comedy we seem to look potential disaster straight in the face. It is as if Shakespeare feels that the resolutions of comedy must be put to the test of harsh experience if they are to be convincing: the happy ending is the more appreciated if both the characters and

audience are aware of the things that threaten it. When the mechanicals perform their play, the fatal love of Pyramus and Thisbe is directly relevant to the experiences of the four lovers in the wood: without Oberon's benevolent intervention to restore their correct pairings, this is how they might have ended up.

Shakespeare's characteristic of putting together contrasting elements is in full flow in the scene where Titania awakes and falls in love with the ass-headed Bottom. The scene helps with the play's dramatisation of love in its many forms: its joys and sadness, its idealism and its selfishness, and the way in which people fall in love with outward appearances. It is typical of the play that it touches on extreme love, the encounter between Beauty and the Beast in the Titania/Bottom scene, and yet also takes love to a higher, more spiritual plane elsewhere.

The play, technically, takes place in Athens, and the fairies have come 'from the farthest steepe of India'; but a more English play it would be hard to imagine. This is clearly apparent in Shakespeare's dramatisation of the fairy kingdom. He has taken hints from English folklore for Oberon, Titania and Puck. All three are entirely original creations characterised primarily by means of the language they are given, the famous lyrical writing of the play; the lyricism is as varied as everything else in the *Dream*. It is used to suggest the rural world which the fairies inhabit and from which they draw their power. The relationship is a mutual one, and when Oberon and Titania quarrel, nature itself is thrown into chaos. The fairy queen, far from being ethereal, expresses herself in terms of everyday country experience. It is this quality that gives the *Dream* its flavour, and why, despite the references to Athens and India, it seems to be taking place in an English rural community.

**ROGER WARREN**

## Performance History

*Midsummer Night's Dream* may have been written for a private occasion, possibly to celebrate a wedding in 1596. By the time it was published in 1600, the title page claimed it had been 'sundry times publickely acted.'

When Samuel Pepys saw it in 1662 he thought it 'the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life.'

Ellen Terry, aged 9, played Puck in 1856 for Charles Kean, and there was a lavish production in 1900 with troops of children as fairies. Revivals in 1905 and 1911 included live rabbits!

Then Harley Granville-Barker created a revolutionary production in 1914 by cutting back the extravagance and using slate-grey canvass screens.

Peter Hall staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Stratford in 1959 and again in 1962, with Judi Dench playing Titania. In 1970, Peter Brook caused a sensation by doubling the roles of Theseus/ Oberon and Hippolyta/Titania.

In 1989, John Caird at the Royal Shakespeare Company directed the play. The wood was represented by a scrap-yard in which the fairies wore clip-on wings, tutus, big boots, and chewed gum.



A world away from 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology and innovation, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is perhaps one of Shakespeare's most escapist plays for a modern audience, and has proved his

most popular play at the box office. The play is open to wide interpretation and the opportunities for imaginative portrayal are endless. Creation Theatre Company in Oxford featured Oberon and Titania on stilts, while cult touring company Ilyria had its fairies on a trampoline. The play has been adapted to opera, film, ballet, and even a swing musical!

**BETH FLINTOFF**

# Interview with Edward Hall

## Director

**Propeller first performed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* five years ago. How has it changed?**

The design is the same in principle, but only two of the cast are the same. I'd forgotten how wonderful it is. My attitudes have changed – I've done more theatre work, and I've grown up, I'm a father now. And as life changes, I find that one's take on the play changes.



**Have you found yourself trying to recreate bits that worked well last time?**

No, it's got a rough shape, but I can't remember *exactly* what we did last time, and with a new cast it's different. It's a revival with the next generation of Propeller.

**In terms of the rehearsal process, how do you start to create the shape of the play?**

It's a gradual process; we work it out as we go along. The actors get to know each other and the play. But I always have a starting point – I tell the actors 'you're coming in from here and let's play the game that you desire her', and we play that for a bit. The actors need to work out what their action is, and what they want to achieve from each line. Shakespeare tells them line by line how their action changes.

**What is your approach to speaking the verse?**

Speak it properly! Five beats in every line, ten syllables, that's a regular Shakespearean verse. To my mind there are no two ways of doing it. You should speak a line of verse metrically as it's written, and any irregularities are there for a reason. You can't ignore how Shakespeare's written it. There are lots of rhyming couplets in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so the first rule is to make it actually *rhyme*. It sounds obvious, but a lot of people don't do it. Sometimes Shakespeare will do a

rhyming couplet to mark the end of scene, and sometimes he'll then do another one, and then another one, so you've got three false endings to a scene. Rhyming couplets are often a comic device as well. *The Merchant of Venice* is more complex as a text because it doesn't follow that kind of pattern.

Once we've got the meter, we find the antitheses (opposites) such as heat and cold, desire and hatred. Sometimes they are in a line, sometimes in a pairing of lines, or in the whole speech. We try to seek these out and bang them against each other, which gives its sense of meaning. It's a device that's very robust, and it works in an outdoor theatre, which was what Shakespeare was writing for. Sometimes the ideas are long – I think they had longer thoughts than we do now, so it takes a bit of practising from the actor. And the end result is that the speech should be quick and light, exactly how Hamlet instructs the players ('Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue.' *Hamlet* III.ii.1).

### **Can you describe the rehearsal process?**

To begin with, we do a bit of work on the text and look at the conceptual idea. We talk about the world we're going to create (for example, *The Merchant of Venice* is set in a prison). And then we work on some musical ideas. This takes a week or so, and then the actors start to stand up and move around.

The designer, Michael Pavelka, and I create a sort of playground first, which can be used in a hundred different ways. Shakespeare didn't write plays that were intended to be design-heavy, with lots of big sets. So Michael and I try not to nail down big heavy design concepts beforehand. We want to be able to change our mind once we're rehearsing, and once the actors are working in the space.

### **The Propeller performances are often very physical. For example, in the scenes where the Lovers are in the wood the actors are very active on the stage. How do you create this physicality without the help of a choreographer?**

It comes from extending an impulse – if a character has an impulse to attack another one, then we'll see how far it can go. It all comes from the actor's intentions.

When we go out to the woods for example, it's not a nice environment to be in. It's dark and violent. That's because they are there to *find* themselves, but the process is not a comfortable one. Helena won't let Demetrius go, and she's got him there under false pretences. Demetrius is furious that Lysander has run off with his girl. Helena can't walk away from Demetrius, because she wants any kind of physical contact, and she's actually rather masochistic. Lysander talks Hermia into going to the woods, and they both idealise how beautiful it's going to be. And then the first

time we meet them she's fainting and he's lost, and they have to have a lie down! It has to be physically tough, so that they find out how they really feel.

**Many people find the way that Demetrius suddenly loves Helena at the end rather unbelievable. What do you think?**

It's not problematic in my mind because I think Demetrius only loves Hermia because he doesn't want Lysander to have her. I don't believe Helena is ugly, as she's sometimes played, she is just lacking in confidence. Demetrius isn't really in love with Hermia, he's playing one-upmanship and she's got a good dowry. Meanwhile, Helena's father is just 'old Nedar', so he's clearly not rich. Hermia is the catch. When Demetrius wakes up, his memory is that he loves Helena, and it's so beautifully articulated ('But like in sickness did I loathe this food; / But, as in health, come to my natural taste, / Now I do wish it, love it, long for it' IV.i.177-9).

And I don't see why audiences should find it sudden – people get together suddenly all the time! Love is like that.



**Do you ever regret decisions you've made on stage?**

Oh, constantly. That's my job. Then I'll niggle away at it and try and make it better. I never stop working. Nothing is ever perfect, either in idea or execution. Even after the production has opened, I'll keep changing little things here and there. Some things are just like blocked chakras, and once it's up on the stage and we've done a few previews, I'll try and unblock the chakras, to allow for future development. A play is a living organism that is slowly growing, so I go away for a bit and then come back and water it.

# Interview with Michael Pavelka

## Designer



### **What does a theatre designer do?**

A theatre designer works closely with the director, actors and other members of a production team to provide scenery and costumes for a performance. Everything you see on the stage – and I mean absolutely everything - has been 'designed'. All the parts of the design should support the ideas behind the production and often the designer's view will shape the show's concept as well as its style and 'look'.

Designers usually make drawings and accurate models to share their ideas with everyone else; particularly when working with an ensemble company like Propeller. This time I used computer programmes to model the set instead of building a scale model from card and glue. These will then be used in different ways to realise the actual set, costumes and props. Sometimes the designer will also draw pictures of how the different scenes will look; this is called storyboarding, and helps everyone to see how the designed production will move in time and space as the story is acted out.

The designer will try to oversee as much of the building of the production as possible, attending rehearsals, costume fittings and visiting the workshop where the set is constructed and painted. When all the parts of the show come together in the days leading up to the first performance (or opening night), the designer is on hand to make sure the ideas are completed on stage and make any last minute changes.

It is most important that a designer uses eyes and mind as well as hands!

## An Interview with the cast

**DA** David Acton

**DN** David Newman

**TM** Tom McDonald

**RD** Richard Dempsey

**TW** Tam Williams

### How do you go about playing a character of the opposite sex?

**DA** - As with any character, particularly when Shakespeare uses verse, you've got to start with the text, and allow the character to develop itself. Whether that actually happens in practice or not I don't know, but that is the aim. As with playing a woman, well I'm actually playing two, so they've got to be different. At the moment I'm not really thinking about it too much, I'm just seeing what happens naturally from playing the scenes and from the text.

**DN** - I agree, I've never played a woman before but with Shakespeare it often seems that you say the words and [Shakespeare] seems to do a lot of the work for you. I'm sure there'll be a physicality that develops over the next two-and-a-half weeks, and of course a dress! I'm actually trying not to think of it any differently than any other character.

**DA** - I've played two women before with Propeller and we're not trying to fool anybody, we're just men playing women, we're acting women not trying to be a woman.

**TM** - Another thing Ed (the Director) says about playing women is that it's generally in the spirit of encouraging the audience to invest in their own imagination, giving themselves to the play. You know when you're watching men playing women, you work a little harder to envisage the world of the play, which can be rewarding and help the understanding to the audience.

### How do the relationships of the lovers develop? Is this complicated because the parts are played by men?

**RD** - I don't think it's complicated at all by us being men. In fact I think it allows us to be a little bit more physical. The lovers' scenes are complex anyway and it may have actually allowed us more liberty.

**TW** - That physicality is a bit of a Propeller trait. We can enjoy the fact that men can throw each other around.

**DA** - What's it like for you [Tom] instead of seeing, for example, a gorgeous blonde Helena that you're confronted by a middle aged 'old bugger'?

**TM** - You just have to imagine, you're not going to fancy every actress you do a play with so it really doesn't make a lot of difference.

### As 21st century performers of the play, how do you tackle the language and style for a modern audience?

**TM** - Basically, don't patronise the audience by modernising and trust that if you do the story according to the stakes and the plot, then this should allow you to express the characters and situations.

**DA** - The most important thing is to obey the verse structure, it's superbly written, so use it and that really helps. That's one of Ed's main aims, you follow the writing and that's the first step of clarity. Therefore those complicated speeches, which sometimes you listen to actors speaking and can't understand, become clear. An awful lot of people say of Propeller's, and indeed other well spoken, productions – 'Have you modernised it? Have you changed the words, the language?' But it's actually just spoken properly so that you can understand it.

**TW** - Ed's mantra is to tell the story as fast as you can with clarity and 'vim'.



**How does the different uses of language i.e. prose and verse help with the development of different types of characters, for example, with their status?**

**TM** - Well the 'Mechanicals' don't speak in verse, they write verse and they write it badly.

**RD** - And that's Shakespeare's joke isn't it, sending up other writers of his time.

**TM** - Yes, I think having the verse elevates a character's status, if they're an orator or royalty for example. The 'Mechanicals' are supposed to be a bunch of workers who have a go at theatre for the first time, so in that sense it was probably Shakespeare's intention to make their language quite minimal and colloquial.

**TW** - I think that even though we've got these props and costumes, just coming on stage in a different situation with different words, the way the verse is written helps you accept immediately that this is not now Lysander but Peter Quince, or this person is not Puck, because it makes you become different. The language does it for you, even playing a woman you really don't have to do too much.

**DA** - The rhyming couplets are quite interesting as well. There are a lot of rhyming couplets for the lovers. When you first speak a line with rhyming couplets it seems a little phoney so you try to hide it a bit, but actually you have to think – that's how it was written, let's do 'em and do 'em properly, do 'em to the full – then actually everything becomes clearer.

**TM** - It's about heightened emotion and heightened language, and we all have these moments in life when we have heightened articulacy, when we really have that need to communicate. You'd probably be surprised how close we come to the language that is written in the verse.



**With the complex plot strands and different groups of characters, how easy has it been to create a shortened version of the play?**

**DA** - Well we're down to three strands rather than four. We've pretty much lost the court, which is just referred to at the beginning and we've got an interesting way to represent Theseus and Hippolyta in the wedding scenes at the end of the play.

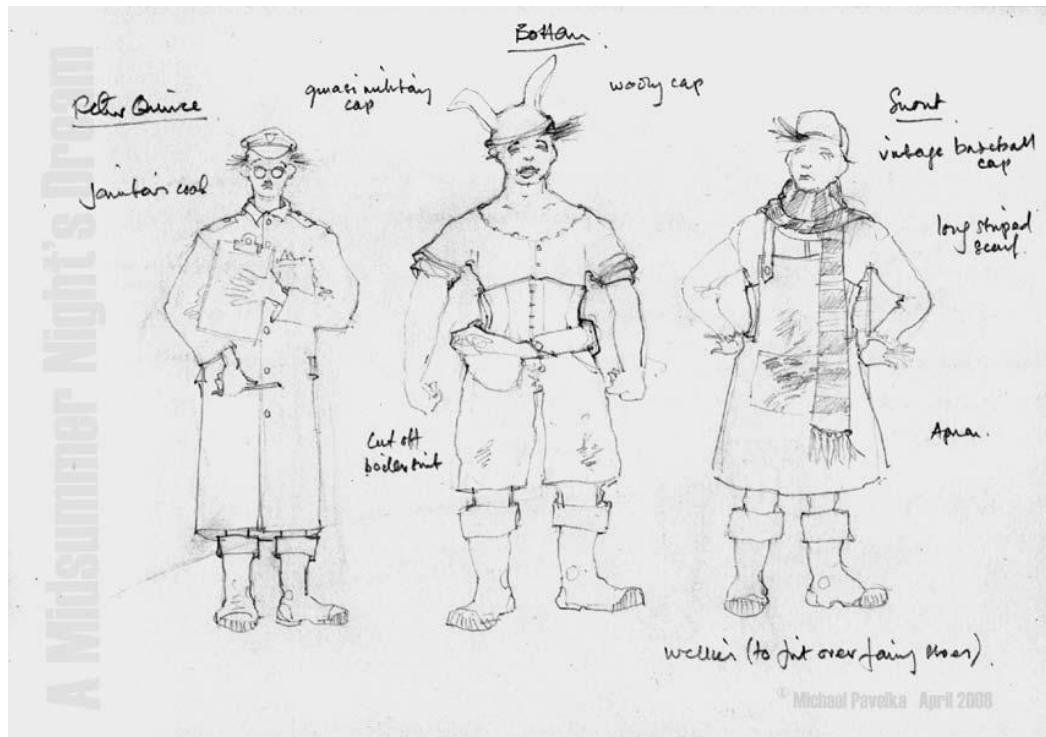
**TW** - I think Roger's got the story there; you really have to trust that he knows this play. We have added some more of Titania, we felt we were losing her a little, but I think he's got all of the aspects right.

**DN** - The audible story is fine, when we were reading the play it all made perfect sense. It's harder when you try and make it a visual story though and you're going from one character to another. When a character has to go to sleep and then become a fairy, you have to consider how to make that transition and stop the audience getting confused about who you are at any certain point.



Cast members of Propeller's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2008; produced by The Watermill Theatre, Newbury.

# Design Exercise



Michael Pavelka's costume sketches for the 'Mechanicals'

## 1 - What does costume tell us?

What does the costume tell us about the 'Mechanicals'?

How much can we learn about each character from the costumes they wear?

What class do they belong to?

## 2 - Design a costume

Choose a character from the 'Main Characters' page and do a costume design sketch for them.

Decide what materials each part of the costume should be made from and label your sketch.



# Script Exercise

## 1 - Lovers' scenes

Act out a scene between the 4 lovers in 3 groups - one all male, one all female and one male/female. Does this affect the relationships? What stays the same? What messages about love is Shakespeare giving?



## 2 - Verse vs Prose

Divide into groups, half of which read and then act out a section written in verse, while the other half a section of prose. What is understood from the sections about the characters, their status and their relationships?

Take another section of verse and rewrite it as prose (i.e. just write the sentences in a continuous paragraph).

Read out the original verse and the rewritten prose.

How does this effect our understanding of the scene and the character's relationships?

Now read the verse version strictly in the iambic rhythm... de dum de dum etc...

Try it again, getting louder at the end of the lines.

What effect does the verse have?

How did writing it out as prose help?

Why does Shakespeare use verse?

## Verse

### PUCK:

Believe me, King of shadows, I mistook.  
Did not you tell me I should know the man  
By the Athenian garments he had on?  
And so far blameless proves my enterprise  
That I have 'nointed an Athenian's eyes.  
And so far am I glad it so did sort,  
As this their jangling I esteem a sport.

### OBERON:

Thou seest these lovers seek a place to fight.  
Hie therefore, Robin, overcast the night.  
The starry welkin cover thou anon  
With drooping fog as black as Acheron,  
And lead these testy rivals so astray  
As one come not within another's way.  
Like to Lysander sometime frame thy  
tongue,  
Then sir Demetrius up with bitter wrong,  
And sometime rail thou like Demetrius;  
And from each other look thou lead them  
thus  
Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting  
sleep  
With leaden legs and batty wings doth  
creep.  
Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye -  
Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,  
To take from thence all error with his might,  
And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.  
When they next wake, all this derision  
Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision,  
And back to Athens shall the lovers wend  
With league whose date till death shall  
never end.  
Whiles I in this affair do thee employ  
I'll to my Queen and beg her Indian boy,  
And then I will her charmed eye release  
From monster's view, and all things shall be  
peace.

**PUCK**

My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,  
 For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,  
 And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger,  
 At whose approach ghosts wandering here and there  
 Troop home to churchyards. Damnèd spirits all  
 That in crossways and floods have burial  
 Already to their wormy beds are gone.  
 For fear lest day should look their shames upon  
 They wilfully themselves exile from light,  
 And must for aye consort with black-browed night.

**Prose****QUINCE**

Is all our company here?

**BOTTOM**

You were best to call them generally,  
 man by man, according to the scrip.

**QUINCE**

Here is the scroll of every man's name  
 which is thought fit through all Athens  
 to play in our interlude before the  
 Duke and the Duchess on his wedding  
 day at night.

**BOTTOM**

First, good Peter Quince, say what the  
 play treats on; then read the names of  
 the actors; and so grow to a point.

**QUINCE**

Marry, our play is *The most lamentable  
 comedy and most cruel death of  
 Pyramus and Thisbe*.

**BOTTOM**

A very good piece of work, I assure  
 you, and a merry.

**3 – Magic**

People in Shakespeare's time still used herbs for medicine and most lived off the land and believed in the power of nature and the seasons. How does Shakespeare make the fairies seem magical and different to the other characters?

What else adds to the magical quality of the play?

If it were set in a modern city would the magical qualities still be evident?

Why is darkness and the moon important?

Look at the text and make a note of how many times words like 'moon' and 'dark' are used and how these words evoke the scenes.

Remembering that in Shakespeare's time the actors would not have had lighting and scenery in the way we do today.



## Understanding the character

*Fabulous fact: the famous actor John Geilgud always liked to know what shoes his character would wear!*

When an actor plays a role, it's essential to understand as much as possible about the character. This means looking carefully at the script for clues. If the script doesn't provide all the answers, the actor can, with the guidance of the director, use his or her imagination to fill in the gaps. When you know more about your character, you can start to make him/her a living, breathing person.

Taking your favourite character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, complete the following questionnaire as if you really are that person. Some answers are there in the text; and some you can decide for yourself. Be imaginative!

NAME: .....

AGE: ..... GENDER: M / F

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?:.....

WHAT'S YOUR JOB?: .....

WHAT DO YOU LOOK LIKE?

FAMILY FACTS (e.g. Brothers / Sisters / Children / Parents ages, occupations etc)

WRITE YOUR OWN CHRONOLOGY (e.g. date of birth, schooling, different jobs, events etc)

WHAT ARE YOUR DREAMS AND/OR FEARS?

DO YOU HAVE ANY GOOD HABITS? BAD HABITS?

DESCRIBE YOUR TYPICAL DAY:

ANYTHING ELSE YOU KNOW:

# Improvisation & Thought Tracking

In this exercise, you are trying to imagine what the characters of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might have been feeling moments before, or after, scenes that we see in the play.

1. First of all, choose from one of the scenarios listed at the bottom of this page (or create your own).
2. In small groups, read the scene from where the quote is taken.
3. Cast your improvised scene.
4. Prepare for the improvisation – it may help to complete the Character Questionnaire from Exercise 1. You should also briefly talk through any important parts of the scene that you think should happen.
5. Show your improvisation to the rest of the Group. Once it has been performed, the whole class should discuss which bits worked, and which bits didn't seem to work so well.
6. Perform the improvisation again, but this time, any member of the audience can shout 'Freeze', at which point the actors stop and the audience member can ask questions, such as 'What are you thinking?' or 'Why did you walk away at that point', etc.

## Suggested Scenarios

1. *'As she is mine, I may dispose of her;*

*Which shall be either to this gentleman,*

*Or to her death,' [1.i.44]*

Hermia and Lysander tell Hermia's father, Egeus, that they are in love.

2. *'Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit, through all of Athens, to play in our interlude before the Duke and the Duchess on his wedding day.'* [1.ii.4]

The Mechanicals (Nick Bottom, Francis Flute, Tom Snout, Snug, and Robin Starveling) arrive at auditions in Athens for a play to be directed by Peter Quince.

3. *'And in the wood, where often you  
and I*

4. *Upon faint primrose beds were  
wont to lie,*

*Emptying our bosoms of their counsel  
sweet,'*

Helena and Hermia have met in the woods for one of their secret meetings. (This could take place either before the events of the play, or after, when they are married.)

5. *'The object and the pleasure of  
mine eye,*

*Is only Helena. To her, my lord,*

*Was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia;*

*But like in sickness did I loathe this  
food;'* [IV.i.174-7]

After the events of the play, Demetrius and Helena discuss their strange adventures in the wood, and Demetrius tries to explain how his love for Helena came back so suddenly.

## Acting as Action

***'The actors need to work out what their action is, and what they want to achieve from each line. Shakespeare tells them line by line how their action changes.'***

**Edward Hall**

This exercise is designed to get you working in the same way that Propeller's professional actors do on the text.

1. Choose a short section of the play that you find interesting (there are some suggestions below).
2. With a partner, take a part each and read it through. Make sure you understand it all.
3. Now write down some possible actions for each line – this means thinking about exactly what you are trying to achieve when you say it. We've put some examples below to get you started. It will always be a verb, and describe something that you are *doing*.

For example, when Theseus says 'Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword' he might be '*adoring*' Hippolyta, or he could be *flirting* with her, or trying to *impress* her, and so on.

4. Now practice saying the lines with your partner, thinking about the action. Try some different actions and see how that changes the way you say it. You can even try some slightly wackier or unexpected verbs, to see what happens.

## Suggested Actions

Here are just a few to get you started:

Adore

Rebel

Chastise

Flirt

Seduce

Humour

Patronise

Destroy

Fight

Confide

Annoy

Love

Cherish

Organise

Ridicule

Humiliate

Belittle

Impress

## THE GREAT 'MND' QUIZ

1. Who brings the complaint against Hermia to Theseus in Act I?

- (A) Egeus
- (B) Bottom
- (C) Hippolyta
- (D) Demetrius

8	A
---	---

2. Who is chosen to play the lion in the Mechanicals' play?

- (A) Bottom
- (B) Quince
- (C) Peaseblossom
- (D) Snug

1	D
---	---

3. Which of the young Athenians is first affected by the love potion?

- (A) Lysander
- (B) Helena
- (C) Hermia
- (D) Demetrius

2	A
---	---

4. Which man does Hermia's father want her to marry?

- (A) Lysander
- (B) Demetrius
- (C) Theseus
- (D) Philostrate

3	B
---	---

5. Where do Lysander and Hermia plan to be married?

- (A) Theseus's palace
- (B) Lysander's aunt's house
- (C) The temple of Diana
- (D) A forest glade

4	B
---	---

5	C
---	---

6. What does Oberon want that Titania refuses to give him?

- (A) Her attendant, an Indian prince
- (B) Her magic wand
- (C) Her maid-in-waiting
- (D) Her love

6	A
---	---

7. Why does Pyramus, in the craftsmen's play, kill himself?

- (A) Thisbe does not love him
- (B) Thisbe has been killed by a lion
- (C) Thisbe has been killed by her father
- (D) Pyramus *believes* Thisbe has been killed by a lion because he finds her tattered garment at their meeting place

7	D
---	---

8. Of whom is Hippolyta the queen?

- (A) The Pygmies
- (B) The Centaurs
- (C) The Amazons
- (D) The Babylonians

9	C
---	---

9. How does Puck prevent Demetrius and Lysander from fighting?

- (A) By freezing them
- (B) By transforming their weapons to weeds
- (C) By squeezing the love potion onto their eyelids
- (D) By mimicking their voices and causing each to get lost in a separate part of the forest

10	D
----	---

10. Which of the women is afraid of fighting?

- (A) Hippolyta
- (B) Hermia
- (C) Titania
- (D) Helena

11	D
----	---

11. Who does Demetrius love at the end of the play?

- (A) Titania
- (B) Hippolyta
- (C) Helena
- (D) Hermia

12	C
----	---

12. With whom does Titania fall in love in Act III?

- (A) Snug
- (B) Puck
- (C) Bottom
- (D) Mustardseed

13	C
----	---

13. What prank does Puck play on Bottom?

- (A) He transforms him into a bear
- (B) He steals his clothes
- (C) He changes his voice into that of a wood thrush
- (D) He changes his head into that of an ass

14	D
----	---

14. Who first thinks of using the love potion on Titania?

- (A) Puck
- (B) Oberon
- (C) Bottom
- (D) Cobweb

15	B
----	---

15. Why is the flower whose juice Oberon seeks special?

- (A) Titania has kissed it
- (B) One of Cupid's arrows struck it
- (C) It was a traditional symbol of love in English folklore
- (D) Fairies sleep in it

17	B
----	---

16. Which of the Mechanicals is in charge of the rehearsals?

- (A) Quince
- (B) Snout
- (C) Bottom
- (D) Starveling

18	A
----	---

17. In what year was Shakespeare born?

- (A) 1563
- (B) 1616
- (C) 1564
- (D) 1615

19	C
----	---

18. Who tells Demetrius that Lysander and Hermia are planning to elope?

- (A) Hermia
- (B) Flute
- (C) Puck
- (D) Helena

20	D
----	---

19. What food does Bottom crave after Puck's mischief?

- (A) Steak
- (B) Kidney pie
- (C) Squirrel
- (D) Hay

21	D
----	---

20. What are Theseus and Hippolyta about to do before they discover the sleeping lovers?

- (A) Listen to Theseus's hounds