

**"FRESH, PHYSICAL AND UTTERLY MODERN"**

INDEPENDENT

**PROPELLER**

PRESENTS

**POCKET  
COMEDY**

**SHAKESPEARE'S  
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS  
POCKET-SIZE**

DIRECTED BY **EDWARD HALL**

"NOT AN  
OPPORTUNITY  
FOR MIRTH  
IS MISSED.  
**IT'S AN  
UNMITIGATED  
HOOT"**



DAILY  
TELEGRAPH



"RIOTOUSLY  
FUNNY...  
A TOUCH  
OF GENIUS...  
**THE WHOLE  
THING IS  
A HUGE  
PLEASURE"**



MAIL ON SUNDAY

## The Comedy of Errors

### Pocket Comedy Education Pack

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Education Pack compiled by Will Wollen with Michèle Waugh.	

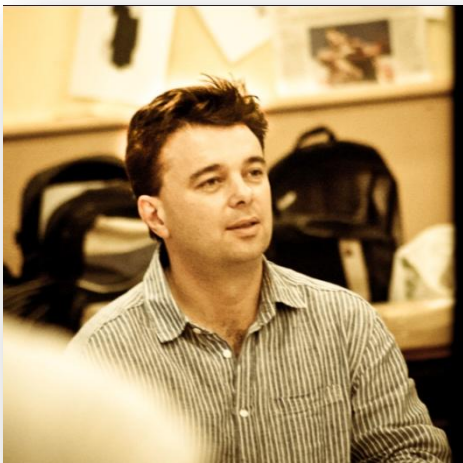




## About Propeller

Propeller is an all-male Shakespeare company which seeks to find a more engaging way of expressing Shakespeare and to more completely explore the relationship between text and performance. Mixing a rigorous approach to the text with a modern physical aesthetic, they have been influenced by mask work, animation and classic and modern film and music from all ages. Productions are directed by Edward Hall and designed by Michael Pavelka. Lighting is designed by Ben Ormerod.

Propeller has toured internationally to Australia, China, Spain, Mexico, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Cyprus, Ireland, Tokyo, Gdansk, Germany, Italy, Malta, Hong Kong and the U.S.A.



*As our times have changed, so our responses to Shakespeare's work have changed too and I believe we have become an ensemble in the true sense of the word: We break and reform our relationships using the spirit of the particular play we are working on.*

*We have grown together, eaten together, argued and loved together. We have toured all over the world from Huddersfield to Bangladesh. We have played in National theatres, ancient*

*amphitheatres, farmyards and globe theatres. We have been applauded, shot at and challenged by different audiences wherever we have gone.*

*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.*

Edward Hall, Artistic Director.



## To Teachers

This pack has been designed to complement your class's visit to see Propeller's production of *Pocket Comedy*.

Most of the pack is aimed at A-level and GCSE students of Drama and English Literature in the UK, but some of the sections, and suggestions for classroom activities, may be of use to teachers teaching pupils at Key Stages 2, 3 & 4, while students studying in other countries and those in higher education may find much of interest in these pages.

While there are some images, the pack has been deliberately kept simple from a graphic point of view so that most pages can easily be photocopied for use in the classroom.

Your feedback is most welcome. You can make any comments on the pack on the Propeller website forum. [www.propeller.org.uk](http://www.propeller.org.uk)

I hope you find the pack useful.

Will Wollen

Education Consultant

Propeller

## The Comedy of Errors

*The Comedy of Errors* belongs to the outset of Shakespeare's career and was performed, presumably by Shakespeare's company, at Gray's Inn on 28 December 1594. Was it then a new play? The London theatres were closed, because of a virulent outbreak of plague, from July 1592 to April 1594, during which time Shakespeare wrote his two narrative poems; he may also have written *The Comedy of Errors* at that time, ready for performance when the theatres re-opened. *Errors* used to be regarded as an even earlier work, perhaps written for local performance before he left Stratford; but this view reflected a low estimate of the play, and modern performances have shown it to be a brilliant piece of theatrical mechanism: it is hard to see how this could have been achieved without the experience of working in the professional theatre.

Central to *The Comedy of Errors* is the rapid quick fire exchange of single lines, wit-combats, as in the debate between Adriana and Luciana about a wife's duties, or the almost music-hall cross-talk between Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse. Trying to keep control of his own identity amongst the confusions of *Errors*, Antipholus of Syracuse says 'if that I am I'; this is a device

### Pause for thought...

There is a strong element of physical violence in the play.

How does Shakespeare make this acceptable to the audience?

Shakespeare uses in other plays written at the same time; for example *Richard III*. *Errors* is a comedy of mistaken identity, and Shakespeare treats his main source, the *Manaechmi* by the classical dramatist Plautus, in an entirely personal way. His interest in this play may be traced to his schooldays. The main concern of Elizabethan schools was the teaching of Latin; and in pursuit of this aim, pupils were allowed to perform Latin plays, including the *Manaechmi*; so Shakespeare may well have got to know the play by acting in it. But he made substantial changes. To begin with, he gave the twin masters of the *Manaechmi* twin servants, thus doubling the potential for confusions and mistaking. Then he moved the setting from Epidamnum to Ephesus, which was famous – or notorious – in the ancient world, and in the Bible, as a centre of witchcraft, so that Antipholus of Syracuse half expects strange things to happen to him.

But Shakespeare's most crucial, and most personal, changes modify the tone of his original. He enclosed the central confusions within a framework – the story of Aegeon and his ultimate reunion with his wife and family – taken from a very different kind of story, the legend of Apollonius of Tyre, to which he returned at the end of his career in *Pericles*. Still more significant, he introduced an element of romance into the mistakings, in the wooing of Luciana by Antipholus of Syracuse, where the language looks forward to his later comedies, and connects with his own love poetry in the *Sonnets*. Antipholus calls Luciana 'mine own self's better part', a phrase which echoes Shakespeare's calling his lover 'the better part of me' in *Sonnets* 39 and 74. His interest in twins, both here and in *Twelfth Night*, may also derive from personal considerations. He was the father of twins, and this may have informed

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Antipholus of Syracuse's sense of loss and of personal disorientation when separated from his twin:

*I to the world am like a drop of water  
That in the ocean seeks another drop,  
Who falling there to find his fellow forth,  
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.  
So I, to find a mother and a brother,  
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.*

*The Comedy of Errors* is technically a farce; but one of the most interesting aspects of farce is how painful it often is, how often the audience is invited to laugh at other people's misfortunes, as in the repeated beating of the Dromios or Adriana's sense of marital betrayal. But again, Shakespeare has it both ways: the scene in which Adriana pours out her resentment to the wrong Antipholus is a perfect example of comedy of mistaking; but at the same time we feel for her in her unhappiness. *Errors*' treatment of money, like its Plautine original, takes place in a primarily mercantile society, symbolised by the theatrical props: Antipholus' bag of gold, and especially the golden chain which leads to so many of the confusions in the second half of the play. And yet the topic of money may serve to indicate the distance that Shakespeare has travelled from his rather inhuman Plautine model, most obviously in the final scene of the play. In *Manechmi*, the equivalent of Antipholus of Ephesus offers his wife for sale; *Errors* ends with the warmth and reconciliation of a multiple family reunion.

Roger Warren, Co-Adaptor of Text

## **Pause for thought...**

Ephesus in the time of Shakespeare was considered to be a spooky place. Can you make a list of points in the play where this drives the action of any of the main characters?

*Consider how it would feel to be in a strange land with such a reputation.*

## 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. There are also contemporary anecdotes and criticisms made by his rivals which speak of the famous playwright and suggest that he was indeed a playwright, poet and an actor.

The earliest record we have of his life 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 – St George's Day. There is, however, no proof of this at all.

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 1592. Hamnet, the only son died in 1596, just eleven years old.

At some point, Shakespeare joined the Burbage Company in London as an actor, and was their principal writer. He wrote for them at the Theatre in Shoreditch where Richard III may first have been performed, 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. 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.



## The Comedy of Errors Synopsis

Egeon, a merchant from Syracuse, has contravened the ban against travel to the rival city of Ephesus, and is condemned to death. Before his threatened execution, he tells the Ephesian Duke, Solinus, that he has come to Ephesus to find his wife and one of his twin sons, both of whom were separated from him and the other twin in a shipwreck that took place twenty-five years ago. The twin, who grew up with Egeon, is also traveling the world in search of the missing half of their family. The twins are identical, both named Antipholus, and each has an identical twin slave named Dromio. The Duke grants Egeon a day to raise a thousand-mark ransom to save his life.

Unknown to Egeon, the missing Antipholus is now a prosperous merchant in Ephesus, while Antipholus of Syracuse (and Antipholus' slave Dromio) has also arrived at Ephesus. Adriana, Antipholus of Ephesus' wife, mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for her husband and drags him home for dinner, leaving Dromio of Syracuse to stand guard at the door and admit no one. Later, Antipholus of Ephesus (with his slave Dromio of Ephesus) returns home and is refused entry to his own house. Meanwhile, Antipholus of Syracuse has fallen in love with Luciana, Adriana's sister, who is horrified because she thinks he is her brother-in-law.

A gold chain ordered by Antipholus of Ephesus is given to Antipholus of Syracuse. Antipholus of Ephesus refuses to pay for the chain (unsurprisingly, since he never received it) and is arrested for debt. His wife, seeing his strange behavior, decides he has gone mad and has him tied up and locked up in a cellar room. Meanwhile, Antipholus of Syracuse and his slave decide to flee the city, which they believe to be enchanted, as soon as possible--only to be menaced by Adriana and the debt officer. They seek refuge in a nearby abbey.

Adriana now begs the Duke to intervene and demands that the man she thinks is her husband be taken from the abbey and 'back' into her custody. Her real husband, meanwhile, has broken loose and now comes to the Duke to level charges against his wife. The confusion is ended by the Abbess, Emilia, who discovers the twins and reveals herself to be Egeon's long-lost wife. Antipholus of Ephesus is forgiven by Adriana; Egeon is pardoned by the Duke and reunited with Emilia; Antipholus of Syracuse resumes his romantic pursuit of Luciana, and the two Dromios are reunited.

**Classroom activity: Write and design an Ephesian Newspaper for publication on the weekend following the events of the play. There might be interviews with any of the characters, political comment on the travel ban, reports of the main story, maybe a style feature on the abbey...**

## Interview with Edward Hall - Artistic Director

### What is the director's job?

The director's job is to design the play – so you have to design the play with the designer when you begin. So you make a little model of the play and work out how you're going to tell the story, what furniture, what it's going to look like, what they're going to wear – all of those things. You get a basic idea of that before you begin. You get an idea of the music and you try and understand the play as much as you can, work out who's in what scene, then cast it, work out who would play what parts best. Once you've got all of that together, which believe you me can take months sometimes, you get to shut the door and rehearse. And when you start rehearsing the director's job is to inspire the actors to understand who they're playing, what they're saying, why they're saying it and to keep the actors absolutely in the shoes of the characters. As you do that, and the story starts to become clearer, the director's job is then to work out how to weight the story, where to make it more dramatic, less dramatic; more sensitive, less sensitive; crueller, less cruel; more about love, more about hate, more about greed, any of the things that you might see.



In a sense it takes quite a long time to get a production to the point where you can then watch it and work out where the balance should be in the performances. Because for a while you're just doing the mechanics – “Where do I come on from?” – “Why don't you come on upstage right and then go to the chair, speak for a bit then go downstage left. Oh and you love her, so stay close to her as much as you can, and he hates you and you're suspicious of him...”. We do a lot of that – for weeks!

### How do you choose actors?

It's a very complicated process. It's never the same. I'll usually start from one place, for example one particular role in the play. Then you sort build a world around that. Who would be a good mother to him? Who would be the sister? You get a bit of a family and you slowly build outwards.

You must be careful when you cast not to typecast. In film and television there's quite a lot of typecasting and people play the type of person that you think they are – romantic lead, villain. Acting on stage, actors can change themselves completely, to a far greater degree than people think they can from working with them on film and TV. Particularly with Propeller when we're doing two plays, you can come and see one actor be villainous and murderous in the afternoon who is then playing a clown in the evening! So you must be careful when

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you're casting not to fall into the trap of thinking, "Oh he does the funny parts – he can play the funny characters", but, "Hang on a second! What happens if that character is actually tragic but quite funny. What happens if someone tragic plays that funny part?." So you have to ask yourself questions to make sure you don't fall into traps.

## **And you work with a particular pool of actors?**

Yes. Propeller is an ensemble in this way: when I have a company of actors like the one in this play, I will guarantee them an offer of a job in the next project we do. So I'll be able to choose and negotiate with them what I want them to play, but they'll be able to decide whether to do it or not. So two of them might be doing something else and not free, three of them might not want to do it or not like the parts and the rest might say yes. Or all of them might say yes – it varies from time to time. But over the last thirteen years we've gathered about thirty actors who've been with the company.

## **What's good about that?**

You get continuity. We've grown up working on Shakespeare. All of them have done Shakespeare with me, so all of them have an idea about how to speak it and how to do it before we begin, which gets you a long way down the track.



## Interview with Michael Pavelka – Designer

### What is the job of the designer?

The designer is usually responsible for the look and function of all the scenery, costumes and objects you see on the stage in a performance. All these components make a sequence of images that support the telling of the story – the actors are usually central to these images. To achieve this, the designer probably works alongside more people than anyone else in the production team; the director, lighting and sound designers, all the performers, the stage management team, all the backstage technicians, scenic and properties makers, costume makers and, importantly, the Production Manager and Costume Supervisor.

The designer has to be inventive, sensitive and, above all, a good communicator. Drawings, models and lots of meetings help to get the ideas across and make sure that they are understood by everyone – although those ideas usually change (and improve) throughout rehearsals. The designer has to be like a tall tree – strong and flexible!

### What were the challenges in this show?



I like a challenge – a challenge presents an opportunity to shine, and there isn't a Shakespeare play that doesn't present a hat full of them! This Propeller production has an all-male ensemble, so how does the design help a male actor play a female character believably? How does the design create a world in which you can powerfully portray violence and comedy on stage?

The solutions to all of these

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challenges inter-link and tackling each problem opens up other possibilities – for example, the audience knows that the performers are male, so there seems little point in disguising them... it's far better to give the audience only part of the complete female image so that the audience can fill in the rest. It follows then, that you can treat other theatrical contradictions imaginatively – like someone being beaten on stage night after night for example. It means that we can concentrate on presenting the idea of being a wife or twin rather than trying to recreate an impossible reality. A Propeller project has very particular technical demands. The productions are usually paired [for example the full production of *The Comedy of Errors* was playing with *Richard III*]; two very different Shakespeare plays in one world, so I have to create a design that can be changed or added to very simply, quickly and effectively to give a contrasting concept and look to the two stories. We don't rehearse them together though, so I have to anticipate what we're going to do for the second show. The productions also tour all over the world - that sometimes means moving the set great distances. To be able to finish a show on a Saturday and then open again two or three days later, we have to build doubles of everything so the second set can be moved and prepared before the company arrives at each location... twice the cost and quite complicated to organise!

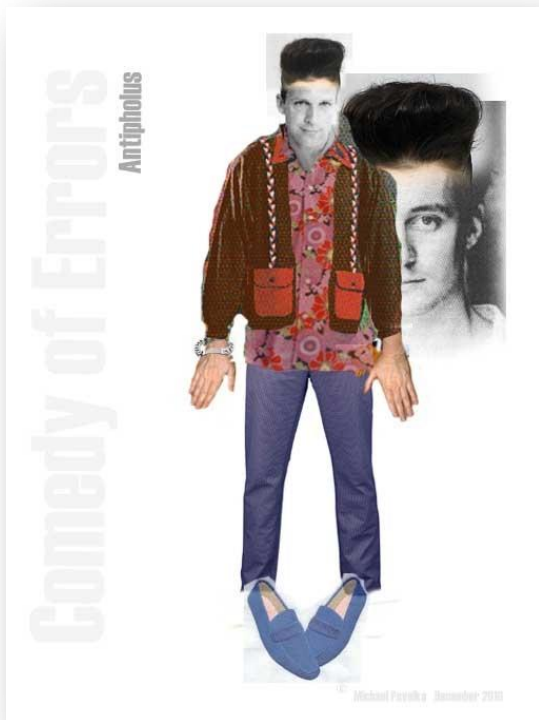
## Do you start with set or costume?

I start with the story and how to reinvent it for a modern audience. I tend to think about a sort parallel universe (which is what Theatre is anyway) that makes sense of the character's situations. I think about characters and locations independently of each other and then enjoy the collisions that might take place – I hope that means that the audience can't quite 'pin down' the look of a Propeller show but that, in the real time of the performance, it makes dramatic sense. Separating set, props and costume ideas also helps the director and performers to be more free to invent in rehearsal and not feel that they are having to stick to specific historical rules (the etiquette of court clothing, for example). For this production I was interested in how a Victorian society with its sophisticated exterior and ruthless moral code might collide with our contemporary 'machine for living' - the one telling us something about the other. Above all though, I hope that the design of a Propeller show helps its clarity, physical strength and unpredictability. The set often has to be built in advance of rehearsals because of its size and



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complexity whereas my costume ideas are often influenced by knowing which actors are going to play the parts. I'm familiar with most Propeller performers (which is an unusual situation for a designer) and this gives me a good head start to the process and I'll always try to respond to the actor's ideas that can sometimes prompt very interesting changes to the costume design. The ideas keep improving throughout rehearsal and can even change again after the first few performances.



## How important are materials?

Very... Propeller actors are on stage all through the play and when they are on the edges of a scene they are as important to the drama as when they are central to it; they should be both seen and heard as either individual characters or often in groups as a chorus with a collective identity. The design has to support this idea, so the materials are often skeletal or semi-transparent so that the actors can appear from as many places as possible or be partially visible in the shadowy corners of the set. Sometimes the performers will use the set as a musical instrument – so the sounds of the materials can be crucial. As a rule, I like to 'be honest' to a material's properties and so the audience see how they are part of the construction with as little fake effect as

possible – this means that the performers tend to use objects on stage with the same physical force as they would in real life.

## The Comedy of Errors Script Exercise

ADRIANA

Ay, ay, Antipholus look strange and frown:  
Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects;  
I am not Adriana nor thy wife.  
The time was once when thou unurged wouldst vow  
That never words were music to thine ear,  
That never object pleasing in thine eye,  
That never touch well welcome to thy hand,  
That never meat sweet-savor'd in thy taste,  
Unless I spake, or look'd, or touch'd, or carved to thee.  
How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,  
That thou art thus estranged from thyself?  
Thyself I call it, being strange to me,  
That, undividable, incorporate,  
Am better than thy dear self's better part.  
Ah, do not tear away thyself from me!  
For know, my love, as easy mayest thou fall  
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,  
And take unmingled that same drop again,  
Without addition or diminishing,  
As take from me thyself and not me too.  
How dearly would it touch me to the quick,  
Shouldst thou but hear I were licentious  
And that this body, consecrate to thee,  
By ruffian lust should be contaminate!  
Wouldst thou not spit at me and spurn at me  
And hurl the name of husband in my face  
And tear the stain'd skin off my harlot-brow  
And from my false hand cut the wedding-ring  
And break it with a deep-divorcing vow?  
I know thou canst; and therefore see thou do it.  
I am possess'd with an adulterate blot;  
My blood is mingled with the crime of lust:  
For if we too be one and thou play false,  
I do digest the poison of thy flesh,  
Being strumpeted by thy contagion.  
Keep then far league and truce with thy true bed;  
I live unstain'd, thou undishonoured.

Adriana's speech comes when she meets Antipholus of Syracuse in the town and thinks he is her husband.

1. Get into pairs. One of you read the speech to the other. Swap over.
2. If there are any difficult words, make sure you know or decide what they should mean.
3. Swap over. This time when you read it point vigorously at yourself every time you say 'I', 'me', 'my', 'mine', 'Adriana', and at your partner when you say 'thou', 'thy', 'thine', 'thee', 'thyself', 'my husband', 'my love', 'Antipholus'. Swap over.
4. Read it aloud again. Your partner who is listening, should repeat loudly what they feel is the most important word in each line. Don't think about this too much – just do it! Swap over.
5. This time repeat back the words that sound 'violent'. 6. Antipholus of Syracuse has never met Adriana before. Why do you think he cannot say so, before she gets to the end of the speech? This time, the partner who is not Adriana should try and interject. Adriana's task is to make that impossible. You may need plenty of space!

## Some interesting facts about The Comedy of Errors

The Story of The Comedy of Errors was used for a musical by Rodgers, Hart and Abbott called *The Boys from Syracuse*.

The Comedy of Errors is Shakespeare's shortest play!

The earliest recorded performance of the play was 28<sup>th</sup> December 1594, but it may have been written a couple of years before.



*Syracuse is located on the island which we now call Sicily. Ephesus is on the western coast of modern-day Turkey.*

Antipholus of Syracuse and Adriana are the largest parts in Shakespeare's play – 264 lines each!

The Comedy of Errors observes Aristotle's three 'Unities'. Almost two thousand years before Shakespeare was born the Greek philosopher Aristotle outlined the components of an ideal play. He said every good play should have:

**Unity of Pace:** the action of the play should all take place in the same location.

**Unity of Time:** the action of the play should take place within twenty-four hours.

**Unity of Action:** everything that happens in the play should contribute to the main plot. There should be nothing irrelevant.