

The Winter's Tale



INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Welcome to this introduction to *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare. It is been directed for Shakespeare's Globe by Blanche McIntyre. These introductory notes were written by Nadine Beasley and Kerry Elkins, and script edited by Louise Fryer.

The Globe Theatre is a reconstruction of the open-air theatre in which some of Shakespeare's greatest plays were first performed. From above, the theatre is shaped like a giant 'O'. The area in the centre of the 'O' is called the Yard, and the members of the audience who stand here are known as the groundlings. Everyone else sits on wooden benches in one of three galleries, which run around the edge of the circle.

Thrusting into the Yard is a large rectangular stage. It is about a metre and a half high, so groundlings nearest to the stage can lean against it. Sometimes, members of the cast enter and exit through the yard and approach the stage via sets of steps on either side. A very high roof, called the Heavens, juts out over the stage, and is supported on either side by two huge pillars, made from whole tree trunks and painted dark red and veined with creamy white to look like marble. The back of the stage is defined by a wall. There is a large double doorway in the centre, with a single arch doorway to each side. Above the double doors is an upper gallery, where the musicians sit.

For this production there are a couple of additions to the stage. A small, horseshoe shaped extension, about a metre deep, has been added to the front centre. There is also a framework of Byzantine-style arches under the Heavens. It is reminiscent of the Sicilian 'Palatine Chapel' described in the programme notes as 'a seemingly effortless fusion of all that is most brilliant in the Latin, Byzantine and Arabic traditions into a single harmonious masterpiece. Its form is in essence that of a western basilica, with a central nave and two side isles separated by rows of antique granite columns.'

There are five rows of arches made from narrow lengths of gold coloured metal running from side to side, the front row level with the pillars, the last right in front of the minstrel's gallery, suspended from the roof by thin steel struts. In front of the central doors, a tall rectangular

frame made of the same gold coloured metal reaches from the stage up to the top of the minstrel's gallery, the rectangle containing another archway. On either side of this rectangular arch, gold metal crosses are glimpsed beneath the roof, dangling on heavy chains.

The Globe's website sums up the story of *The Winter's Tale* as follows: 'In a fit of groundless jealousy, Leontes [King of Sicilia] wrecks his marriage, defies the gods, destroys his family and ruins himself. As the years roll around, a new generation flee their own country and take refuge in Sicilia. Unknowingly they bring with them the key to the past, present and future.'

A 'winter's tale' is a fantasy, and *The Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare's great play of the irrational and the inexplicable. The play's uncontrollable emotions – rage, love, grief and forgiveness – range across gender, country, class and age. Its universe is full of monsters, gods and natural disasters, and its colossal sweep takes us from stifling courts to unbuttoned festivals.'

There are 13 actors in the multi-ethnic ensemble, six men and seven women – some of whom play up to three different roles during the production.

During the play we move from the more formal setting of the Sicilian court to the country setting of Bohemia. In the court of Sicilia the costumes are of the Byzantine period, men in tunics and pantaloons with long robes or capes that flow from their shoulders, and the women in full length silken gowns covered with brightly coloured ankle grazing robes. In contrast, the costumes in Bohemia are modern in style. The director explains in the programme, 'I feel that if I were Shakespeare, rural Bohemia would be a more familiar world to me than courtly Sicilia. So my take on the play has been to bring Bohemia close to us, and push Sicilia away by contrast.'

In Sicilia, King Leontes dominates the court. A man of medium height and sturdy build, he is clothed in an opulent shimmering cream calf length tunic edged with gold. The bodice is snug fitting, flaring out from the waist which is cinched by a broad old gold silk sash tied at the side. Under this are gold pantaloons gathered around the ankles, and bare feet slipped into softly silent gold slippers. During more formal moments he throws on a long matching quilted floor length coat. Leontes has a shaved head, which accentuates his furrowed brow and dark-shadowed, piercing blue eyes. His chiselled chin is sparsely covered by a closely cropped salt and pepper beard. He darts around the court with nervous energy, his hands often twitching by his sides or fluttering over his bald pate. In his tenseness the sinews in his neck stand out like cords and his face is often ruddy with anger.

His wife Hermione is heavily pregnant with their second child. Of medium height and slender build, she exudes quiet authority and dignified composure. Her glossy black hair falls in a long plait over her left shoulder, bouncing against large gold disc shaped earrings. Her deep brown eyes dominate her oval face, darkening in anger or sparkling in occasional lighter moments, her full red lips widening in an open smile. She wears a cream silky full-length gown finely pleated from the neck and tied under the bust with a narrow black ribbon, flowing softly over her swollen belly. Over this is a sumptuous dark blue long-sleeved robe with a small gold diamond pattern and gold buttons edging the cuffs. The robe has a single pleat at the back held in place by a single gold button.

Their young son Mamillius is played by a young woman. Of slender but sturdy build, Mamillius bounces around the court with youthful exuberance, long golden curls held off his face by a gold ribbon tied around his forehead. His pale features are often serious, his eyes watchful, but can be transformed by a cheeky grin when he relaxes with the servants. Mamillius wears a cream tunic trimmed with a narrow band of turquoise brocade

around the neck, hem and cuffs. His legs are bare and his feet pushed into tan gladiator sandals. At times he wears a red wool cape with a circlet of gold around the neck, and we catch a glimpse of cream shorts beneath the tunic as he dashes around the court.

Leontes is entertaining Polixenes, the King of Bohemia. Of medium height and slender build Polixenes has an open fresh countenance and smiling wide set eyes. His blonde hair is slicked back off his face and a light beard covers his chin. He moves with calm grace and contained energy. He is dressed simply in a straw-coloured linen suit, an open necked white shirt, brown belt and tan brogues.

Hermione has a confidante, Paulina, her staunch support at the court. Paulina is of medium height and slender build with fiercely observant, piercing brown eyes under thin arched brows. Her dark brown hair is pulled severely off her face into a large tight bun in the nape of her neck. Paulina is vigorous and assertive – darting around the court, eyes flashing and fingers jabbing – her red, orange and gold geometrically patterned sleeveless robe billowing around her. Under the robe she wears a shimmering pewter coloured gown finely pleated from a gold circlet around the neck and a gold knee length waistcoat.

Her husband Antigonus is a tall, middle aged, slightly rotund gentleman with a round, kindly face and florid complexion, twinkling blue eyes and a ready smile. His grey hair is thinning on top and combed forward into a short fringe over his forehead. Antigonus is dressed in a pale green tunic with a darker green belt over brown trousers tucked into high brown leather boots. His cream cape is attached by a gold brooch to each shoulder. He walks with a heavy tread and controlled calm movements.

Camillo is a long serving courtier of Leontes. Camillo is in his early forties, tall and slim with short cropped brown hair, slightly greying at the temples and sideburns. He has watchful grey eyes and his full dark beard is neatly trimmed. He has a long pale grey quilted robe with a

wide brown belt, and broad pleated epaulettes of brown satin. He moves with quiet dignity in soft brown leather low heeled boots.

The servants of the court wear similar costumes of tunics covered by robes or capes, but in more muted colours and cloth rather than the silken robes of the courtiers.

In the second half of the play, the story moves to the neighbouring kingdom of Bohemia. The Bohemian people are dressed in modern European style clothing. Those who are at court – King Polixenes and his courtiers – wear suits and tailored city clothes; but the vast majority of people we meet are country folk and dressed in relaxed, casual clothing.

The Old Shepherd is a short, sturdy woman, with a dishevelled appearance, her faded sandy hair blunt-cut and fluffy round her ruddy face. Despite her weathered complexion, she has a dimple in her cheek and a twinkle in her eye. When first we meet her she is dressed for bad weather in a battered red anorak and dark gaiters over brown corduroy trousers and heavy walking boots. In calmer weather she wears blue wide leg trousers with clumpy blue canvas shoes and a bright and colourful short sleeve shirt.

Her son, the Clown, is an optimistic youth with blonde hair tufted up at the front in an attempt at styling. His face is round and guileless, his blue eyes close set, his mouth frequently open in a gormless expression. He's taller than his mother, and of average build. When we first encounter him, he too is wearing wet weather clothing – a pink waterproof jacket with jaunty blue and yellow check lining and walking boots with thick socks showing above them. In his more regular attire he wears straight leg, mid-blue jeans with a sunshine yellow shirt and white trainers; over all of this is an outsize baseball shirt in black and yellow.

Perdita is a young woman of 16 or so, the adopted daughter of the Old Shepherd. She is a fresh-faced maid with full cheeks, softly drooping eyes, and a pert rosebud mouth. Perdita is wearing a pale pink, sleeveless, wrap-over dress, scattered with detailed floral embroidery and dainty beading which gives the fine fabric weight and drape. It is an ankle length dress but the skirt has been swagged up at either side, raising the hemline to her calves. The neckline crosses over at the front and has a little cape at the back. Later she adds a silk bomber jacket covered in Chinese embroidery in pale pastel colours. Perdita's unruly dark hair is loosely gathered into a large bun, with a headdress fitted over it – a halo of gold pins each six inches long fanning out around her head.

Florizel is a tall and slender young man greatly enamoured of Perdita. He has a square face, clean shaven, with large eyes and a wide mouth, his light brown hair brushed back from his forehead, with a quiff lifting the front. Florizel is dressed in dark, skin-tight jeans rolled up above his calves, and a white vest with a tropical shirt open over the top – the shirt has a pale background with palm leaves all over it.

Mopsa and Dorcas are Perdita's friends, and physically very different from one another. Mopsa is tall and willowy, her long chestnut brown hair loose and curling down her back. She wears a short blue dress with a small flower pattern on it, and pink trainers, a pink and white shirt tied at her waist. Dorcas is small and sturdy, dressed in multi-coloured leggings with a tight, blue and white striped dress on top and a red checked shirt over that. Her light hair is tied in multiple knots all over her head, poking out at quirky angles.

There is a generally festive air about the rustic gathering – food and drink abounds and everyone seems to be sporting a touch of sparkly face paint. On hand to take advantage of the festival feeling is the cunning Autolycus. She is short and wiry, with light brown hair cut short at

the neck but long on top, her fringe falling heavy across her forehead and almost into her eyes. She has sharp features – an angular jaw, a narrow nose and piercing eyes. Her demeanour is confident and perky, and she wears a variety of colourful outfits. When we first meet her, Autolycus sports cut-off denim shorts over holey cerise tights with a grey, slouchy vest. Later she dons a turquoise bomber jacket and snakeskin ankle boots. And always, she carries a bright yellow rucksack.

At one point in the play, King Polixenes and his servant Camillo leave the Bohemian court and sneak into the country gathering, attempting to blend in by foregoing their slim-line tailoring and adopting more relaxed clothes. Polixenes wears cords and obviously new wellies, with a blue cotton jacket, modishly knotted scarf and a grey tweed flat cap. Camillo, wears khaki trousers and a relaxed black leather jacket.

Throughout the performance, a group of five musicians are present in the minstrel's gallery, using instruments including a large bass drum, violin and clarinet to create the soundscape of the production. During the Bohemian part of the story, the musicians descend from their gallery and join the festival, dressed in the modern uniform of the folk musician – skinny black jeans, floral shirts and waistcoats, trilby hats at jaunty angles. They play a festival tune or two on accordion and mandolin.

CAST AND PRODUCTION CREDITS

Will Keen as **Leontes**
Priyanga Burford as **Hermione**
Rose Wardlaw as **Mamillius** and **Dorcas**
Oliver Ryan as **Polixenes**
Sirine Saba as **Paulina**
Howard Ward as **Antigonus**
Adrian Bower as **Camillo**
Annette Badland as the **Old Shepherd**
Jordan Metcalfe as the **Clown**
Norah Lopez-Holden as **Perdita**
Luke MacGregor as **Florizel**
Zora Bishop as **Mopsa**
And Becci Gemmell as **Autolycus**

The **musicians** are Robert Millett, Matt Bacon, Jon Banks, Sophie Barber and Sophie Craner.
The **composer** is Stephen Warbeck
The **designer** is James Perkins
And the **director** is Blanche McIntyre

Nadine Beasley and Kerry Elkins, script edited by Louise Fryer, voiced by Jane Brambley and Di Langford, produced by Bridget Norman, recorded and edited by Gary Giles for VocalEyes.

An audio version of these notes can be found [here](#).

To contact VocalEyes, please email us on enquiries@vocaleyes.co.uk or visit vocaleyes.co.uk