



A Midsummer Night's Dream

 VOCAL EYES

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Welcome to this introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. It is been directed for the Globe Theatre by Dominic Dromgoole. These introductory notes were written by Miranda Yates and Roz Chalmers, and script edited by Clare Le May.

**SHAKESPEARE'S
GLOBE**

The Globe Theatre is a faithful reconstruction of the open-air theatre in which some of Shakespeare's greatest plays were first performed. Constructed with oak and lime plaster, it has the first thatched roof permitted in London since the Great Fire of 1666. From above, the theatre is shaped like a giant 'O'. The floor in the centre is called the Yard, and the members of the audience who stand here are known as the groundlings. The term comes from Shakespeare's time and is easy to understand when you know that a groundling was their name for a fish that lay at the bottom of a river and looked upward, its mouth gaping open. Everyone else sits on wooden benches in one of three galleries, which run around the edge of the circle.

Thrusting out into the Yard is a large curved stage. It stands at shoulder height, so that the groundlings nearest can lean against it, and actors can stoop down to address members of the audience directly. There are steps leading from the front edge of the stage down into the yard, to both the right and left. These are used by the actors to make entrances and exits, when they have to thread their way through the groundlings.

Towards the front of the stage on either side, two huge pillars support an overhanging roof. The underside of the roof – known as the Heavens – is divided into panels by gilded wooden ribs. Each panel is painted deep blue and decorated with stars, moons or signs of the zodiac.

Although fashioned from complete tree trunks, the pillars have been painted crimson, veined with creamy white to look like marble. For this production, the plinth of each pillar is wreathed with leaves and a stout rope hangs from above, allowing characters to haul themselves up and eavesdrop on others.

At the back of the stage are three entrances – an arched doorway at either side and a wide central entrance with a balcony above where musicians sit and play during the performance. The balcony's decorated by sprigs of leaves

and white blossom and above each of the entrances is a portrait in a gilt frame. The central portrait, above the wide entrance, is the head and shoulders of a middle-aged man with a long face and pointed beard and a haughty, hooded gaze. He wears a black cap and doublet and high ruff. He is Henry Carey, 1st Baron Hunsdon, an English nobleman and courtier. He was the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, William Shakespeare's playing company. Some Shakespearean scholars have theorised that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed at a wedding hosted by Carey in the last years of his life, around 1594 to 96. Flanking Carey's portrait are those of two more of Shakespeare's patrons, both in high ruffs.

To the left is Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, dark and saturnine, whose company, Pembroke's Men, is linked to the earliest performance of *Henry the Sixth Part 3*. To the right is the silver-bearded Charles Howard, 1st Earl of Nottingham, who sponsored The Admiral's Men, linked to the first performance of *Richard III*.

Below these portraits and beside each of the arched entrances is a grey curtain with black figuring. At the beginning of the play they are held back with ropes. Later they're drawn across the width of the stage by a series of ropes and pulleys, hiding the three entrances and providing a backdrop for the woodland scenes. Opened, they reveal an image like an Elizabethan woodcut, a simple, stylised grey and black illustration of a thicket of trees and bushes - the 'hawthorn brake' referred to in the text.

Just to the right of the central entrance is a wooden cart with a drum in it, and overhead hang two simple iron chandeliers with long, slender wax candles.

As usual at the Globe, the performance begins with music, played in this case by five musicians in yellow ochre linen tunics trimmed with black, black breeches and either soft black caps or high domed hats with a

small brim. They play a number of instruments; fiddle, shawm – a predecessor of the modern oboe – guitar, bagpipes, cornet, sackbut – an early trombone – recorder and tambourine.

As the play begins, we meet **Theseus, Duke of Athens** and **Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons**. Theseus is stocky and brawny, black bearded and fierce-eyed. He wears a crimson doublet with an armoured metal collar – a gorget – around his neck, and trunkhose – breeches that balloon out around the hips before tapering to reach his knee-length black suede boots. Theseus's pale gold sleeves end in a frilled cuff and have crimson ribbons tied around his bulging biceps.

Hippolyta is petite but has a wiry strength. She's dressed in a floor length green coat and soft maroon trousers. On her hands are crimson gauntlets and her thick wavy light brown hair is caught back in a golden net snood. Hippolyta has an animated face with a determined little chin and a sudden flashing smile that is at odds with the fiery glare of her eyes.

They are accompanied by their warriors, Theseus by four soldiers in highly polished helmets and yellow cloaks trimmed with scarlet, Hippolyta by three young Amazons in sea green ankle length coats, trousers and turbans. The women hold longbows, handling them with grace and ease.

Theseus's Master of Revels is **Philostrate**, a tall, superior young man with a snooty tilt to his head. He's in cream doublet and trunkhose, wearing a high-crowned beige hat with a red brim and a jaunty feather.

He introduces an Athenian gentleman, **Egeus** a distinguished old fellow in black cloak, doublet and hose, all trimmed with gold. Egeus's hair and beard are silvered with age and his face reddens with anger as he speaks of his disobedient daughter, Hermia. She's a tiny sweet-faced teenage girl with a charmingly upturned nose and

a cascade of dark curls. Her complexion is creamy and flawless. Hermia's dressed in rose-pink silk, a bodice with a low square neckline and long fitted sleeves and a full skirt with a gold embroidered panel at the front.

She is accompanied by **Lysander**, a cheery but rather befuddled youth in a gold brocade doublet and hose. His dark hair is cut short and his open face beams with boyish enthusiasm. Lysander's rival for Hermia's love is Demetrius, an altogether more disgruntled young man. Demetrius has a light beard and moustache and he wears a petulant, aggrieved expression. His clothes fit his mood, a doublet and hose in stormy grey.

Gazing at Demetrius with longing is **Helena**. She's a friend to Hermia, but almost opposite in appearance; beanpole tall and thin with long straight blonde hair that hangs around a mournful face with sad blue eyes. Helena's bodice and skirt are in sky-blue brocade.

We move to a glade in an Athenian wood where a group of local tradesmen are rehearsing a play in honour of Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding day. They're all dressed in homespun woollen clothes of browns, greys or forest greens and they all wear leather clogs with steel toecaps.

The director is **Peter Quince** the carpenter, a bouncy little moppet with a head of greying curls and an unlimited zeal for his theatrical work. Quince gazes, rapt, at his actors, his hands fluttering to his heart in unbridled joy. His tunic is green with a wide white collar, his baggy brown trousers protected by a white apron.

Quince's star is **Bottom** the weaver, tall, long-faced, lugubrious and melancholy, but acutely aware of his status in the play. Bottom's floppy hair and shaggy beard are peppered with grey. He wears a high-crowned hat and a leather waistcoat over a green jacket. His wide breeches are brown and his thick socks are rust red.

The other actors are **Snout** the tinker, **Starveling** the tailor, **Snug** the joiner and **Flute** the bellows mender. Snout has a red nose, a thin moustache and a narrow strip of beard and greasy brown hair that hangs in long matted strings from under his grey knitted cap. Snout's brown jacket has threadbare sleeves and his baggy breeches droop shapelessly. Starveling is brown-skinned with black collar-length dreadlocks and neat little beard. Starveling cuts a bit of a dash, advertising his tailor's trade in a well-fitting grey jacket and loose beige waistcoat worn with brown trunkhose. On his head is a scarlet fez. Snug's a man of few words. He's a lanky old soul with sparse grey hair under a filthy white brimless cap and an almost toothless mouth clamped around a pipe. Snug wears a green jacket and trousers and a leather apron with the pockets stuffed with chisels and awls. The youngest of the group is Flute, a shy, gangling youth with a gormless face and a thin piping voice. His messy brown hair is largely covered by a cap with earflaps and his jacket and narrow trousers border on the cheerful, in shades of yellow. Flute carries a large satchel, and he frowns, concentrating hard as others speak.

Leaves drift down as we move into the realm of fairyland and into a battle of wits between the King and Queen of the fairies. They are played by the same actors who play Theseus and Hippolyta, a tradition that was only begun in 1970 by the iconic director Peter Brook.

The King, **Oberon**, although not tall, is powerful and bare-chested, with well-defined abdominal muscles and broad shoulders. He wears only brown suede breeches, slashed to reveal deep a red fabric. They have a leaf-shaped codpiece. His high green boots lace at the back. There's a V-shaped pattern of mud-brown that runs from his shoulders to his breastbone and an identical shape on his back. Oberon's supremely athletic, springing up the pillars to hang suspended on a rope, horizontal to the ground. His strong, black-bearded face is quick to show anger, and there's a more than a hint of brutality

in the way he treats his queen, **Titania**, gripping her just a little too hard.

But Titania is no easy prey. Though slight, her bare arms are strong and sinewy and her tongue is lacerating. Her light brown hair falls in sunkissed curls down her back and her perky little face is a constant mirror of her mood, merriness, hauteur, ardour and fury chasing across in rapid succession. Titania's dressed in a sleeveless bustier in a sparkling bronze fabric, and round her waist is a short skirt of glossy animal pelts that look like foxtails, parting to reveal her muddy bare legs. On her feet are grey shoes with small heels. At times she drapes a cloak of skins and fur over her shoulders and settles a crown of twigs in her hair.

Oberon is served by the sprite **Puck**, a pale, skinny boy with short dark hair interwoven with feathers that resemble the ear tufts of an owl. His eyes, too, are circled by daubs of mud, mirroring the facial ruff that circles an owl's eyes. Like his master, Puck's' bare-chested but his torso is smeared with mud to resemble an open waistcoat. He wears dark green breeches spangled with glittering beads like raindrops and his calves are wrapped in dirty rags. Puck's a giddy, fey creature, alternating between sudden spurts of energy and the world-weary yawns of an adolescent.

The fairies who accompany Titania are feral, pagan creatures, the men wearing masks created by animal skulls complete with antlers, ram's horns or boars tusks. Their leader, the First Fairy, wears the skull of a goat. The male fairies' tattered breeches have prominent codpieces and their waistcoats are in the browns and greens of the woodland, worn open over bare chests. Their bare legs are streaked with mud.

The three female fairies have mask-like faces as grey as putty, and black sunken eyes. They drape thick fur pelts across their shoulders and wear bustiers displaying lush cleavages. Their baggy breeches are in earthy clay

browns and leafy greens. The fairies' hair is concealed under bandage-like grey caps with chinstraps, topped by feathers. Like their male counterparts their legs are spattered and begrimed. Both male and female fairies prowl the edges of the space, watching their king and queen warily.

CAST AND PRODUCTION CREDITS

Duke Theseus and Oberon, the King of the Fairies are played by **John Light**.

Hippolyta and Titania, Queen of the Fairies by **Michelle Terry**.

Philostrate, Master of the Revels and Puck are played by **Matthew Tennyson**.

Egeus, an Athenian gentleman, is played by **Edward Peel**.

His daughter Hermia by **Olivia Ross**.

Her friend Helena by **Sarah MacRae**.

Hermia's suitors are Lysander played by **Luke Thompson**, and Demetrius is played by **Joshua Silver**.

The rude mechanicals are:

Quince the carpenter, played by **Fergal McElherron**.

Bottom the weaver is played by **Pearce Quigley**.

Snout the tinker, by **Tom Lawrence**.

Starveling the tailor, by **Huss Garbiya**.

Flute the bellows mender, by **Christopher Logan**.

Snug the joiner, by **Edward Peel**.

The Fairies are: **Tala Gouveia, Molly Logan, Stephanie Racine, Tom Lawrence** and **Huss Garbiya**. The First Fairy is played by **Fergal McElherron**.

The Musicians are **George Bartle, Emily Baines, Arngeir Hauksson, Sarah Humphreys** and **Nicholas Perry**.

The play was designed by **Jonathan Fensom** with Music composed by **Claire van Kampen** and was directed by **Dominic Dromgoole**.

A SYNOPSIS FROM THE PRINTED PROGRAMME

Duke Theseus and Hippolyta are preparing for their wedding, when Egeus arrives with his daughter Hermia, along with her two suitors Lysander and Demetrius. Hermia and Lysander are in love, but Egeus wants Hermia to marry Demetrius (who is in turn loved by Helena). Theseus supports Egeus and gives Hermia an ultimatum. She has three choices. Either she marries Demetrius, retires to a convent, or is put to death. Hermia and Lysander decide to run away and plan to meet in the forest. Hermia tells Helena of their plans, and she betrays their confidence to Demetrius, in the hope that he will change his mind about her. Demetrius chases after the eloping couple, and Helena follows him.

A group of tradesmen meet to discuss a play on the theme of Pyramus and Thisbe which they want to perform at Theseus' wedding. They plan to rehearse in the forest.

Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, are arguing over who should have a changeling boy who Titania has in her retinue. Titania will not give him up, so Oberon takes his revenge by having his servant Puck find a special flower. Oberon plans to squeeze its juice on Titania's eyes while she sleeps. This will make her fall in love with the first person she sees upon waking. Oberon, seeing Demetrius violently reject Helena, tells Puck to put the potion on Demetrius' eyes as well. But Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius, and Lysander wakes to see Helena. He falls instantly in love with her, leaving Hermia alone.

The rustics begin their rehearsal near where Titania is sleeping. At Oberon's order, Puck gives Bottom an ass's head. His friends are terrified and flee. Bottom, unaware of his transformation, wakes Titania with his singing. Under the spell of the potion, she falls in love with him, and Bottom is treated like a lord by the fairy retinue.

Hermia, having lost Lysander, thinks Demetrius has killed him, and when he denies it she goes to look for her love. Oberon is furious with Puck for his mistake and tells him to find Helena and bring her to him. Oberon squeezes the flower onto Demetrius' eyes while he sleeps. Lysander enters with Helena, begging for her love. Demetrius wakes, sees Helena and declares his love for her. Hermia returns and is snubbed by Lysander, while Helena thinks all three are tricking her.

Demetrius and Lysander challenge each other to a duel. Oberon orders Puck to imitate the two men's voices, leading them around until they fall asleep. Puck puts an antidote on Lysander's eyes so that he regains his love for Hermia but leaves Demetrius still doting on Helena. Oberon releases Titania from her spell, having received the changeling boy from her, and Puck removes the ass's head from Bottom.

Theseus and Hippolyta arrive to hunt in the forest where they discover the sleeping lovers. They hear their story, and Theseus decrees they shall be married as they wish, despite Egeus' will.

Bottom is reunited with his friends, and they rehearse their play, which has been selected as one of those to entertain the Duke and his guests at the wedding. After supper their play Pyramus and Thisbe is presented in front of an audience of all the lovers. Oberon and Titania enter to bless the three couples, and Puck is left to address the audience.

The introductory notes were written by Miranda Yates and Roz Chalmers, script edited by Clare Le May, voiced by Angus King and Miranda Yates, and recorded and edited by Gary Giles for VocalEyes

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