



# Exploring William Shakespeare's

## *A Midsummer Night's Dream*



Evansville : Shanklin Theatre : March 1 - 5, 2005  
 South Bend : Bendix Theatre : March 8 - 12, 2005  
 Indianapolis : IRT Mainstage : March 23 - April 16, 2005

*This production is part of Shakespeare in American Communities: Shakespeare for a New Generation, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.*

## "Jack shall have Jill; Nought shall go ill;"

**T**heseus, Duke of Athens, having defeated her in battle, is preparing to marry Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, in four days. Their discussion is interrupted by Egeus, a citizen of Athens, charging that his daughter, Hermia, has been "bewitched" by Lysander, and refuses to marry Demetrius, the suitor Egeus has chosen for her. Egeus demands his rights as a parent under Athenian law: either his daughter marries as her father demands, or she must be put to death. Theseus offers Hermia a third choice: to live the cloistered life of a nun, forever celibate. Lysander counters that he is just as fit a suitor as Demetrius; and furthermore, that Demetrius has courted and won the love of Helena. Theseus decides to talk to Egeus and Demetrius privately, warning Hermia that she must make her decision by the Duke's own wedding day.

Left alone, Hermia and Lysander decide to run away from Athens, and to meet that night in the nearby woods. They encounter Helena, pining for Demetrius and wondering how her friend Hermia won his love. Hermia tries to comfort Helena, explaining how she and Lysander plan to escape, and wishing Helena good luck with Demetrius. Helena, in hope of earning his favor, decides to tell Demetrius of Hermia's flight.

Meanwhile, in another part of Athens, a group of mechanicals, or laborers, gather together for a meeting: Peter Quince, a carpenter; Nick Bottom, a weaver; Francis Flute, a bellows-mender (a bellows is the part of an old-fashioned church organ that needs to be pumped in order to force air through the organ pipes); Robin Starveling, a tailor; Tom Snout, a tinker (someone who repairs broken household utensils; a metalworker); and Snug, a joiner (cabinet maker). Their plan is to pres-

ent a play in celebration of the Duke's wedding. Peter Quince assigns roles and distributes scripts to the group, and they decide to meet that night in the woods outside the city to rehearse.

That night, in the forest, Oberon and Titania, King and Queen of the Fairies, meet. The couple has been fighting over a changeling boy, an orphan whom Titania has taken from India and whom Oberon wants for his own retinue. Since summer began, whenever Titania and her fairies have met to dance in the wood, Oberon



and his fairies have interrupted them with brawls. As a result, the weather has turned bad, disease has spread, and the seasons have altered. Titania accuses Oberon of an affair with Hippolyta; Oberon counters by declaring that Titania loves Theseus. Oberon demands the changeling boy, Titania refuses, and they part angrily.

Oberon summons his lieutenant, Puck, also known as Robin Goodfellow, a mischievous village sprite, and sends him in search of a magical flower. To punish Titania for her obstinacy, Oberon plans to

sprinkle the juice of this flower in her eyes while she sleeps; its magic will cause her to fall head over heels in love with the first thing she sees when she wakes, no matter who or what.

Suddenly, Oberon encounters Helena and Demetrius as she, in vain, follows him through the woods. Oberon decides to help Helena by having Puck sprinkle the flower's juice in Demetrius's eyes, so he will fall in love with Helena. But Puck mistakenly sprinkles the love-juice in Lysander's eyes, and when he wakes, he forgets his Hermia and falls madly in love with Helena, who thinks it is a cruel trick.

Meanwhile, the mechanicals have met for their rehearsal in the wood, and when Puck happens by, he is amused by their inept performance. For a joke, he magically gives Bottom the head of an ass; and it is this transformed Bottom whom Titania first sees when she awakes, and she falls in love with him.

Further mishaps, mistaken identities, and merry tricks fill the night forest, as the three worlds—the court, the mechanicals, and the fairies—become comically entwined. Eventually, order is restored, all the loving couples are properly matched, weddings are celebrated, the mechanicals' play is performed, and marriages are blessed. ★

### WHILE WATCHING THE PLAY

- In this production, each actor plays two or even three roles. How do the actors transform themselves? How do the different characters played by one actor relate to each other?

### TO LEARN MORE

Check out these books:

- *Shakespeare after All* by Marjorie Garber
- *The World of Shakespeare* by Claybourne & Treays
- *Shakespeare A to Z* by Charles Boyce

# Shakespeare

Although William Shakespeare is generally considered the greatest dramatist in the English language, few facts are known about his life. Only a handful of legal documents verify his existence. Tradition has it that he was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small market town, on April 23, 1564. His father was a glove maker who became High Bailiff of Stratford, a position similar to our mayor.

As the son of a leading citizen and public official, Shakespeare would have gone to school as soon as he learned to read and write. The Stratford grammar school was excellent by comparison to similar schools in bigger towns. School was in session year round, and students attended for nine hours a day. The curriculum was limited, consisting almost entirely of Latin: grammar, reading, writing, and recitation.

By the time Shakespeare was a youth, many traveling theatre companies of significance had visited Stratford, so it is fair to guess that Shakespeare had seen some of them and admired their art.

At age 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior. Six months later, Shakespeare's eldest child, Susanna, was born. Two years later he became the father of twins, Hamnet and Judith. Little is known of Shakespeare's life at this time. It is clear that by the early 1590s, however,

Shakespeare was a part of the theatrical scene in London, although we know nothing of the circumstances by which he left Stratford and his family to become an actor and playwright in the city. In 1594 Shakespeare was established at the center of theatrical activity, for he is recorded as a shareholder in the Globe Theatre.

Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, several narrative poems, and over 150 sonnets in the next fifteen years. He became the most popular playwright in London's highly competitive theatrical world. He was granted a coat of arms, thus officially making him a gentleman, and he bought sizeable pieces of real estate in and around Stratford with his earnings. His plays exhibit not only a fine sense of poetry and stagecraft, but also an excellent awareness of the political and literary atmosphere in which he lived. These were tempestuous times socially and politically, and Shakespeare used his plays metaphorically to suggest how order could be made out of chaos in a changing society.

By 1604 Shakespeare's company was named the King's Men, having drawn the favorable attention of the new monarch, King James I. Their fortunes continued to rise as their plays drew well at the Globe, and the number of command performances at Court doubled and tripled.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616—his 52nd birthday—and was buried in the church chancel in Stratford. A tribute to his genius occurred in 1623, when two of his fellow actors and a London printer published a collected edition of his plays. This kind of publication was rare in its day, as plays were valued for their commercial appeal on the stage, with little thought of them as literature to be preserved. No doubt some of the texts were reconstructed from memory or from a stage manager's promptbook. In any case the First Folio, as this collection has come to be called, is a document of great historic and literary importance, for it preserved for posterity some of the greatest writing in the English language, allowing us to study and perform Shakespeare's plays more than 400 years later and for generations to come. ★

#### TO LEARN MORE

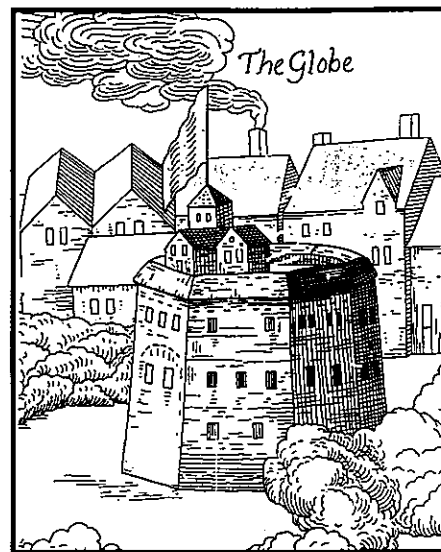
Visit these websites:

- <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu>
- <http://www.folger.edu>

Or check out these books:

- *Will in the World* by Stephen Greenblatt
- Or watch this DVD series:

- "In Search of Shakespeare"



Going to see a play at the Globe was an adventure. The theatre was located on the south bank of the River Thames in London, and on performance days a yellow silk flag fluttered above the roof. The Globe stood tall among the low, narrow houses that lined the streets in this rather disreputable part of the city.

In Elizabethan times, playgoing was enormously popular for all classes of people, and a new generation of brilliant playwrights—like Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe—had done much to make the new theatres that were springing up highly successful. Of all the theatres, none was more popular than the Globe, built in 1599 by Shakespeare's company. A round wood and plaster building, it featured galleried walls that were about 30 feet high with just a few tiny windows; the only public entrance was through a narrow door in a small tower.

By noon on a performance day, a crowd would begin to gather for the three o'clock performance, and soon the air was filled with shouts and cries as people jostled for a place near the front of the line. Before long, the noisy, colorful crowd began to file through the small entrance door. Above the door hung a sign like a wooden flag. It showed the Greek god Hercules holding a globe on his shoulders.

As you entered, you paid your penny entrance fee and stepped through into the large, round yard, open to the sky. There was a rush to grab the best spots just in front of the huge stage. The theatre held more than 2,000 spectators, and popular plays often sold out.

Once you had your place, you could talk with your friends for a couple of hours before the play began. It was difficult to get bored. Sometimes a man selling nuts would thread his way through the mass of bodies or a woman carrying jugs

# The Globe

of ale would trip and spill the ale down someone's neck—much to everyone's amusement. An exchange of insults between two noisy wits near the stage would bring hoots of laughter from the people nearby. And soon everyone would start pointing and joking, as the richer people began to file into the galleries that fringed the yard.

You paid a few pennies more for a place in the gallery, but it was more comfortable and bought a seat protected from the weather. Even more money bought a seat in a private box, or lord's room, near the back of the stage, so close to the actors you could almost touch them. Fashionably dressed youths often sat there, whiling away the time before the performance playing cards.

Newcomers to the theatre gazed in amazement at the splendor of the empty stage that jutted out into the center of the yard. On each side of the stage, supporting the roof above, towered two tall pillars painted in gold and bright colors to suggest the palaces of kings and princes. Underneath the roof, the "heavens" were painted sky blue and decorated with silver stars. At the back of the stage, on each side, were two doors through which the players usually made their entrances and exits. Between the doors, a small alcove called the "discovery" area was hidden by a brightly painted curtain; during the play, actors could stay there out of sight.

When it was time for the performance to begin,

three loud trumpet calls announced the play. For a moment, the audience was hushed. Then the actors stepped onto the stage to transport the audience to an imaginary world where all sorts of strange and magical things could happen.

There was very little scenery on the Elizabethan stage, but there were gorgeous costumes. Fine taffeta, silk, lace, and tinsel in brilliant colors dazzled the eye, and soldiers appeared in shining armor, their swords and shields gleaming. All the parts were played by men, since women were forbidden by law to act on the stage; young boys, about 12 years old, played the female roles.

Because there was so little scenery, actors relied on words, costumes, and special effects to create a scene. People loved noise and spectacle, and the plays had lots of action, music, and violence. The noise of thunder and lightning was created by rolling a cannonball across a wooden floor. Loud trumpets and drums gave the impression of a battle. Ghosts and other spirits could be raised from below the stage through trap doors. The most spectacular effect, however, was when an actor was lowered from the "heavens" onto the stage by a small crane. This machinery was housed in the "hut" which capped the stage; and to hide its creaking, there was often thunder, fanfares, or music, which made the entrance even more dramatic.

It was not always easy to concentrate on the play, as playgoers were not always well-behaved. They might throw apples or oranges at each other or at the actors on the stage. Some talked loudly through the play or called for more ale and other refreshments, and most people thought it quite normal to make remarks about the actors while the play was in progress. Scuffles frequently broke out between groups of rowdy playgoers. Small wonder then that getting the attention of the audience and keeping them silent was challenging—far more so than it is today, when such behavior is no longer acceptable. ★

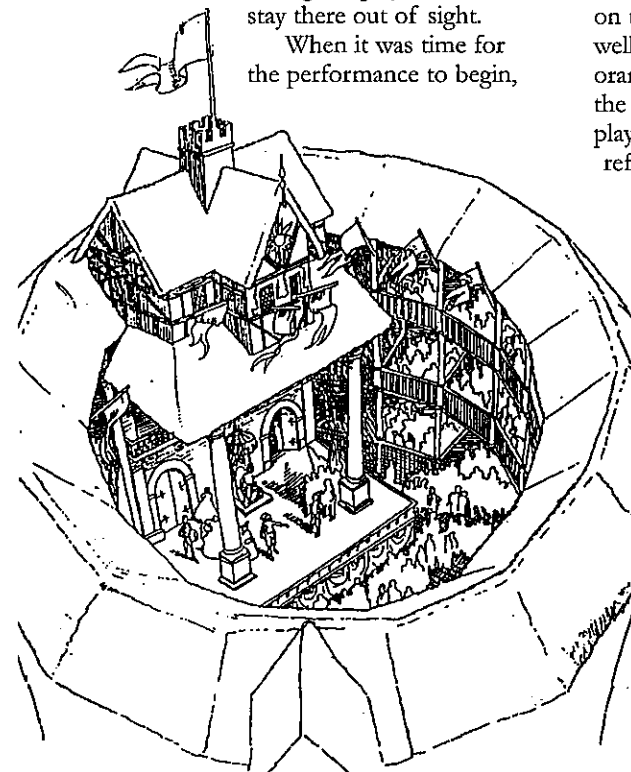
#### TO LEARN MORE

Visit this website:

- <http://www.shakespeares-globe.org>

Or check out this book:

- *Shakespeare: The Globe and the World* by Samuel Schoenbaum



# The Globe and Society

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, in its shape and design, functioned as a metaphor—a map, if you will, of the Elizabethan concepts of society, civilization, and the universe. The name of the theatre itself—the Globe—suggested that the events which were portrayed on its stage were symbolic of events which happened in the world. The building's shape, an octagon, suggested the round shape of the world itself—a roundness which had only been discovered one hundred years before.

Inside the theatre, the stage represented the stage on which world events were enacted. The trap doors in the stage floor could open for demons rising from Hell—or descending thereto. The two massive columns which held up the stage roof were known as the Pillars of Hercules. High above, the stage ceiling was painted with the stars of the Zodiac—the heavens. And tucked under that ceiling was a small balcony where the theatre's musicians played "the Music of the Spheres."

The audience surrounding the stage was likewise arranged to reflect society. Standing around the stage itself, in the area known as the Pit, were the groundlings—those of the lowest classes who paid the least for admittance. Three surrounding levels of balconies arose above them, with correspondingly rising admission prices—so that Elizabethan society, from top to bottom, was clearly divided and arranged for all to see.

Thus an audience member at the Globe could not help but feel his place in the world order, and as he watched the play he could not help but see the action on the stage as emblematic of life in the world at large. For example, in *King Lear*, when Lear enters at the end of the play carrying the body of his dead daughter, we see not only a sad image of a bereft father, we see an archetypal image of tragedy itself. ★

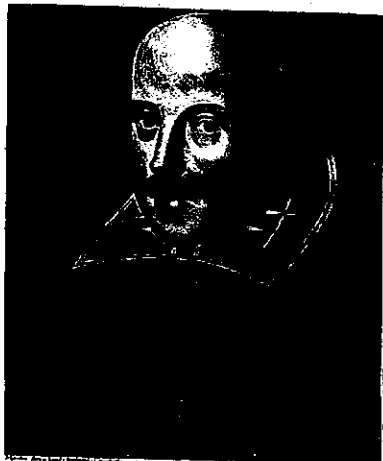
#### WHILE WATCHING THE PLAY

- Look for those moments which link the world of the play to the world at large—not only Shakespeare's world, but the world we live in today.
- How does the theatre space in which you see this production differ from others you have visited? How do those differences affect your experience?

## Mr. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARES

COMEDIES,  
HISTORIES, &  
TRAGEDIES.

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LONDON  
Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1635

# Questions for Discussion

What is the significance of the settings of the play? What significance do forests have in other literary works? What about urban settings? What rules and values apply in the different settings? What other stories do you know that follow the same pattern of characters venturing into the world and returning home? What is the significance of this journey and return?

Discuss the meanings of the play's title, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In addition to the title, what other references do you find to dreaming in the play? What relationship is created between dreaming and theatre (look, for example, at Puck's final speech)? Why is the time of midsummer important to the themes of the play?

The play presents several different couples: Theseus and Hippolyta, Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, Titania and Bottom, and Titania and Oberon. What aspects of love are explored in each of these relationships?

Gender issues are significant in this drama. What differences are there in the roles and behaviors appropriate to men and women? Do these gender differences still exist today, or are they examples of outdated stereotypes?

This production, like many, casts the same actor in the role of Theseus and Oberon, and also of Hippolyta and Titania. What does this suggest about the functions of these characters in the play? How are the characters of Hippolyta and Titania similar and/or different? Theseus and Oberon?

All the actors in this production play multiple roles, as was the practice of Shakespeare's original company. How does the actor's process of transformation relate to the theme of transformation within each character in the play?

Think about the four young lovers—Demetrius, Helena, Lysander, and Hermia. How does Shakespeare individualize these characters? What similarities and differences do you find among their personalities in this production? Do you have a favorite among this group? Why?

★



Preliminary costume renderings for the IRT production by designer Joel Ebarb for (left) Oberon, (below left) Helena, and (right) the Mechanicals. The three groups of characters wear costumes inspired by different painters and styles from different eras. What does this mixture suggest about the world of the play?



(below) Jean-Honoré Fragonard's 1772 painting *The Rendezvous* is re-created on the floor of the stage setting by scenic designer Robert M. Koharchik.



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With the support of the ARTS COUNCIL OF INDIANAPOLIS and City of Indianapolis