

STATE ED

STATE THEATRE COMPANY  
of South Australia presents

# The Popular Mechanicals

by



**STATE SA  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**



**DURATION APPROX:** *90 minutes (no interval)*  
**SUITABLE FOR** *Years 8-12*  
*DWS performance followed by a 20 - 30 min Q&A session*

# Index

---

Index.....	3
Theatre Etiquette .....	4
Cast & Creatives .....	6
Playwrights .....	7
Play History.....	8
Director .....	9
Actor Profile.....	10
Synopsis.....	12
Plot .....	13
Characters.....	17
Genre .....	19
Themes.....	20
Other References.....	22
Set Designer .....	27
Set & Costume Design .....	28
Music .....	30
Composer .....	32
Glossary .....	34
Review Writing .....	35
Marketing & Design.....	36
Essay Questions .....	37
References .....	41

# Theatre Etiquette

---

## THEATRE ETIQUETTE

*“An audience member had clambered onto the stage of the Booth Theatre and tried to plug a cell phone charger into an outlet on the set of *Hand to God*.” – Playbill news July 2015*

While this occurrence in New York seems pretty ridiculous, our State Theatre Company Audience Spy Panel have already clocked the following right here in South Australia: phones ringing, phones used as lights, note-taking, heckling of actors and people walking across the stage - all while the actors are performing onstage!

A live performance is a unique experience shared between performers and the audience. Unlike television or movies, the actors on stage can hear noise and see lights from the audience. So, as a courtesy to the performers and the others around you, please review the following information with your class before attending a performance.

### **Day with State performances**

Please notify front of house when your school arrives, as schools are seated in order of arrival. Teachers must accompany students into the theatre and are responsible for their behaviour throughout the performance. Students will be asked to leave large school bags in the foyer.

### **Be on Time!**

Some shows have a lock-out period where you won't be let into the theatre until a suitable break in the performance.

### **Running late for a matinee performance?**

If your group is running late for a performance, please contact State Theatre Company's main number on 8415 5333 during working hours, or contact the venue after 5pm.

### **Note taking**

Many teachers like students to take notes during a performance. This is distracting for actors on stage and other audience members, particularly when phones are used as lighting devices. Instead, notes should be written in the interval and after the show. If you are seeing a performance with a Q&A following, this is a good time to take notes. Perhaps allow class discussion time in the foyer after the show. If students have further questions after the performance, I am happy to respond.

Email: [education@statetheatrecompany.com.au](mailto:education@statetheatrecompany.com.au)

### **Talking**

Everyone attending the production deserves to see the play without distractions.

When someone in the audience talks, it ruins the story and spoils the mood being created on stage.

### **Leave food and drinks outside**

Food and drinks are not permitted in the theatre. They make a mess and the noise is distracting for the actors and the rest of the audience.

**Seats are for sitting**

Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you. Always walk along the row rather than jumping over seats. For safety reasons stay in your seat at the end of the show until the auditorium lights go up.

**Turn OFF all electronic devices**

Mobile phones should be turned off during a performance, as they can interfere with the sound system. Phones used to SMS give off a glow that the actors can see from the stage and is distracting for them and others around you. All recording devices (camera, MP3 recorders, and video recorders) are illegal to use unless you have prior copyright permission.

**Feel free to laugh, cry and applaud**

Show your appreciation of the performance -the actors love it!!

**Length of performance**

The length of a performance in the Study Guide is an estimation made during rehearsals. For updated details check out our website: [www.statetheatrecompany.com.au](http://www.statetheatrecompany.com.au)

**Suitability**

Warning guides are usually given on all productions in our brochure and online. Should you have further questions please ring the Education Manager for more information.

# Cast & Creatives

---

**Nick bottom / Mowldie**

*Charles Mayer*

**Peter Quince**

*Rory Walker*

**Francis Flute**

*Tim Overton*

**Snug**

*Amber McMahon*

**Tom Snout**

*Lori Bell*

**Robin Starveling**

*Julie Forsyth*

**Director**

*Sarah Giles*

**Designer**

*Jonathon Oxlade*

**Lighting Designer**

*Mark Pennington*

**Composer**

*David Heinrich*

**Choreographer**

*Gabrielle Nankivell*

**Stage Manager**

*Melanie Selwood*

**Assistant Stage Manager**

*Alison Growden*

# Playwrights

---

The Popular Mechanicals was co-written by Tony Taylor and Keith Robinson, using the original works of William Shakespeare.

Tony Taylor is an actor, playwright and director. Prior to *The Popular Mechanicals*, Taylor worked in productions such as *As You Like It*, *The Hills Family Show*, and *The Venetian Twins* as an actor. In the original Company B 1987 production directed by Geoffrey Rush, which toured to Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne, Taylor played the character of Francis Flute. After this, he continued to feature as an actor in productions of *Henry IV*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Tempest*, *The 39 Steps* and *As You Like It*. Taylor tried his hand at directing as well, working on *A Porthole into the Minds of the Vanquished* and even directing *The Popular Mechanicals* in Newtown in 2005. His other works as a collaborative playwright include *Gentlemen Prefer Blokes* and *Horrortorio*.

Keith Robinson is an Australian actor and playwright. Robinson is predominantly known for his acting, having performed in many productions including *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *Art* and most recently *The Underpants*. In the premiere 1987 production of *The Popular Mechanicals* by Company B, Robinson played the character of Peter Quince. *The Popular Mechanicals* is his only known work as a playwright.

William Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright, and performer. In the late 1500s, he began his successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of the most infamous Elizabethan playing company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. His works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays varying in genre between tragedy, comedy, history and tragicomedy; 154 sonnets; two long narrative poems and a few other verses. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English vernacular and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. His plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* have been translated into every major language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. In the 20th and 21st centuries, his works remain highly popular and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in theatres throughout the world; an example of this being Taylor and Robinson's *The Popular Mechanicals*, which was adapted from his original comedy play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

# Play History

---

*The Popular Mechanicals* developed out of the 1987 'Stand up for Shakespeare' jigs that occurred after the productions of *Hamlet* and *Henry IV, Part One* at Sydney's Wharf Theatre. *The Popular Mechanicals* was a piece working Australian-ness into the Shakespearean text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The original production in 1987 performed by Company B at Belvoir Street Theatre was directed by Geoffrey Rush and featured the playwrights Taylor and Robinson in the cast. Rush described the play as, "Shakespearean vaudeville, consisting, as it does, of songs, sketches, novelties, dance – something to celebrate the traditions of theatre clowning. It mines silliness, rudeness, it deploys surreal routines that seem to go on and on, and, like many farces, jigs or vaudeville sketches, *The Popular Mechanicals* performs better than it reads."

He also said the play highlighted, "collective childhood memories and all the good and bad Shakespeare we've ever done or seen."

Since this first production, there have been a number of performances of *The Popular Mechanicals* across Australia by a variety of theatre companies, including La Boite Theatre Company (2000), Riverina Theatre Company (1997), Freewheels Theatre Company (1991), Western Australia Theatre Company (1991), TN Theatre Company (1989) and State Theatre Company SA (1988).



© Shane Reid

# Director

## SARAH GILES

Sarah Giles graduated from NIDA in 2008 with a graduate diploma in dramatic art specialising in directing, and has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne with a double major in History and Italian.

She has been involved in a range of productions including: operas *Pas a Pas – Nulle Part* and *Into the Little* for the Sydney Chamber Opera; classic and contemporary productions such as *Perplex*, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Mariage Blanc*, *Money Shots*, *Ruby Moon*, (Sydney Theatre Company); *Die Plantage* (The Farm) (NIDA); *Vernon God Little* (WAAPA); *The Ugly One*, *The Pigeons* (Griffin Independent); *Kreutzer VS Kreutzer* (The Australian Chamber Orchestra); *That Face* (Red Stitch); *The Herbal Bed* (The New Theatre); *The Bear* (Theatre Forward); *The Bald Soprano*, *Face to the Wall* (NIDA) and *The Maids* (La Mama).



Sarah was the Affiliate Director in Residence at Griffin Theatre Company in 2009, the Richard Wherrett Fellow at Sydney Theatre Company in 2011 and was Co-Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company in 2013. In 2011 Sarah won a Sydney Theatre Award for Best Direction of an Independent Production for her production of *The Ugly One* at Griffin Theatre.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

### **1. The Popular Mechanicals is about amateur thespians who put on *Pyramus and Thisbe* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. What do we see in this production that we don't see in a Shakespeare play?**

We see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from their perspective. While the rest goes on and people do all sorts of ridiculous things, we stay with this group of amateur actors as they rehearse the play they want to perform at the Royal Wedding. It follows the very basic, and sadly all too true rule of theatre: what can go wrong, will go wrong, but nonetheless the play must go on!

### **2. What do you think is the enduring appeal of Bottom and his mates?**

That they are really trying to do a good job, but unfortunately are very bad at that job.

### **3. We are promised bad puppetry. How bad can it get?**

So bad that it's good.

### **4. We're also promised fart jokes. Why are farts funny?**

Everyone farts – the rich, the famous, the poor, the powerful – yet our very Victorian stitched-up sense of shame and embarrassment about our bodies, tells us that it's wrong to fart. We are told it is socially unacceptable, rude and that we should control our sphincters. This sense of shame at doing something extremely natural is taken very seriously. So when this veneer of civility is stripped back we are shocked. When a politician in a suit farts mid-sentence, we see the ridiculous naked body wiggling beneath the suit. That is why we laugh.

I firmly believe fart jokes are best shared when the fart is true and audible, so very hard to do when not in person!

# Actor Profile

---

## **CHARLES MAYER - Bottom and Mowldie**

After 11 years in the British Army, Charles trained at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and has worked in London, China and Australia. Charles has appeared in the West End in *Bent*, on stage in Shanghai in *I Am My Own Wife*, *The Odd Couple*, *Oleanna* and *No Exit*, and in Adelaide in *Orphans* and *Man in a Bag*.

For State Theatre Company, Charles has appeared in our 2013 production of *Othello*. Film credits include *Ip Man 2*, *Shanghai Calling* and forthcoming Australian thriller *The Pack*, and TV includes *Hotel Babylon*, *Spooks*, *Sam Fox Extreme Adventures*, *ANZAC Girls*, *Gallipoli* and *Deadline Gallipoli*.



## **INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES**

### **1. What training have you done as an actor?**

I've completed a BA Honours in Acting at Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, 3 years of classical training.

### **2. What attracted you to the roles of Bottom & Mowldie?**

These characters both carry many of my own personal flaws, so celebrating my own weaknesses is good for my improvement as a human. Quick-changes of character are always fun to do.

### **3. What are the difficulties of playing two characters in this show?**

Quick-change of costume is always a challenge no matter how many times you do it, as the stakes are very high for getting it right and on time. And having two opposite characters forces the actor to have to dig deep into every characteristic of physicality and voice so that no two details overlap. A lot of intellectual work, experimentation, accepting that I have to try and fail many times before I'm happy.

### **4. What do you see are the difficulties with comedy?**

There are so many variables in what makes something funny, it takes a long time to develop every gag. In performance not every gag will get a laugh and it takes a lot of strength to hold back and not play for the laughs to try to entertain too much, just let it ride.

### **5. Give a brief description of your characters.**

Bottom is an arrogant, self-assured know it all modern type of actor with a big ego and a superiority complex. He reckons he could direct better than the director and act better than the other actors put together. He turns into a nice guy, though, when his 'dream', the terror of turning into a donkey and his joy of being loved by the queen of the fairies, turns him into a nice guy.

Mowldie meanwhile is an old-school actor who is all about the work, which he loves, and misses in his retirement. He speaks in Shakespeare all the time! He is an alcoholic, and an angry drunk, therefore a liability. He lets the gang down and is fired.

### **6. What have been your favourite two roles that you've played and why?**

These two, obviously! The joy of work is a lot to do with who you're working with and in this play it's heaps of fun working everything out with a great gang of people. There's a lot of laughter in the rehearsal room and off stage. I was pretty intense when I first started acting and took myself very seriously (like Bottom!) but now I enjoy working more and more. Maybe one day I'll turn into

Mowldie...!

### **LORI BELL – Tom Snout**

Lori Bell graduated AC Arts in 2004 and in 2009 was a part of the team that took out the Best Cabaret Ensemble at the 2009 Melbourne Greenroom Awards for *Mutzenball*.

While Lori was part of the Women's Chorus in *Euripides' Trojan Women* as an AC Arts student, Lori makes her State Theatre Company debut with *The Popular Mechanicals*.

Lori also works as a comedian having won the Adelaide Comedy's People Choice Award 4 out of the last 5 years, as well as a stack of other awards including Comedian of the year and Host of the Year. In 2010 Lori Bell won an Adelaide Fringe Award for Best Emerging Comedian as her alter ego *Granny Flaps*. As *Granny Flaps*, Lori has toured with *Puppetry of the Penis*, played at Big Day Out in Melbourne and Adelaide and released a DVD titled, *Granny Flaps – Opens Up*.



Lori's most recent theatre role was in the 2013 Critics Circle Award winning show *One for the Ugly Girls*, which played to sold out shows in both the Adelaide Fringe and 2014 *LaMama* seasons.

### **INTERVIEW WITH LORI**

#### **1. What training have you done as an actor?**

I trained at AC Arts (Adelaide College of the Arts).

#### **2. How did you get into stand-up comedy?**

Accidentally. I was asked to do a female monologue for a magazine launch and couldn't find one for my age that wasn't about women hating on themselves or a man, so I wrote my own. Turns out that monologue was my first set.

#### **3. What attracted you to the role of Tom Snout?**

They let me play the part.... But no, it's written for a female actor, pretending to be a male, who does a stand-up routine... It was a good fit. I walk funny and my natural voice is deep.

#### **4. What do you see are the difficulties with comedy?**

Getting it right. Stand up is all about reading a crowd and flexibly moving along with them. The control is yours. Theatre is more set. My role is shaped by writers, designers, other actors, and most of all the director. So, trust in everyone and remember to have fun.

#### **5. Give a brief description of your character.**

I am one of the village idiots at this stage. But a bit of a turd. But that may change by the time the show gets up.

#### **6. What have been your favourite two roles that you've played and why?**

Played 'The Host' in *Mutzenball* which I co-wrote and also won a Melbourne Green Room award for. That was a very personal show and performance. And I also loved the show I did before this which was called '*One for the Ugly Girls*' I played the 'ugly girl'. I liked it because it was a funny role that also let me flex my drama muscles. Sometimes when you're the funny girl, that's all you get to be.

# Synopsis

---

*The Popular Mechanicals* is a hilarious romp with the supporting characters of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, putting centre-stage the infamous Nick Bottom and his fellow tradesmen and their misadventures in amateur theatrics. Using most of the characters' existing lines from Shakespeare's play, the adapting authors have retained the original plot of the mechanicals preparing for their performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, but built up a larger 'between-the-scenes' narrative that imagines what kind of antics the mechanicals were getting up to when they're offstage in Shakespeare's play, especially during the period Bottom has been transformed and is away with Titania.



© Shane Reid

# Plot

---

## Act I, Scene 1

A voiceover introduces the mechanicals who come onstage with percussion instruments and begin performing a musical number called *'Monster in the Dark'*, which ridicules common annoying audience behaviour during a performance like: talking, giving away the plot, burping, taking photos, coming in late, eating, being critics, sneezing, wheezing, coughing, knitting, listening to music, dying, knuckle-cracking, denture-clacking, shouting, calling out, sleepers, drunkards, snorting, chewing gum and the annoyance of alarms.

Halfway through the song, the mechanicals begin singing Balthasar's song from Act II, Scene III of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Having trouble with the words they all stop to work out who is singing it wrong, before remembering the audience and finishing the song. Snug twice refers to Macbeth's most infamous line – *"is this a dagger which I see before me?"*

## Act I, Scene 2

Set in a rehearsal hall on Thursday evening at cocktail hour, the scene begins with the mechanicals waiting for Bottom, complementing the room's décor. Quince quotes Viola from *Twelfth Night*, *"Yes I fell in love with the willow cabin at the gate."* A discussion ensues about the state of the sausage rolls. Snout reads the announcement of Theseus (the Duke of Athens) and Hippolyta (the Queen of the Amazon's) search for a group to perform at their wedding reception from the newspaper. Commenting on the late hour the men begin quoting lines from *Twelfth Night*, *"the clock upbraids us with the waste of time"* and Macbeth, *"Light thickens and the crows makes wing to the rooky wood."* Bottom hurries in the door.

The remainder of the scene follows the script of Act I, Scene II of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with occasional interjections from the group in response to lines. During this scene, Quince calls upon each mechanical member of the troupe and allocates each their role in the play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Bottom is given Pyramus, Flute to his distress is given Thisbe, Starveling is given Thisbe's mother, Snout is given Pyramus' father, Snug the lion's part and Quince allocates himself as Thisbe's father; yet Bottom insists throughout he play all the roles and demonstrates or rather brags about his ability to do so. Quince cunningly convinces Bottom to play only Pyramus as he needs, *"a sweet-fac'd man; a proper man as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely, gentleman-like man."* Bottom concedes. Quince tells the group to learn their parts and meet in the woods the next night to rehearse away from the townspeople, reminding them the performance is Saturday night and *"two days be not an ideal rehearsal period one is forced to admit – and we've got our day jobs to think about!"*

## Act I, Scene 3

During the following day, each of the mechanicals goes about their day jobs while learning lines and practicing gestures. Starveling begins the scene on the phone with a customer, discussing their requirements, *"linen bossed with pearl"*, (*The Taming of the Shrew*) before calling Snout, who he has to call back as another customer rings. When Starveling calls Snout again, Snout answers with his hot iron burning himself before answering the phone. Starveling is once again interrupted by another customer ringing before he returns to ask Snout if he has learnt any of his lines today. Snout replies all that he has learnt is, *"If the iron rings, don't answer it"*.

## Act I, Scene 4

That evening in the wood of the Duke's Oak, Flute, Snout, Starveling and Snug are waiting in the dark for Quince and Bottom to arrive, meddling around with their torches and flitting about to music. When Quince arrives he orders the lights up and asks as to Bottom's whereabouts. The group begin to ridicule

Bottom's name, laughing all the while. When Bottom arrives, they continue to make Bottom '*the butt of their feeble wit*' until he goes to storm off, but Quince assures him it's all in good humour.

The remainder of the scene follows the script of Act III, Scene I of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the exemption of Puck and his lines. Quince sets the rehearsal area for the group before Bottom begins to raise many of the issues within the play *Pyramus and Thisbe*, such as the use of a sword and the performance of the Lion which would terrify the ladies of the audience. Bottom suggests a prologue be written to say they will do no harm with their swords and the Lion is merely a man in a costume to put them out of their fear.

Quince then asks as to how to resolve the 'two hard things' - bringing moonlight into the chamber and how to represent the wall that Pyramus and Thisbe talk through. They decide to have men represent the moonshine and the wall onstage. The group begin to rehearse rather haphazardly, before Flute sees Bottom offstage metamorphosing into an ass. At this sight, the entire group onstage throw their scripts in the air, run around in a panic, falling over one another, screaming for their lives in fear.

### **Act I, Scene 5**

The next morning, Quince, Snout, Snug and Flute sit wrapped in a rug at the rehearsal hall, drinking tea in sadness over the previous night's events. The men discuss how the sun hasn't risen, taking lines from *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*. Starveling enters and the men ask if Bottom has been home yet. Starveling replies that he has not. They all begin to weep and wonder what happened to Bottom and how he came to look like a donkey. Snug suggests he's just having breakfast, while Starveling believes he's gone off in a huff as their performances stink, which Flute takes great offense to, which starts a war of Shakespearean insults between the two mechanicals.

The men all say they shouldn't have gone to the wood to rehearse. They suspect that something bad has happened to Bottom, quoting *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare's *Sonnet 71* and *King John*. Quince blames himself to which all the men agree. Upset Quince begins to hysterically rant about how hard he works as a director using phrases from *The Life and Death of Richard II*. Flute slaps Quince back into reality who slaps him back.

Snout announces the sun has risen, "*jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top*" (*Romeo & Juliet*). The men gather around the radio to hear the morning news about the wedding, which reduces Quince to tears again. Snug tries to convince Quince not to get upset as they have a show to do. Quince is struck with an idea and calls The Frog and Parsnip, and waits on hold. Remembering the audience is watching, Quince instructs the group to 'fill in' the stage with an act. The men argue over what to perform before Starveling suggests a song about Queen Elizabeth I called, "*I Grieve and Dare Not Show My Discontent*", otherwise known as "*Upon Mounzeur's Departure*". The scene ends with him singing to the audience.

### **Act I, Scene 6**

Later that day, Quince announces, "*a replacement is arriving imminently to take over from Bottom in the role of Pyramus*" someone who "*hath served many years once with the King's Players in London*". Quince announces Ralph Mowldie as the replacement and all the group gush over the stories they have heard about the great professional actor. Mowldie enters with a dramatic performance which the group revers.

Quince thanks Mowldie for coming to their aid and introduces everyone, going blank with nerves on each introduction. Flute calls for a speech from Mowldie who begins performing excerpts from *The Comedy of Errors*, swigging a drink from his hip flask as he performs. He moves himself and the others to tears, with Quince telling Mowldie the men will carry the memory of his performance to their graves. As the men rush to aid the 'tired' Mowldie and ask if he needs anything, he requests they perform for him. Snug again suggests "*That*" which the men again say no to, but then agree on "*The Jig*."

### **Act I, Scene 7**

This scene sees for the performance of “The Jig” called “*Beryl the Widow*” set to the tune of the song, “*Minnie the Moocher*”, during which Mowldie drinks at an alarming rate. The mechanicals then enact a play in which a man named Johnny visits Susan in her bed to engage in ‘*the sweet sports of the night*’, when Susan’s mother enters and chastises the two before dragging Susan off. A witch and her friend enter and Johnny approaches the witch asking for a way to soften Susan’s mother. The witch says she has a potion that must be put into Spanish soup that will make her fart. Johnny enlists Susan to help give her mother the soup, while he plays a ghost to frighten her to death. When Susan’s mother demands her dinner, Susan feeds her the Spanish soup and waits for it to work. When midnight strikes, Mother prays that spirits don’t begin walking abroad and starts farting uncontrollably as John enters and scares her as the Ghost. Susan offers her mother a phial to sniff to make her feel better, at which her mother suddenly has a change of heart and asks after Johnny. When Susan asks if they can marry, Mother agrees “*with all her heart*” and the couple celebrate their triumph and plan to continue to ply Mother with the soup the next week. Snug concludes the scene with a reprise of the opening song, to which Mowldie erupts with applause before falling down dead drunk in front of the troupe.

### **Act I, Scene 8**

Snug finds himself in front of the curtain, where he alone is left to pack up everything from “The Jig” while the others have gone to deal with Mowldie. What follows is maybe a dream, or a day-dream, or a fantasy. Maybe a silent clown routine. Maybe he plays music to clean to and gets carried away. Maybe he starts talking to the audience. Whatever. (In this version, although it is rehearsed, this scene is also ad-libbed – so expect anything!)

Snout joins him onstage doing his own impressions and telling jokes. The two start discussing the difference between poetry and prose, before bursting into song and dance to “*Merry England*” and are gradually joined by the full company. The scene ends with the men standing in perfect tableau same as the end of Scene 7.

### **Act I, Scene 9**

The men try to shake Mowldie awake, but realise that he’s out cold because he’s drunk. They all begin to wonder how they’re going to rehearse, with Flute suggesting to cut out *Pyramus* and call the play just *Thisbe*. Snug suggests doing “*That*” as he has everything he needs for it in his bag and it’s cheery. Reluctantly Quince instructs the men to do it. As they all start setting up, Snout re-enters and realising what’s going on, turns to the audience and apologises. The chicken royale begins. A performance where the mechanicals use rubber chickens in trunk hose and ruffs on sticks to perform a comedic and crude show. During the performance, Mowldie stirs and sees the alarming display and passes out once again.

At the end of the performance, Snout presents the list of the finalists selected to perform at the wedding. When the group discovers they have been billed poorly, Quince is outraged. Behind him, Mowldie awakens and drunkenly begins performing *Pyramus and Thisbe*, swigging from his flask as the troupe try to get to their places around him. The phone rings and Quince answers, to be told that the Duke is on his way to the reception. The men lament Bottom’s absence and Quince asks Mowldie to leave, eventually pushing him out of the door. Offstage Bottom calls for the men. The group waits in fear of whether he will enter as a donkey or a man, but when Bottom comes in human, they all clamour around him overjoyed.

Bottom instructs the group to get ready to perform at the reception. Mowldie re-enters and calls the mechanicals amateurs, at which they retort he is unprofessional. Quince strips down, freshens himself up and changes into a tuxedo reciting Act III, Scene I of *The Life of King Henry V*. The other men gather onstage dressed in tuxedos and Flute in a dress and to the sound of ‘*Mendelssohn’s Wedding March*’ they head to the reception and begin warming up.

**Act I, Scene 10**

A fanfare sounds and the men nervously make their way to the stage at the reception. What follows is an avant-garde conceptual production of *Pyramus and Thisbe* gone terribly wrong: Quince dries up during his prologue, Flute consumed with nerves vomits before the show begins, words are muddled up, props are forgotten, discordant music is played, Bottom overplays his character and extends his dialogue, Snug's costume falls apart, the audience struggle to understand Starveling's role as moonshine, the lighting blinds the actors and four 'Sisters Three' appear onstage. At the performance's end, Quince asks if the Royals would like to see the epilogue or hear a Bergamask dance between two of the mechanicals, which they obviously decline as the group exits bowing and prostrating themselves.

**Act I, Scene 11**

The men stand around drinking and congratulating one another at the after-show party. Bottom breaks away and comes to a spot downstage, and while the others freeze, he recites his final lines from Act IV, Scene I of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When Bottom re-joins the group, the company all begin to say farewell to another, quoting *Troilus and Cressida*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*. Snug simply says "see ya" before turning and stepping in a cow pat.

# Characters

---

## **Nick Bottom**

A weaver chosen to play Pyramus in the mechanical's play. Bottom is full of advice and self-confidence, but frequently makes silly mistakes and misuses language. He believes himself to be the most talented member of the group, insisting he plays everyone's roles and extending his own dialogue when performing. He is shown to have diva tendencies, threatening to "go back to me loom." However, Quince convinces him he must only play Pyramus. Bottom's arrogant attitude is what sees him being targeted by Puck, an unseen character, who turns him into an ass and makes him absent for most of the play's action.

## **Peter Quince**

A carpenter and the nominal leader of the mechanical's attempt to put on a play. Quince is often shoved aside by the abundantly confident Bottom. Originally allocated the role of Thisbe's father in *Pyramus and Thisbe*, Quince instead plays the Prologue. Quince is the most driven member of the group when it comes to the performance, refusing to let anything such as missing props and actors get in the way, directing the troupe aggressively from side stage, and becoming extremely frustrated when they are billed poorly. Quince can also get quite hysterical, blaming himself for Bottom's disappearance and again when the group suggests he resigns as director.

He is very conscious of the audience's presence and will not leave the stage empty. He seems organised, preparing sausage rolls, coming up with a bill of properties and has inspired ideas such as performing in the woods and having Mowldie replace Bottom. However, in reality he isn't: the sausage rolls burn, props are forgotten and his ideas put the group in more trouble than they were to start with. Quince is also seen to become easily tongue-tied, when he is star struck by Mowldie and forgets everyone's names, and later when he forgets his lines and muddles up his Prologue.

## **Francis Flute**

A bellows-mender, unhappily chosen to play the female role of Thisbe in the play. Forced to play a young girl in love, the bearded craftsman speaks his lines in a high, squeaky voice. He is overly enthusiastic about Mowldie's acting abilities and involvement in the play. Flute is also seen to be the most nervous about performing, as he vomits onstage before the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

## **Robin Starveling**

A tailor originally chosen to play Thisbe's mother, he ends up playing the part of the moonshine. Starveling is seen to be one of the most easy-going of the group members, accepting her role without dispute, and attempting to learn her lines between work calls.

## **Tom Snout**

A tinker originally chosen to play Pyramus' father, Snout ends up playing the part of Wall, dividing the two lovers. Snout features in Snug's dream of a stand-up comedy routine, showing he is very comedic but sensible as he reigns Snug's dirty jokes in. Snout's wife Dorothy dotes on him, travelling to Devon to get him Devon sausages, providing him with the final list of finalists to perform at the Duke's wedding, and calling Snout to tell him the Duke is heading to his reception.

## **Snug**

A joiner chosen to play the Lion, as she is 'slow of study' – for example, she struggles to understand the group's jokes and references. Snug worries that her roaring will frighten the ladies in the audience. In this play, Snug is perhaps the most crude of the company, insisting constantly the group perform "That",

which turns out to be a cheeky performance with rubber chickens, and making dirty jokes during her stand-up comedy routine in her dream.

### **Mowldie**

The retired professional actor, who "*hath served many years once with the King's Players in London*", and replaces Bottom in the role of Pyramus. Mowldie is very dramatic and self-confident, but is also a drunk who drinks throughout the rehearsal period. Once they discover his misdemeanour he begs not to be turned away, and when he is, he abuses the men and calls them amateurs, believing to be above them.

# Genre

---

*The Popular Mechanicals* is labelled a play with music. Adapted from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Popular Mechanicals* has been described as, "a low-brow, absurdist and occasionally poetical play without the play." Using most of the mechanical's dialogue from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, playwrights Robinson and Taylor have inserted into its narrative a combination of songs, puppetry, jokes and excerpts from Shakespeare's plays – all depicting the antics the mechanicals were getting up to whilst offstage during the original play.

It is a comedy with clowning, vaudeville, farce, wordplay both high and low-brow, moments of grotesquery and assaults on the fourth wall. It is also rough, hammy, crude and obscene, but all in the very best of fun. The writers poke fun at the world of theatre both overtly and stylistically using theatrical techniques including slapstick, stand-up comedy, musical theatre, broad farce, puppetry and more

## **Definitions of the types of Comedy used in *Popular Mechanicals*:**

<b>Slapstick</b>	A style of humour involving exaggerated physical activity which exceeds the boundaries of common sense.
<b>Stand-up</b>	Where a comedian performs in front of a live audience, usually speaking directly to them.
<b>Musical theatre</b>	A form of theatrical performance that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting and dance.
<b>Farce</b>	A comic dramatic work using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterisation and ludicrously improbable situations.
<b>Puppetry</b>	The skill or activity of using puppets in performances.
<b>Clowning</b>	Entertaining by pantomiming common situations or actions in exaggerated or ridiculous fashion, by juggling or tumbling, etc.
<b>Vaudeville</b>	A type of entertainment popular in the US in the early 20th century, featuring a mixture of speciality acts such as burlesque, comedy, song and dance.
<b>Wordplay</b>	The witty exploitation of the meanings and ambiguities of words, especially in puns.

# Themes

---

## ACTING DILEMMAS

Opening with a song both decrying and celebrating live audiences, the script is really a celebration of theatre. The mechanicals enjoy acting and coming together to create something. Bottom says, *"We may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains, be perfect."*

Quince the director also laments about the trials of being an amateur and the short rehearsal time, *"Two days be not an ideal rehearsal period one is forced to admit – and we've got our day jobs to think about!"*

The opening song talks about bad audience behaviour entitled, *"The Monster in the Dark"*. This behaviour includes: chatting, giving away the plot, burping, eating, and coming in late.

**TASK:** Create a list of other bad audience behaviours – see if you remember any from the play.

**REVIEW:** After you come back from seeing the State Theatre show, review the experience with your students. Were they 'good' or 'bad' audience members? How was the experience of watching the show given their behaviour and the behaviour of other audience members?

The opening song then continues to talk about performers and how they aim to please their audience;

*We are Deceivers Ever  
One Aim to Please,  
One to Deplore,  
In one thing constant never  
Then sigh not so,  
But let us show  
That we be fair and funny,  
And funny, and funny, and funny  
And we be fair and funny  
Converting all your worldly woe  
Into Hey No Nonny*

**TASK:** Read the lyrics above and decipher what they mean.

Later Mowldie, a professional actor who is a drunkard calls them amateurs. But it is clear they all enjoy acting and instead of feeling dejected by this comment, Quince responds, *"From the Latin Ama: Love: For the of.....For the love of! Yes, amateurs! And you sir, a professional."*

Being outdone, Mowldie replies, *"Yes Professional. Pro: For Flesh:...fesh. On: Stage of: Al...Cohol. Professional. One who drinks like a fesh!"*

**TASK:** Other acting issues mentioned in the play include: nerves, missing props, interrupted rehearsals, the rehearsal space, poor publicity, poor billing and performance going poorly.

Talk about how these issues occur in the script and what is done to overcome them.

## FRIENDSHIP

Bottom, Quince, Flute, Snug, Snout and Starveling are all good friends. They all have other jobs, but enjoy coming together to work on a performance piece. Quince is clearly the leader of the group and keeps them in order during rehearsals and discussions. Even though they make fun of Bottom's name, they are scared when he changes into a donkey and know that the play can't go on without him. They are ecstatic when Quince gets Mowldie as a replacement. However, they discover that Mowldie is a drunk and long for their friend, Bottom "*O sweet bully Bottom!*" When they hear him approach they are most happy, but fearful that he is still a donkey.

After the performance they celebrate together and Starveling says, "*Farewell all! If we do meet again, why we shall smile! If not, why then, this parting was well made.*"

**TASK:** Explore friendship. Who are your friends with? Create a Mind Map/Radial hierarchy of who your friends are. Maybe your friends include family, or cousins or even pets?

## AUSTRALIAN-NESS

The *Popular Mechanicals* is riddled with Australian references such as:

- Food
  - Twisties, Minties, (*Twistie-Crunching, Mintie Munching*)
  - Sausage rolls and tomato sauce (*There are sausage rolls without, and tomato sauce*)
- Performers
  - Colin Friels – (*Which one's Colin Friels?*)
- Expressions
  - Dag and Brekkie
- The Iconic
  - Avon Lady. (*Ding Dong. Ding Dong. It's the Avon Lady.*)

There is also a sense of Englishness in the show, with many British references made throughout, such as Mowldie's career in the Kings Players of London, and in the songs of "*Merry England*" and "*I Grieve and Dare Not Show My Discontent*".

**TASK:** Explain how Australian-ness and English-ness can be used as a comedic tool.

## FOOLISHNESS

The central theme of the original text, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the foolishness of humankind, which carries through into *The Popular Mechanicals*. While the troupe intentionally play the fools in trying to entertain and amuse their audience through many forms of comedy, much of the play's hilarity comes from moments when the group become caught in their own stupidity.

# Other References

---

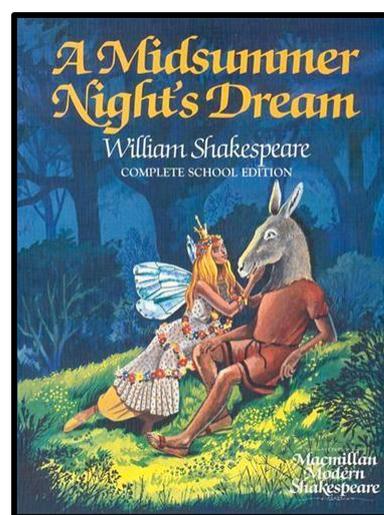
## ***A Midsummer Night's Dream Play Summary***

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare was believed to be written between 1590 and 1597, and first performed in its entirety in the 1840s. The play is recognized as one of the most popular of Shakespeare's comedies, still being performed on stages across the world today.

The play consists of five Acts of one or two scenes each, and three parallel plots, each connected by the event of the Duke Theseus of Athens and the Amazon Queen Hippolyta's wedding. As the play progresses, the plots overlap and the characters of each distinct story have some form of interaction with others. The majority of the play takes place at night in enchanted woodlands just outside of Athens.

The play tells the stories of four young lovers caught in a love quadrangle who have set out into the forest in pursuit of one another, and a group of amateur actors poorly rehearsing a play in the same woods to be performed at the Duke's wedding, who all find their worlds turned upside down by the actions both intentional and incidental of the warring king and queen of the fairies and their servant sprite.

Through a combination of madness, mistaken identity and magic, a classic comedy takes shape that allows Shakespeare to explore the universal theme of love and the complexities that come with it: lust, obsession, jealousy, disappointment, confusion, commitment amongst the many. Overall, Shakespeare uses his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to comment on how love can ultimately make fools of us all.



## ***A Midsummer Nights' Dream PLOT***

The first plot revolves around the four lovers who are for the majority of the play caught in a love quadrangle. Hermia is in love with Lysander but has been promised to Demetrius by her father. When her father brings her before the Duke to convince her to marry Demetrius, the Duke invokes the law that a woman must marry the man her father arranges for her to marry or face death. He instead offers her the option of choosing lifelong chastity as a nun. Not willing to take either option, Hermia and Lysander plot to steal away into the woods at night to elope.

Meanwhile, Demetrius - who is in love with Hermia - follows them, who in turn is closely followed by Helena who is deeply in love with Demetrius but is rudely rebuffed by him. In the woods, the four are caught up in the plot of the fairies, who incidentally make both Lysander and Demetrius fall in love with the previously undesired Helena. This causes a quarrel between the two men and the two women. When all is eventually put right and the charm is removed from Lysander, Hermia and Lysander end up together as do Demetrius and Helena, with the Duke allowing each couple to marry.

The second plot revolves around the fairies, King Oberon and Queen Titania, and Oberon's servant sprite Puck. Their plot begins with the royal fairies arriving in the woodlands outside Athens the day before they are to attend the Duke's wedding. Here, Oberon and Titania get into an argument over a little Indian boy who Oberon wants to be his soldier but Titania wants to keep as her own. Oberon decides Titania must be punished for her disobedience and orders Puck to help him concoct a magical juice derived from a flower called "love-in-idleness", which turns from white to purple when struck by Cupid's arrow. When the concoction is applied to the eyelids of a sleeping person, that person, upon

waking, falls in love with the first living thing they perceive. He informs Puck of his intention to have Puck apply the juice to Titania's eyes as she sleeps and make her fall in love with an animal of the forest and thereby shame her into giving up the little Indian boy.

In the meantime, Oberon and Puck witness the four lovers travelling through the woods and Demetrius' terrible treatment of Helena and resolve to help them, but through a case of mistaken identity on Puck's part, complicates the situation between the four lovers further. Eventually the two correct the mistakes made. The fairies disappear and only return at the play's end when they come to bless the house and its occupants with good fortune. After all other characters leave, Puck "restores amends" and suggests to the audience that what they just experienced might be nothing but a dream (hence the name of the play).

The final plot revolves around the amateur theatre group The Popular Mechanicals. The leader of the troupe Peter Quince and his fellow players Bottom, Flute, Snout, Starveling and Snug are first seen in the play planning to put on a play for the wedding of the Duke and Hippolyta, "*The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe*." Quince reads the names of characters and bestows them to the players. During the rehearsals, Bottom is spotted by Puck, who (taking his name to be another word for a jackass) transforms his head into that of a donkey. When Bottom returns for his next lines, the other actors run screaming in terror, much to Bottom's confusion, since he hasn't felt a thing during the transformation. Determined to wait for his friends, he begins to sing to himself. Titania is awakened by Bottom's singing and immediately falls in love with him. She lavishes him with attention and presumably makes love to him. Eventually, Oberon orders Puck to remove the donkey's head from Bottom, and after they all exit, Bottom awakes, and decides that he must have experienced a dream "*past the wit of man*". In Athens later that day, The Popular Mechanicals perform *Pyramus and Thisbe* for the Duke, his bride and the four lovers. Given a lack of preparation, the performers are so terrible playing their roles to the point where the guests laugh as if it were meant to be a comedy.

### **The Role of the Popular Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

The rude mechanicals are skilled labourers, or craftsmen, from Athens who want to put on a play for the city's royalty. There are six members in this group. The leader of the group is Peter Quince who chooses the play, assigns the parts, and directs the actors as they rehearse. Nick Bottom is the only one of the rude mechanicals who interacts with characters outside of the group, when a mischievous fairy named Puck casts a spell that turns Bottom's head into a donkey's head.

The main purpose of the Popular Mechanicals in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the comedic value through the group's repeated oxymorons e.g. "*a most lamentable comedy*", Bottom's dramatic diva-like behaviour e.g. "*That will ask some tears in the true performing of it*", and the pitiful production and performance of '*Pyramus and Thisbe*'. The six mechanicals and amateur dramatists see the audience not laughing with them, but rather at them.

However, the Popular Mechanicals have the role of embodying one of the biggest issues Shakespeare addresses in the play: the foolishness of humankind. This is particularly evident where the troupe rehearses, with Puck watching from afar. Puck sees that the mechanicals are too uneducated and inexperienced to present a well-performed play as they continuously bungle their lines and come up with ridiculous solutions to production problems such as the lack of a wall for two characters to speak through. It is this lack of education, coupled with Bottom's conceit that inspires Puck to turn Bottom into a donkey, to prove just what a fool Bottom truly is. Puck's famous line, "*Lord, what fools these mortals be!*" is spoken as he reflects on what he has witnessed both the four lovers and the mechanicals do, which in itself speaks to that the mechanicals embody Shakespeare's theme of the foolishness of humankind.

## Shakespeare

*The Popular Mechanicals* is riddled with references to other Shakespearean plays:

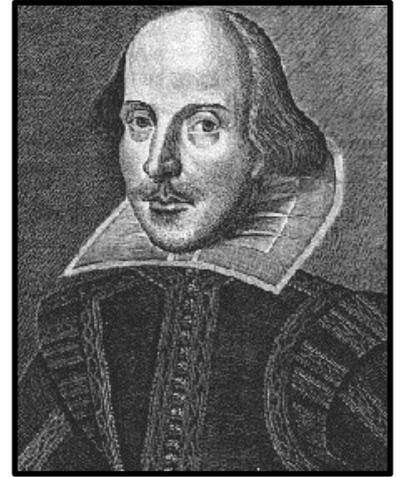
### *As You Like It*,

Act II, Scene I - *"Living on the edge of the woods one finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything."*

### *Coriolanus*

Act II, Scene I - *"I have heard that dumb men throng to see him, and the blind to hear them speak... All the gallery they say bends as if to Jove's statue, and the pit make a shower and thunder with their caps and shouts."*

Act IV, Scene V - *"My father saw him once. His voice, he said, was of trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries and fifes; tabors and cymbals, and his shouting made the sun dance!"*



### *Cymbeline*

Act IV, Scene II - *"Golden lads and lasses must, as chimney sweepers, come to dust."*

Act I, Scene VI - *"Your cause doth strike my heart with pity that doth make me sick."*

### *Hamlet*

Act I, Scene I - *"The morn in russet mantle clad walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill."*

Act III, Scene I - *"Perhaps he's gone to that undiscovered country [...] that country from whose bourn no traveller returns."*

### *Henry V Part I*

Act II, Scene IV - *"No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Quince's company; banish not him thy Quince's company. Banish plump Jack and banish all the world."*

### *Julius Caesar*

Act V, Scene I - *"For ever, and forever, farewell, all! If we do meet again, why we shall smile! If not, why then, this parting was well made."*

### *King John*

Act II, Scene II - *"I was never so bethumped with words since first I called my father's brother Dad."*

### *King Lear*

Act I, Scene IV - *"Prithee nuncle, I had rather be any kind of thing than a fool."*

### *The Life and Death of King John*

Act III, Scene IV - *"Death, death: O, amiable lovely death? Thou odoriferous stench! Sound rottenness! Arise forth from the couch of lasting night, thou hate and terror to prosperity, and I will kiss thy detestable bones, and put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows, and ring these fingers with thy household worms!!!"*

### *The Life and Death of Richard II*

Act III, Scene III - *"O, that I were as great as is my grief, or lesser than my name, or that I could forget what I have been, or not remember what I must be now! What must the director do now? Submit? [...] Swell'st thou proud heart? I'll give thee scope to beat since foes have scope to beat both thee and me."*

### *The Life of King Henry V*

Act III, Scene I - *"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; Or close the wall up without English dead! In peace there's nothing so becomes a man, As modest stillness and humility; But when the blast of*

*war blows in our ears, Then imitate the action of the tiger; Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage; Then lend the eye a terrible aspect, Let it pry through the portage of the head Like the brass canon; let the brow o'erwhelm it, As fearfully as doth a galled rock O'erhang and jutty his confounded base, Swilled with the wild and wasteful ocean. Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide; Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit To his full height! – On, on, you noblest English! Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof; Fathers that, like so many Alexanders, Have in these parts from morn till even fought, And sheath-d their swords for lack of argument. Dishonour not your mothers; now attest That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you. Be copy now to men of grosser blood, and teach them how to war! I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips, Straining upon the start. The game's afoot: Follow your spirit; and upon this charge, Cry 'God for Harry, England and Saint George!'*

#### *Macbeth*

Act II, Scene I – *“Is this a dagger which I see before me?”*

Act III, Scene II – *“Light thickens and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood.”*

Act II, Scene IV – *“By th' clock 'tis day, and yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp. Is't night's predominance or the day's shame that darkness does the face of Earth entomb when living light should kiss it?”*

#### *Merry Wives of Windsor*

Act I, Scene III – *“Hence! Avaunt! Vanish like hailstones, go!” “Trudge.” “Plod away o'the hoof.” “Seek shelter.”*

#### *Much Ado About Nothing*

Act II, Scene III – *“Fear, fear, fear, no more, darlings, fear no more, we are deceivers ever. One aim to please, one to deplore, in one thing constant never. Then sign not so, but let us show that we be fair and funny, converting all your worldly woe into hey no nonny...”*

#### *Othello*

Act V, Scene II – *“Here is my journey's end. Here is my butt.”*

#### *Richard III*

Act V, Scene III – *“Who saw the sun today?” “Not I, my lord.” “Then he disdains to shine; for by the book he should have braved the east an hour ago. A black day it will be to somebody.”*

#### *Romeo and Juliet*

Act II, Scene II – *“Arise, fair sun and kill the envious moon.”*

Act II, Scene III – *“The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night, chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light.”*

Act III, Scene V – *“Jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top.”*

Act II, Scene II – *“Goodnight, goodnight; parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say goodnight till it be morrow.”*

#### *The Taming of the Shrew*

Act II, Scene I – *“Linen bossed with pearl, valance of Venice gold in needlework”*

#### *Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Act II, Scene III – *“I think Crab my dog be the sourest-natured dog that lives.”*

Act III, Scene I – *“Cease to lament for that which thou canst not help.”*

#### *Troilus and Cressida*

Act V, Scene VIII – *“Look how the sun begins to set; how ugly night comes breathing at his heels... The dragon wing on night o'er spreads the earth.”*

Act III, Scene III – “Time is like a fashionable host, That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, And with his arms outstretched as he would fly, Grasps in the comer: Welcome ever smiles, And Farewell goes out sighing.”

*Twelfth Night*

Act I, Scene V – “I fell in love with the willow cabin at the gate...”

Act III, Scene I - “The clock upbraids us with the waste of time’

### **Pyramus & Thisbe**

In both Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act V, Sc I) and in *The Popular Mechanicals*, the troupe of amateurs enact the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Their production is crude and, for the most part, badly done.

Pyramus and Thisbe are a pair of ill-fated lovers whose story forms part of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The story has since been retold by many authors.

In the Ovidian version, Pyramus and Thisbe are two lovers in the city of Babylon who occupy connected houses/walls, forbidden by their parents to be wed, because of their parents' rivalry. Through a crack in one of the walls, they whisper their love for each other. They arrange to meet near Ninus' tomb under a mulberry tree and state their feelings for each other. Thisbe arrives first, but upon seeing a lioness with a mouth bloody from a recent kill, she flees, leaving behind her veil. When Pyramus arrives he is horrified at the sight of Thisbe's veil, assuming that a wild beast has killed her. Pyramus kills himself, falling on his sword in proper Roman fashion, and in turn splashing blood on the mulberry fruits, turning them dark. Thisbe returns, eager to tell Pyramus what had happened to her, but she finds Pyramus' dead body under the shade of the mulberry tree. Thisbe, after a brief period of mourning, stabs herself with the same sword. In the end, the Gods listen to Thisbe's lament, and forever change the colour of the mulberry fruits into the stained colour to honour the forbidden love.

Nicolaus Manuel: "Pyramus et Thisbe", anno 1520 picture



# Set Designer

## JONATHON OXLADE

Jonathon studied Illustration and Sculpture at the Queensland College of Art.

Jonathon has designed sets and costumes for Windmill Theatre, The Queensland Theatre Company, *Is This Yours?*, *Aphids*, *Circa*, Arena Theatre Company, *Polyglot*, *Bell Shakespeare*, *Polytoxic*, *Men Of Steel*, *The Real TV Project*, *Terrapin Puppet Theatre*, *The Escapists*, *The Border Project*, State Theatre Company of South Australia and LaBoite Theatre.



His designs has been seen at venues and festivals including the Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Festival, Adelaide Festival and Fringe, The Malthouse, Performance Space and the Queensland Art Gallery. Jonathon has illustrated the picture book *The Empty City* for Hachette Livre/Lothian and *The Edie Amelia* series by Sophie Lee, was Festival Designer for the 2010 *Out Of The Box* festival and is currently the Resident Designer at Windmill Theatre.

He has received a 2005 'Best Designer' Matilda Award for *A Christmas Carol* and Contribution to Queensland Theatre, and a 2009 'Best Designer' Matilda Award for *Attack of the Attacking Attackers*. He was nominated for a 2010 Greenroom Award for *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mud* for Best Design, a 2011 Ruby Award for *School Dance*, a 2013 Helpmann award, 'Best Scenic Design' for *School Dance*, and in 2014 for *Pinocchio* along with a Greenroom nomination for *Skeleton* and *I Heart John McEnroe*.

Jonathon was awarded the Lord Mayors Fellowship Grant to attend the Prague Quadrenniel of Scenography and Theatre Architecture.

## INTERVIEW WITH JONATHON

### 1. What attracted you to the play *The Popular Mechanicals*?

*The Popular Mechanicals* is one of the silliest and most well-known comedic plays in Australia. Being originally invented by some of Australia's most hilarious theatrical humans, it's a great opportunity to develop a new version of this riotous romp with a new team of Australia's finest. What fun!

### 2. What sorts of references have you used to help in the design and how does this help?

Sarah, the director and I looked at everything from traditional Tudor costumes, medieval workers outfits, *The Blackadder* TV Series, to other references including the *Simpsons*, *Dumb 'n Dumber* and the *Young Ones*. We wanted a quite traditional Tudor English look, with slight fractures in hairstyle and silhouette, to bring out the humour in physicality.

### 3. What are the challenges in the design of the play?

The amount of time for these comedy based shows is quite limited, there is a lot to do in such a short time. Rehearsing a comedy is different to a drama, the beats are different. Also, when you are dealing with jokes, you need props that work and rehearsals to be quite rigorous.

### 4. What training have you done as a designer?

I studied Illustration and Sculpture. I kind of fell into theatre through designing a small puppet show for a friend to tour, I think the training in art really helps to think about designing for the Theatre.

# Set & Costume Design

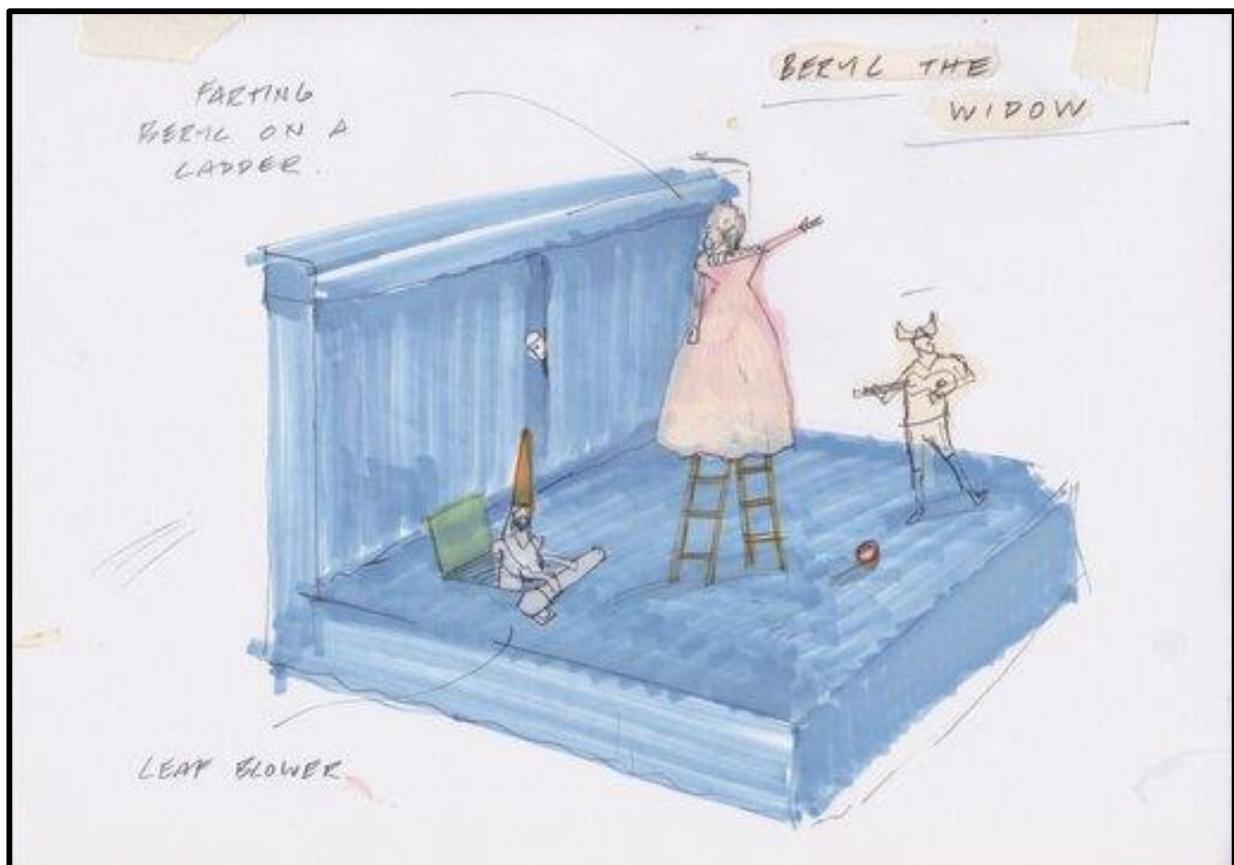
## SET

The play is set Now and Then. There is little reference to the design of the play other than the note, “*the play is set Now and Then.*” Essentially this leaves the director and designer with a blank canvas on which to begin. The language is a mixture of Shakespearian and contemporary language, and the confusion which lies therein. There are only two states of the play, that of the woods and the rehearsal hall.

The stage has been designed like a traditional travelling performance, with a stage curtain, raised stage/apron, wooden floors, trap doors and changing backdrops. The trap doors open to reveal the forest.

There are also three performances within the play: the crude and crazy “*Chicken Royale*” that sees 100 rubber chickens move along to the music of Prokofiev’s *The Montagues and the Capulets*, “*Beryl The Widow*” – a jig and crude performance about a lady who farts profusely, and the final performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which is a debacle from beginning to end.

Because of the nature of the behind-the-scenes rehearsal and the performances within the play the director and designer talked about creating a world like the TV show “*The Extras*”. In this show the actors are on stage with scenery behind them, then walk offstage in costume to eat or have a cup of coffee. This idea of mixing the two worlds was the inspiring for the design.



© 2015 Jonathon Oxlade

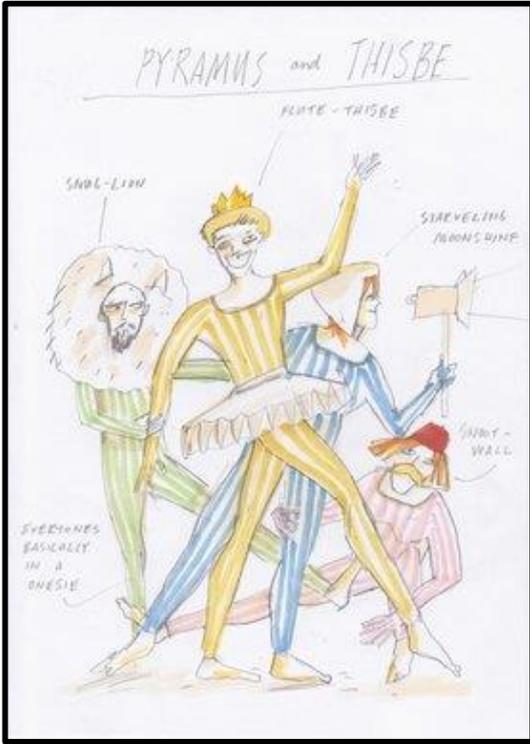
## COSTUMES

The costumes in *The Popular Mechanicals* are all period costumes or 'Tudor' costumes, referencing Shakespeare's time. This includes the 'ruff' collar and tights.

Some of the design inspiration came from the television series, "*The Blackadder*"



Blackadder



© 2015 Jonathon Oxlade



Traditional Shakespearean costume

# Music

---

*The Popular Mechanicals* is a play with music. The text takes quotations from various Shakespearean plays, and is interspersed with songs written to either well known tunes or music that has been specifically composed for the show. The company is directed to play various percussion and other instruments throughout the play – playing along to the music, setting the mood, or adding to the comical element.

The first song, “*Monster in the Dark*” is about the audience and its behaviour during performances. There are several verses of the song followed by the chorus:

*We love ya, we love ya  
What a jape, what a joke, what a lark!  
You Twistie-crunching, mintie-munching  
Monster in the Dark*

It is comical and very repetitive, finishing with one-liners by the various characters:

*Bronchial-wheezing  
Multiple-Sneezing  
Knuckle-Cracking  
Denture-Clacking  
Mucus-Clearing  
Hard of Hearing  
Bangle-Rattling  
Domestic-Battling  
Chewing-Gumming  
Off-Key-Humming  
Garlic-Ponging  
Singalonging  
Never-Clapping  
Chocolate-Wrapping  
Loudly-Snoring  
Deadly-Boring  
Monster in the Dark*

Starveling later sings “*Upon Monzuer’s Departure*”. This short lyric is often said to be written by Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603). The title given to the poem suggests that it may have been written by the Queen in response to the French Duke of Anjou’s departure from England in 1582, with whom she had been discussing the possibility of marriage. She knew he’d be one of her last suitors as she was 46. He was only 24 and the only suitor she actually got to know. The idea wasn’t very popular in England and she was forced to call the whole thing off. Some editors are confident that the poem really is Elizabeth’s, others are less certain. The music for this has been composed specifically for this production.

In Scene 7, the mechanicals do a jig to the tune of “*Minnie the Moocher*.” “*Minnie the Moocher*” is a jazz song first recorded in 1931 by Cab Calloway and His Orchestra. The song is most famous for its nonsensical adlibbed “scat” (for example, “Hi De Hi De Hi De Hi”). Calloway would get the audience to participate by repeating each scat phrase in a form of call and response. Eventually Calloway’s phrases would become so long and complex that the audience would laugh at their own failed attempts to repeat them. The actors on stage also encourage the audience to join in.

The next song, "*Merry England*" talks of Tudor England with nostalgic overtones, incorporating Englishness symbols such as thatched cottages, the country inn, cup of tea and the Sunday roast. This version uses some English symbols – mostly bad:

*If the black death doesn't get you, then the fire of London will  
We never bathe in water....We haven't any toilets, so we do it on the floor  
When pointing out a witch we must be sure there's no mistake, we take the dear old lady and we  
throw her in a lake, if she sinks she's not, but if she floats, we burn her at the stake  
We all went into mourning when Queen Bess's day was done, they put her in a coffin but they left it  
in the sun, and when the thing exploded she reigned over everyone*

The final song is for the "*Chicken Royale*" – a piece to accompany the crude performance of 100 rubber chickens.

# Composer

---

## DAVID HEINRICH

David is an experienced performer, composer and sound designer, with a background in theatre and live music.

He has produced composition/sound design for numerous theatre projects including *Last Days of the new Theatricals* (The Restaged Histories Project), *Whore* (B Sharp @ Belvoir), *Escape From Peligro Island* (Windmill), *Vs Macbeth* (Border Project/Sydney Theatre Co), *I Am Not An Animal*, *Highway Rock n Roll Disaster* (The Border Project), *Quack* (Griffin Theatre), *The Coming World* (Darlinghurst Theatre) *I, Animal* an interactive audio tour at Melbourne Zoo, *Mariage Blanc* (Sydney Theatre Co), *Fight Night* (Ontroerend Geod/Border Project). His composing credits for State Theatre Company include *Little Bird* and *The Comedy of Errors* (with Bell Shakespeare).



His other works as a performer and musician include *The Mouse*, *The Bird*, and *The Sausage* (Slingsby), *You Me and the Bloody Sea* (Mumpsimus/Adelaide Caberet Festival), *The Smile Off Your Face* and *Fight Night* (Ontroerend Geod), *Boom Bah!* and *Escape From Peligro Island* (Windmill Theatre), *Mr McGee and The Biting Flea* (Patch Theatre), Robyn Archer's *Boy Hamlet* (Brisbane Festival), Aaron Copeland's *The Second Hurricane* (Adelaide Festival), *Couch Potato* (Host, ABC Children), and *Elephantaisis* (Closer Productions)

David was a founding member of the Adelaide based ensemble The Border Project, and has co-created and performed in nearly all their works including *Half Real* (Malthouse Theatre/Border Project), *Please, Go Hop!* and *Trouble on Planet Earth*.

## INTERVIEW WITH COMPOSER

### 1. What is the importance of music in *The Popular Mechanicals*?

Music is pretty central to the show - there are several songs throughout and they are a central part of the comedy. The music is also part of communicating the kind of show it is and the kind of world these characters live in.

### 2. After reading the script, what is your first approach to beginning the music design?

I began by having a conversation with the director Sarah Giles, about what kind of world the play existed in - what would it look like, what would it sound like, what kind of songs did we want? We looked at YouTube clips of things we found funny, listened to songs for inspiration and considered how the songs would be performed - i.e. would we play backing tracks, or would the cast be able to play instruments.

So the musical decisions we make have to work in the context of the other design choices, so the production as a whole is coherent, and take into account the relative skill level of the cast as musicians and singers. Generally, you need to make some decisions and write most of the songs before rehearsals start, but also be able to evolve the design to suit discoveries made during rehearsals.

**3. As this play requires musical skills of the cast, how much do you work with them when designing the songs?**

Quite a bit, more than normally because of this very reason. They've had to learn how to play and sing the songs, and we've worked together in the rehearsal room quite a bit to achieve this.

**4. What are the two main challenges for you in your design?**

Deciding on the arrangements for the songs, and what instruments to use and how to use them in the show. As well as making sure that songs played on glass bottles and made up instruments also sound good!

**5. What training have you done?**

I am a Flinders Drama Centre graduate from 2000.

# Glossary

---

<i>Agog</i>	Very eager or curious to hear or see something.
<i>Apothecary</i>	A person who prepared and sold medicines and drugs.
<i>Avaunt</i>	Go away.
<i>Bellows-mender</i>	Someone who repairs bellows, the instrument which puffs air into a fire to make it hotter.
<i>Bethumped</i>	To beat or thump soundly.
<i>Capons</i>	Castrated domestic cocks fattened for eating.
<i>Casement</i>	A window with such a sash or sashes.
<i>Conned</i>	Study attentively or learn by heart.
<i>Cozenage</i>	To deceive, win over, or induce to do something by artful coaxing and wheedling or shrewd trickery.
<i>Degas</i>	A picture by French impressionist painter and sculptor Hilaire Edgar 1834–1917.
<i>Doublet</i>	A man's short close-fitting padded jacket, commonly worn from the 14th to the 17th century.
<i>Gramercy</i>	Used as an exclamation expressing surprise or sudden strong feeling.
<i>Hawthorn-brake</i>	The room or place where players dress for the stage.
<i>Jocund</i>	Cheerful and light-hearted.
<i>Loam</i>	Mixture of clay, sand, straw etc. used in founding and plastering walls.
<i>Mead</i>	An alcoholic liquor made by fermenting honey and water.
<i>Nonny</i>	Used in refrains of songs from Elizabethan era.
<i>Odious</i>	Highly offensive, repugnant, disgusting.
<i>Pismire</i>	An ant.
<i>Prithee</i>	Please (used to convey a polite request).
<i>Prologue</i>	An introductory speech, often in verse, calling attention to the theme of a play.
<i>Tinker</i>	A person skilled in various minor kinds of mechanical work, a jack-of-all-trades.
<i>Upbraids</i>	Find fault with someone, scold.
<i>Unbegot</i>	Not yet made or born.
<i>Withal</i>	In addition, as a further factor or consideration.
<i>Wither</i>	Become dry and shrivelled, fall into decay or decline.
<i>Whit</i>	A very small part or amount.

# Review Writing

---

## PLAY REVIEW FORMAT – Years 8 - 9

### Paragraph 1:

- What is the name of the play you are reviewing?
- Who are the main characters in the story?

### Paragraph 2:

- Write/draw a favourite scene/part of the performance.

### Paragraph 3:

Give your opinion:

- Write/draw the best part of the performance for you
- Was there a part of the play that you didn't like or understand? – Write/draw your response.
- Give the play a rating in stars: \* poor ; \*\*\*okay; \*\*\*\*very good; \*\*\*\*\*excellent

### Paragraph 4:

For your final summation discuss the technical elements:

- How did the lighting impact on the mood/atmosphere of the production?
- How did the sound effects evoke the person/place?

Opinions must have reasons:

- Consider the integrations of dramatic elements
- Can you determine the purpose/aims and the achievements of the production?
- Tell it in a personal voice

## PLAY REVIEW FORMAT Years 9-10

Guiding Question – *What are the elements that bring a play to life on stage?*

Write a review of *The Popular Mechanicals* that demonstrates the way the writer, director, actors and designers brought the play to life on stage for you. (350 – 500 words).

Find a review guide online using the following link;

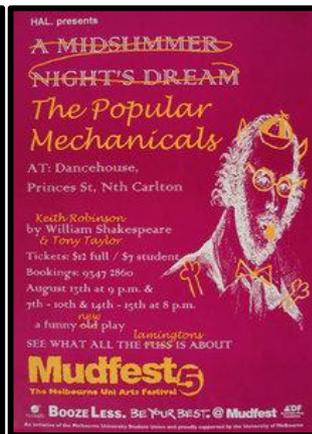
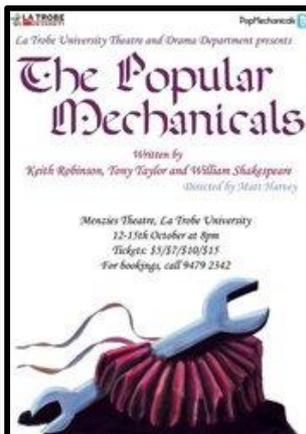
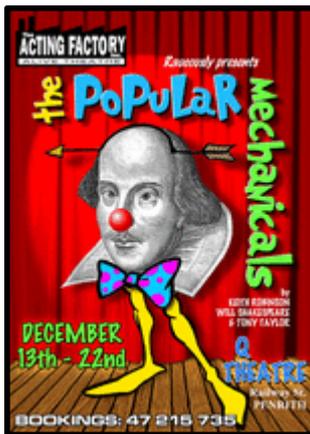
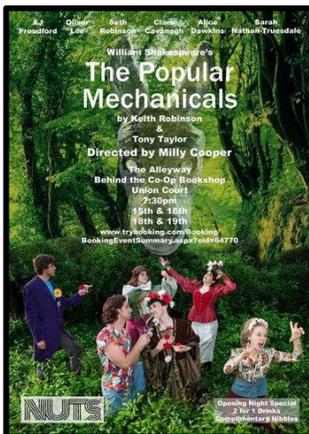
<http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/assets/Education/how-to-write-a-theatre-review.pdf>

# Marketing & Design

Examine the poster image for the production of *The Popular Mechanicals*. What story does the poster tell? What expectations of the show do you have by looking at the poster?



TASK: Look at other company's posters of the show. (Some examples below)  
Which is your favourite? Why?



TASK: Using your knowledge of seeing the play, design your own poster.

# Essay Questions

---

## ENGLISH QUESTIONS

1. *The Popular Mechanicals* is set 'Now and Then.' How has the playwright created a sense of this in the script? E.g. dialogue, song choices, references.
2. Why have the playwrights chosen to adapt/reimagine this classic text?
3. What is the effect of the playwright's decision to include quotations from a variety of Shakespeare plays in the script? Why do you think they made this decision?
4. Discuss the comedy device of word play. How does it work in the play and why is it funny?
5. Choose one style of comedy represented in the play *The Popular Mechanicals*. Research its history and how the style has been used, giving examples of plays, television shows or films.
6. Discuss the theme of foolishness and how it relates to *The Popular Mechanicals*.

## DRAMA QUESTIONS

1. *The Popular Mechanicals* is set 'Now and Then.' How has the designer created a sense of this in the visual/audible elements? E.g. costumes, set.
2. What is the purpose of having the characters of Bottom and Mowldie played by the same actor?
3. What forms of comedy can be found in *The Popular Mechanicals*? E.g. word play, slapstick etc. Give examples of each.
4. What visual forms of comedy were used? Give examples.
5. The music plays an important role in *The Popular Mechanicals*. Discuss.

## WRITING OR PRACTICAL TASK

Write your own comedy scene using a famous quotation from Shakespeare, interspersed with your own writing. Think about what the phrase means and either use it in that context or change its meaning.

OR

Choose one of the famous quotations from Shakespeare as a starting point for an improvisation. Some sample quotations are below or find your own!

- To be, or not to be: that is the question. (*Hamlet*)
- All the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players. (*As You Like it*)
- Now is the winter of our discontent. (*Richard III*)
- Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand? (*Macbeth*)
- Cowards die many times before their death. (*Julius Caesar*)
- If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? (*The Merchant of Venice*)
- I am one who loved not wisely but too well. (*Othello*)
- Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage. (*Macbeth*)
- Get thee to a nunnery. (*Hamlet*)
- If music be the food of love, play on. (*Twelfth Night*)
- What's in a name? A rose by any name would smell as sweet. (*Romeo and Juliet*)
- To thine own self be true. (*Hamlet*)
- All that glitters is not gold. (*The Merchant of Venice*)
- The course of true love never did run smooth. (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)

- Lord, what fools these mortals be! (*A Midsummer Night's dream*)
- There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. (*Hamlet*)
- Off with his head! (*Richard III*)
- This is very midsummer madness. (*Twelfth Night*)
- What light through yonder window breaks? (*Romeo and Juliet*)

### **DESIGN TASK**

*A Midsummer's Night Dream* has been re-imagined the world over. Playing indoors and outdoors, the design has changed constantly to suit its environment and the vision for the show. Research some of these designs and then design your own version of *The Popular Mechanicals* using your favorite *A Midsummer Night's Dream* design/s as inspiration.

### **OTHER FUN ACTIVITIES**

A Link to ABC Shakespeare in School – a good pre-show resource

<http://www.abc.net.au/btn/resources/teacher/episode/20130312-shakespeareinschool.pdf>

CODE FUN

<http://www.free-for-kids.com/Shakespeare/The%20Shakespeare%20Code.pdf>

	<b>production elements</b>	<b>performance elements</b>
<b>strengths</b>		
<b>impact on audiences</b>		
<b>weaknesses</b>		

<b>design role</b>	<b>technique</b>	<b>What did this contribute to the performance?</b>
<b>lighting</b>	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	
<b>music</b>	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	

# References

---

[www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/the-popular-mechanicals--nida-2424.html](http://www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/the-popular-mechanicals--nida-2424.html)  
<http://www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/the-popular-mechanicals--nida-2424.html>  
[www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/the-popular-mechanicals--nida-2424.html](http://www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/the-popular-mechanicals--nida-2424.html)

<https://rainbowliterature.wordpress.com/2014/01/27/i-grieve-and-dare-not-show-my-discontent/>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Midsummer\\_Night%27s\\_Dream](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Midsummer_Night%27s_Dream)  
<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/m/a-midsummer-nights-dream/play-summary>

[www.shmoop.com/pyramus-thisbe/](http://www.shmoop.com/pyramus-thisbe/)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramus\\_and\\_Thisbe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramus_and_Thisbe)

<http://dictionary.reference.com/>

## BOOKS

R.S. White, Mark Houlahan, and Katrina O'Loughlin, *Shakespeare and Emotions – Inheritances, Enactments, Legacies*

## PICTURES

Photos © 2015 Shane Reid

Design pictures - © 2015 Jonathon Oxlade

[https://la.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramus\\_et\\_Thisbe](https://la.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramus_et_Thisbe)