

A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare

Natalie Abrahami – Director

What are the challenges of working on Shakespeare?

Working on Shakespeare is a brilliant challenge because rarely do we express ourselves as eloquently as Shakespeare can write for us, let alone in verse. Although written over 400 years ago the ideas and thoughts are very contemporary and so the challenge is to make sure that during the rehearsal process we can find a way to convey these thoughts and ideas freshly, clearly and dynamically to the audience.

Talk a little bit about your vision for this production?

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a magical play and I have been keen to find a way to explore the different facets of characters such as *Theseus* and *Hippolyta* and their tempestuous alter-egos *Oberon* and *Titania*. It struck me that the notion of acting and on-stage and off-stage rapport might shed light on these characters' relationships and so we thought about different couples who were famous for having amazing on-camera chemistry and having a more volatile interaction off-screen. We naturally started thinking about the Duke and Duchess of the silver-screen, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, and so we thought it might be fun to create our play on a 1960s film set, as the couple famously met during the filming of *Cleopatra*. In our vision, Athens where Shakespeare set his play, is not an actual city but a 'quasi' city – as it is a film studio, and thus Shakespeare's forest is the magic of the film set at night where anything can happen...

Why do you think we should keep performing Shakespeare?

I think we should continue performing the work of any playwright who continues to shed light on the world as we know it and the nature of being human, and Shakespeare is a playwright whose plays endlessly reveal new elements of themselves in each new production and interpretation.

Who are your influences as a director?

I always feel rather magpie-esque in this respect as my influences come from all around from: fashion designers like Viktor and Rolf, to the photography of Jeff Wall, the writing of Italo Calvino, the choreography of Wim Wandekeybus and the direction of Robert Lepage.

What three works of art (books, paintings, films – anything!) would you take to a desert island?

Given that I find it hard to even choose what main course to have from a menu, this is the sort of question that completely paralyses me with indecision. Having mentioned Jeff Wall and his staged photographs as an influence I think I would take his photograph 'After an *'Invisible Man'* by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue' as I love the evocative image of a man living in his underground lair with only a ceiling covered with 1369 lightbulbs for company. A sojourn on a desert island would also encourage me to take Ellison's 1952 novel *'Invisible Man'* with me as I've been meaning to read it for years and have never got around to it.