



A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare

Rehearsal diary

Week 1

Written by **Chris Hill**, *Assistant Director on A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The first week of any rehearsal period is always a bit of a whirlwind. We started the week with a 'meet and greet' where the cast, creative team and the Headlong team all sit down with a coffee and a biscuit to begin the process of getting to know the people they are going to be spending the next couple of months with. Natalie (Director) and Tom (Designer) talked through the world of the play and how they arrived at this particular interpretation of the piece. As our production takes elements from 1960's Hollywood, Natalie talked us through some documentary footage from the making of Cleopatra (with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton) to begin to give the company ideas about the kind of people that inhabited those huge studio back lots.

First days also include a read through of the piece, which is a chance for the company to hear the play out loud for the first time without the pressure of performance. As the week progressed, we began to thoroughly examine the play, going through and paraphrasing Shakespeare's words in contemporary language to check that we had a shared understanding of the text and to begin to rough out some basic facts about the piece (times of day, location etc). The week also included a text session with Rob Icke (Headlong's Literary Associate) who worked on some small speeches from the play to help us use the structure and rhythm of Shakespeare's text to speak the words clearly and freely.

Alongside all this the Stage Management team are beginning to find props and furniture, costumes are being chosen, songs are being composed and scenery is being built. It's been a busy week and it's only going to get busier!





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Week 2

My prediction last week that our rehearsals would get busier proved to be more than accurate. This week we have begun to put the production on its feet and sketch out our initial ideas for how each scene might be staged. Possible ways of looking at the scene are discussed and some of them are played out in the space. These different versions are mined for useful discoveries and so we slowly begin to build up a picture of what the piece is going to look like.

We have also welcomed some new people into our rehearsal room this week. Tom Mills (Composer and Sound Designer) has been in to work with the fairies on their lullaby and with Chris Logan (who plays Nick Bottom) on the song he sings just after he is transformed. Georgina Lamb (Movement Director) has begun to work with the fairies on a Busby Berkeley-esque movement sequence that they use to lull Titania to sleep. Vocal coaching sessions and costume fittings all have to be scheduled in alongside our main rehearsals which has resulted in Catherine (our Deputy Stage Manager), Natalie (Director) and I spending lots of time hunched over diaries and copies of the script to try to find the most efficient way to use our time.

Next week heralds the arrival of some of our key pieces of set which will mean we can start to get a really clear picture of the world in which our play is set allowing us to cement the discoveries we have made this week





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Week 3

On Monday we transformed our spacious rehearsal room into a busy film studio for the day in order to film all of the audio-visual sequences we're using in the piece. Ian William Galloway (Video Designer) arrived laden with lights, tripods, green screens, cameras and lenses ready to capture the sequences we had rehearsed the previous week. It was a brilliant and busy day during which we got a glimpse of some of the beautiful costumes, which Antonia Rudgard (Costume Supervisor) and Tom Scutt (Designer) have been busily sourcing, and the key pieces of set which have been built already.

We have now roughed out a shape for the whole piece on which we can build. The company are working enormously hard, grabbing time in corners of the rehearsal room or in the corridors outside to go through lines, refine scenes and test out ideas which all feed into the main rehearsals. Week three is a really exciting time. We have made so many discoveries about the world of the play and the people that inhabit it and this is the time when we can begin to knit everything together.

We've been really lucky to have so much of the set and so many of the actual props with us in rehearsals. The room seems to get added to every day. Even as I type two enormous film studio lights have just arrived and we will now be able to weave these new items into our play.

Next week is our final week in the safety of our rehearsal room before we head down to Southampton where we will be joined by more set and more people as we begin the long process of technical rehearsals. Can't wait.



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Week 4

We are, quite rightly, outgrowing our rehearsal room. Throughout this week we have looked in detail at the entire play in order to refine each moment. This process forces us to ask really specific questions, not only about character and intention but also about the performance spaces we will be working in on tour. The ground plan of the stage at the Nuffield, Southampton (our first venue) has been expertly rendered in coloured electrical tape on the floor of the rehearsal room by Rachel Presdee (Company Stage Manager) and Andy Hunt (Assistant Stage Manager) but having physical walls, curtains and other pieces of scenery will have a huge effect on the way the piece moves around. We are also keeping in mind the size of the various auditoria. We have to make sure that every audience member has a good view of the action onstage and also that each image or moment in the piece is clear as to its intention.

Music has been a huge addition to our world this week. Every day new tracks arrive in the rehearsal room and would be tried out alongside the work that the actors are doing in the scene. David Shaw-Parker (who plays Egeus and Peter Quince) is an amazing guitarist and so Tom Mills (Composer and Sound Designer) has composed some music for him to play during the mechanicals play. David is now grabbing any time he can in the corners of the rehearsal room or in the production office to practise this new addition ready for our final run through.

Next week we begin the process of knitting all the technical elements together with the work we have been doing in the rehearsal room. It's going to be a busy but exciting week.



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Week 5

We've arrived in Southampton to begin the long process of adding in all of the technical elements of the show to what we've been doing in the rehearsal room. It's a daunting process, especially for this show as there is so much to bring together. Each lighting cue, sound cue, actor entrance, piece of projection or scenery move has to be precisely plotted before we can run the show.

It's a funny time as it can often feel like we are taking apart something we've spent four weeks in the rehearsal room trying to build. But, after two days of technical rehearsals we are ready for our first audiences.

Over the course of the first few shows we will need to tweak things. Preview periods are really important as we need the reactions of an audience to tell us what works well and what could be improved. Audiences discover new things in any play and their feedback as they watch is especially important when working on a comedy. Tiny things can suddenly seem riotously funny when all the elements are put in front of an audience and the actors need to allow space for these reactions.

Meanwhile all the technical departments are still working exceptionally hard, making and altering props in the morning, re-teching moments in the afternoon and running the shows in the evening. It's the most intense, exhausting week of the entire process. Once previews are over the company stays in Southampton for another week before heading out on tour.

