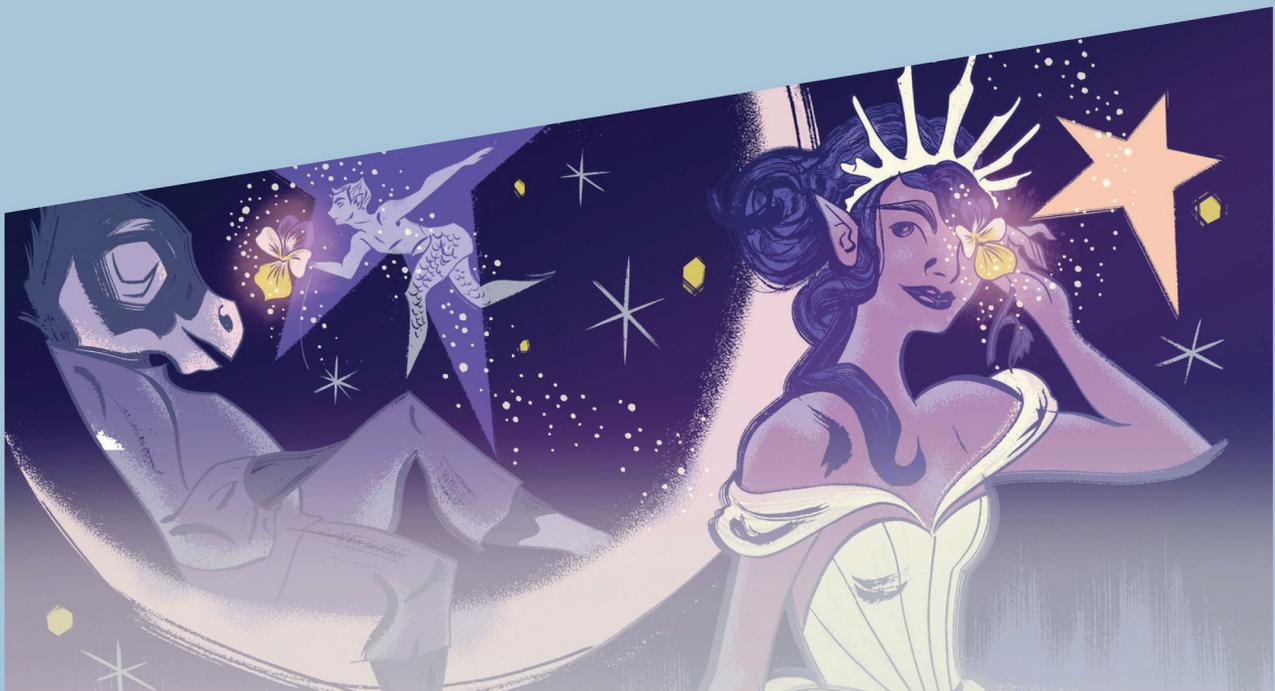


A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare
2025-26 National Tour



THANK YOU TO OUR EDUCATION SUPPORTERS

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Producing Artistic Director's Note



The Acting Company has a tradition of over fifty years of producing repertory. Each season, we produce two (or more) plays that are presented alongside each other and share a single cast. It is a fiendishly difficult task involving the triangulation of casting, design, and theme. It also demands the actors hold two different plays in their heads. In this season, we have ensemble members that are playing more than eight characters between the two productions. A difficult thing, but so very, very worthwhile.

It is the perfect way to experience the virtuosic brilliance of an ensemble. We watch an actress play a hyper-aggressive working class woman and a near-insane wealthy recluse in one play and a warrior queen in the other. The actors must use every trick of voice, body, costume, and language to conjure all of these different identities for an audience.

This process is all the more exciting when the titles feel like mirrors to each other. A *Midsummer Night's Dream* is, simply put, one

of my favorite plays. It has everything: beautiful language, moving lovers, spectacular faeries, and hilarious mechanicals. It is a story that, beneath its humor asks us important questions about how love can define our lives. I have laughed until I cried watching a 50-year-old British Clown kill himself as Pyramus and I have fallen out of a chair watching a middle school girl do the same moment. This is a crowd pleaser by any measure.

Great Expectations will, I think, surprise folks. So often when we think of Dickens we imagine filthy cobblestone streets, the hacking coughs of Victorian chimney sweeps, the clink of coins, and the gaunt faces of the hungry. He was a writer who managed to master his period's version of Primetime TV (the serialized novel) as both a political act and as thrilling entertainment. *Great Expectations* is no exception. This story has EVERYTHING: orphans striving to find their place in the world, beautiful heiresses, violent criminals with hearts of gold, and just maybe a strain of true love. *Bridgerton* has nothing on Dickens.

That's what I love in both these stories. I know that they will make you laugh and touch your heart. Despite being filled with danger, these plays are stories of hope. They will leave you energized and longing for more. At the same time, they ask eternal questions about social mobility, love, identity, power, and all the other things that make growing up so difficult. That is their power: they entertain us, even as they bring us face to face with ourselves.

I hope you all get to enjoy both of these productions!

Devin Brain
The Acting Company

The Acting Company

Since 1972, The Acting Company has developed actors by touring professional theater across America. Founded by John Houseman and Margot Harley with the first graduating class of the Drama Division of The Juilliard School, the Company has launched the careers of some 400 actors, including Kevin Kline, Patti LuPone, Mary Lou Rosato, Keith David, Rainn Wilson, Lorraine Toussaint, Frances Conroy, Harriet Harris, Lisa Banes, Jeffrey Wright, Hamish Linklater, Jesse L. Martin, Roslyn Ruff, Jimonn Cole, Kelley Curran, among many others, while bringing sophisticated theater to hundreds of communities from coast to coast.

Among many accolades, The Acting Company won the 2003 Tony Award for Excellence in the Theater, and recently won the 2019 Audelco Award for Best Play for its production of Nambi E. Kelley's *Native Son* directed by Seret Scott. The Acting Company has been seen by over 4 million people in 48 States, 10 foreign countries, on and Off-Broadway, and at leading resident theaters including the Guthrie, the Kennedy Center and New York City Center.

New works commissioned by The Acting Company include plays by William Finn, Marcus Gardley, Rebecca Gilman, John Guare, Beth Henley, Tony Kushner, Lynn Nottage, Meg Miroshnik, Ntozake Shange, Maria Irene Fornés, Spalding Gray, Marsha Norman, and Charles Smith.



2025-26 National Repertory Tour

Each season, The Acting Company tours two productions that feature the same actors in a form called rotating repertory. These two productions are designed to be in conversation with each other. These two productions uphold our mission to reinvigorate the classics of the canon with vibrantly diverse perspectives even as we expand the definition of "classic" for audiences around the country.



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

By Nikki Massoud

From the novel by Charles Dickens

Directed by Devin Brain

The Acting Company reinvigorates Charles Dickens' timeless novel with an effervescent stage adaptation brimming with unexpected hilarity and romantic heart. *Great Expectations* follows the harrowing journey of working-class orphan Pip as he navigates a challenging upbringing at the hands of his abusive sister, encounters an escaped prisoner, and meets the wealthy and eccentric Miss Havisham and her daughter Estella, a stunning, young heiress of ruthless intelligence. When Pip receives a sizable fortune from a mystery donor and enters the ranks of high-society London, his life is forever changed, learning hard truths about integrity, loyalty, and love. Akin to a bingeable dramedy carved with the beautiful prose that made Dickens popular, Nikki Massoud's take on this uproarious, thrilling, and surprisingly relatable story will keep audiences of all ages on the edge of their seats.



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Written by William Shakespeare

A rapturous, fresh take on one of William Shakespeare's most popular and widely performed plays, The Acting Company's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a captivating, coming-of-age story that will surprise and delight! In this fast-paced, crowd-pleasing comedy, a pair of young lovers flee to an enchanted forest where a troupe of amateur actors rehearse a play. With the help of a mystical flower, the fairy king and queen's mischievous servant Puck creates chaos for these unsuspecting humans, leading to mistaken identities, romantic entanglements, and comical transformations. Bursting with mirth, music, magic, and mayhem, this uplifting tale of illusion and love comes to life with an electric cast of New York-based artists.

2025-26 Company



MICHAEL STEWART ALLEN

Theseus
King Titania



SHUNTÉ LOFTON

Bottom



MALLORY AVNET

Helena
Starveling
Fairy



PAULI PONTRELLI

Philostrate
Puck



MADELEINE BARKER

Hermia
Snout
Fairy



GEORGE ANTHONY RICHARDSON

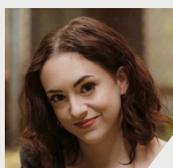
Egeus
Snug
Fairy



CHRISTIAN FROST

Demetrius
Peter Quince
Fairy

UNDERSTUDIES



KRISTA GREVAS

US: Hippolyta, Queen Oberon
US: Bottom



SAM IM

Lysander
Flute
Fairy



DEVAN KELTY

US: Lysander, Flute, Fairy
US: Theseus, King Titania
US: Demetrius, Peter Quince, Fairy



ANGIE JANAS

Hippolyta
Queen Oberon



KLEO MITROKOSTAS

US: Helena, Starveling, Fairy
US: Hermia, Snout, Fairy
US: Egeus, Snug, Fairy



THE PLAYWRIGHT: William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet, and actor. He lived over four hundred years ago and many records of his life have been lost or were never kept. However, there are some facts we do know about him. William Shakespeare was born in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. When he was eighteen years old, he married Anne Hathaway and had three children with her—a daughter named Susanna and twins named Hamnet and Judith.

By 1592, Shakespeare was working in the London theater scene. Shakespeare was a founding member of an acting company named the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He wrote new plays for this company, often adapting existing stories, and produced on average two new plays per year for nearly twenty years. In 1603 after years of popular productions, his acting company became known as The King's Men when King James I gave them his patronage. In total, Shakespeare's surviving writing includes around 38 plays—some in collaboration with other playwrights—154 sonnets, and 2 long poems. William Shakespeare died at the age of 52 in the same town where he was born. There are no surviving manuscripts in his hand. However, some of his writing was published during his lifetime, and 36 of his plays were published in a collected volume called the First Folio after his death.

A Midsummer Night's Dream Synopsis

Days before Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding day, Egeus seeks Theseus' counsel as his daughter Hermia refuses to marry Demetrius because she is in love with Lysander. Theseus rules that Hermia must either marry Demetrius or become a nun. In secret, Lysander proposes that they escape to the forest and marry; Hermia agrees. Hermia's friend Helena bemoans her unrequited love for Demetrius. Hermia discloses Lysander's proposal to her friend. Helena schemes to tell Demetrius of this plan so that she can follow him into the forest and try to seduce him.

Meanwhile, a crew of Mechanicals rehearse the play they will perform for Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding entertainment. Peter Quince, the leader of the group, casts each of them, including the boisterous Bottom, in "Pyramus and Thisbe."

In the forest, King Titania and Queen Oberon, leaders of the fairies, brawl over a changeling boy King Titania had taken in. After, Queen Oberon tells her servant, Puck, that she will prank Titania with a potion to make him fall madly in love with the first thing he sees upon waking. Helena follows Demetrius deep into the forest and tries to seduce him, but he casts her off. Overhearing this scene, Oberon tasks Puck with casting the same love spell on Demetrius so that he will return Helena's love.

Oberon lays the love potion over Titania's eyes as he sleeps. Hermia and Lysander rest in the woods, and Puck enchants Lysander with the potion, mistaking him for Demetrius. Helena, who has lost Demetrius once again, finds the sleeping Lysander; he wakes up under the love potion's spell and proclaims newfound love for Helena. Thinking he is making fun, Helena storms off; Lysander follows her, and Hermia wakes alone.

Puck stumbles upon the Mechanicals' rehearsal and plays a practical joke on them by turning Bottom's head into the head of a Donkey. The others fearfully run away from him, but her yelling wakes the enchanted King Titania, who falls in love with her. As Puck reports his doings to Oberon, Demetrius pursues Hermia in the woods. Moments later, Lysander chases Helena, and Oberon realizes Puck's mistake. The four lovers catch up to each other, and a fight breaks out as they compete for each other's misguided love. Puck chases them all down and corrects the spells to set everything right.

Titania and his fairies dote upon Bottom. After they fall asleep, Oberon and Puck reverse the spell, wake him up, and Titania and Oberon make amends. Theseus, Hippolyta, and Egeus encounter the four sleeping lovers in the woods, who wake up and fail to recount how they got there. Theseus rules that both couples—Hermia and Lysander, as well as Helena and Demetrius—should be married alongside him.

Bottom returns to the Mechanicals and tells them it is time to bring their show before the Duke. At the wedding, they perform a hilariously disastrous "Pyramus and Thisbe." After the play within the play, Hippolyta exits with Theseus, while Puck says farewell to the audience.

Shakespeare & The Supernatural:

A Brief Overview of Fairy Folklore



Fairies have had many evolutions across various cultures and eras throughout history. Today, one might first think of iconic contemporary fairies such as Tinker Bell or the Tooth Fairy—very small, anthropomorphic creatures with wings and magical powers. These modern renditions of fairies are majorly influenced by the fairies of Shakespeare’s creation in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

What might Shakespeare’s understanding of fairies and magic have been in the late 1590s? Fairy lore developed independently across many early European cultures, including in Celtic, Early English, and German folklore. While many of these early concepts of fairies had different names—“fae”, “faeries”, or even “wee folk”—many of these titles translate to “enchantment” and “fate.” In some cultures, fairies were believed to be as real as any other being and to possess fateful control over the mortal realm.

Shakespeare was likely most acquainted with English and Celtic fairy lore, in which many historians have identified remnants of old pagan beliefs. Several early religious legends claim that when angels misbehaved, these rejected angels fell to earth and wandered the mortal realm for eternity. This might also be the source from which the more mischievous or even demonic understanding of fairies originates. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Puck is described as a “hobgoblin,” a once-friendly household spirit turned evil goblin. Like much early fairy folklore, Shakespeare’s fairies have their own royal court, are divinely in touch with nature and the elements, possess both generous and malicious interest in humans, and are described to be very small.

What makes Shakespeare’s representation of fairies in *Midsummer* particularly unique for its time is his mixing of fairy folklore with ideas from Greek mythology. While fairies were the shared lore of the lower class, often used as stories parents would tell to threaten misbehaving children, Greek and Roman mythology would have only been taught in upper-class education in the Elizabethan era. The theatre, however, was a space shared by every class. As the royalty and upper class mixed with the lower class within the walls of the Old Globe, Shakespeare weaved together the popular mythologies of each group in *Midsummer*. He created comedy out of the interaction of various classes of people influencing each other’s fates—royalty like Theseus, Hippolyta, Oberon, and Titania; upper-class socialites like Egeus, his daughter Hermia, and the other lovers; and the lower-class and service folk, such as the Mechanicals, Puck, and Titania’s fairies.

Many historians claim that Shakespeare’s comedic depiction of fairies in *Midsummer* was a turning point in English and Western culture’s general understanding of fairies. Their light-hearted mischievousness strayed from the darker, more punishing connotations of previous fairy folklore. For the theatregoers of Shakespeare’s day, the supernatural was a part of the fabric of everyday life; his use of these magical elements continues to enthrall audiences today and raises both comedic and dramatic questions about some of life’s most inexplicable forces.

Shakespeare's Language: ---

Practical Poetry for Performing Comedy

Shakespeare's language is frequently misunderstood due to the complexities of its poetic beauty. While his texts are lyrically beautiful, they are also practical texts for performance. Shakespeare's words are not meant to only be read on the page- they are designed to be spoken aloud. In addition to crafting stunning poetry, Shakespeare gifted his actors with incredibly logical language for embodying his characters.

A great Shakespearean actor allows the language to lead, because in it is every key needed to unlock the story. A common mistake in performing Shakespeare is inserting too many pauses (like we see some of the Mechanicals do in "Pyramus and Thisbe"!). Shakespeare frequently writes in verse; the language demands that the performer must follow the lineated rhythm of their lines until the playwright has written in a purposeful pause.

Shakespeare's characters never stop to search for the right word; the words have been crafted to reveal exactly what the character is thinking in any given moment. This is very different from contemporary drama, which relies heavily on subtext, and instead provides the actors very clear insight into the internal worlds of their characters.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is as much a linguistic comedy as it is a physical and situational comedy. In addition to the various puns in the text, Shakespeare uses multiple linguistic tools to heighten the differences in class and power at play in *Midsummer*. The royals and the lovers speak in an elevated iambic pentameter, whereas the Mechanicals speak in casual prose. Shakespeare frequently uses verse and prose in this way, providing a practical distinction between classes for performers. He utilizes rhyming couplets to bring to life instances of magic and to highlight Puck's mischievous playfulness.

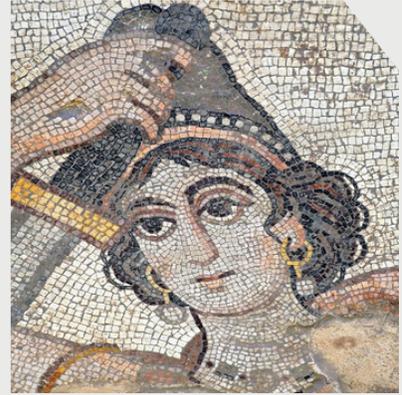
By creating his own linguistic rules, he then gets to break them in the comedic height of the play—the Mechanicals' performance of Pyramus and Thisbe. Within Bottoms' final monologue as Pyramus, the text breaks its own rules and rhythms multiple times, leading to one of the play's most laugh-out-loud moments:

"O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame
Since lion vile hath here deflowered my dear,
Which is: no, no, which was the fairest dame
That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer.
Come, tears, confound.
Out, sword, and wound
The pap of Pyramus;
Ay, that left pap, where heart doth hop.
Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.
Now am I dead; now am I fled;
My soul is in the sky.
Tongue, lose thy light; Moon take thy flight.
Now die, die, die, die, die."

This monologue, which begins in an appropriated iambic pentameter and then breaks into its own rhythm, which is then broken again by repetition, is a great example of Shakespeare's genius use of language in comedy. The text is crafted in a way that requires the actor to surrender to its specificity every time it is spoken aloud; this is part of what makes Shakespeare's language so brilliant to audiences and actors alike.

Hippolyta - Who is She?

In Greek Mythology, Hippolyta was the daughter of Ares, the god of War, and Otrera, Queen of the Amazons. The Amazons were believed to be a courageous and independent tribe of women, and various accounts identified their territories around the Black Sea, on land we now know as Eastern Europe and the Middle East. After her mother's death, Hippolyta rose to the throne, and her father Ares gifted her his girdle, the famous war belt that signified his authority over the Amazons. She wore it with pride, and many accounts demonstrate that she was a fierce, strong, and beautiful woman. Her strength in battle and her beauty are what attracted Theseus to her.



Like all Greek myths, Theseus and Hippolyta's story is complex and has many variations. Theseus had both royal blood and was a demigod, being related to both Aegeus, King of Athens, and Poseidon. He was also the cousin of Hercules, with whom he went on many adventures. Some versions of the story say that Hercules accompanied Theseus when he set off to find his wife in the Amazonia. The nature of Theseus and Hippolyta's marriage is unclear—some believe that Theseus hatched a plan to abduct Hippolyta and to force her into marrying him. Others believe that she went with him willingly and became the first Amazon to ever marry. Shakespeare seems to reference a version of the myth in which Theseus fought and overcame Hippolyta in battle, and therefore, she conceded to marry him.

Shakespeare's Hippolyta is likely based on Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, a series of 48 ancient biographical accounts of famous Greeks. *Parallel Lives* is believed to be one of Shakespeare's primary sources for all of his mytho-historical characters. In Plutarch's *The Life of Theseus*, Hippolyta is the one who agrees to marry Theseus, but with an immense amount of pressure as the conclusion to a four-month war against her people. In Act 1, Scene 1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus states that although he "wooed [her] with [his] sword," he will marry her "with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling." Hippolyta herself says very little throughout the play, and says nothing specific at all about her perspective on the marriage.

Many productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* downplay the significance of Theseus and Hippolyta to the storytelling. However, Hippolyta provides a grounding force to the play that also weaves together the various influences and forces Shakespeare includes—mythology, fairy folklore, and royalty.

The People Behind the Scenes

THE PLAYWRIGHT

A "wright" is a type of artisan who makes things that people can use. For example, a wheelwright makes wheels. A playwright makes plays and usually completes a draft of the script before rehearsals begin.

THE DIRECTOR

After reading the playwright's script, the director decides on an overall vision for the production and decides which designers to hire to support their ideas. The director meets with the creative team to assemble a unified look for the sets, costumes, lighting, and other elements. The director oversees the actors in rehearsal with the help of the stage manager.

THE ACTORS

The actors perform the play and draw on their own experiences and understanding of life to create believable characters. Actors usually audition for their parts after the play is written and the director is chosen. Actors must memorize their lines and attend many rehearsals before opening night.

THE STAGE MANAGERS

The stage managers facilitate communication across departments, organize rehearsals, and call technical cues during performances as well as maintain the artistic intentions of a production after opening. They are usually hired around the same time as the designers and actors.

DESIGNERS (SETS, PROPS, SOUND, LIGHTS, AND COSTUMES)

All theaters need an environment created on stage for the play to take place, and the designers help create that world in collaboration with the director. The set can be a literal world, with many objects ("props") and lots of furniture, or it can be a suggestion of reality with minimal actual components. Music and sound effects can make the theatrical experience more real or more fantastical. The lights add to the environment of the play and enhance the mood that the other designers have created. The costume designer and costume staff work within the vision of the director for each character. They choose colors and styles to help the audience better understand the characters, and often do historical research to make the world of the play come to life. For The Acting Company touring productions, the set must be easy to assemble and disassemble, and the sound and lighting design must be able to be recreated in each venue.



Set Designer's Note



On the surface, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Great Expectations* appear to be vastly different plays; however, at the core of both of them, we see the main characters navigate survival in conditions where they live with significant power disparities. Although Hippolyta is a Queen of the Amazons, she has been brought to be the bride of Theseus after a loss in battle, while Pip is an impoverished young man brought into the life of a wealthy patron, initially as a pawn in her personal vendetta against men.

In order to show these characters pushing against the circumstances they find themselves in, we wanted the world of the play to have a sense of imposing authority and constriction. To achieve this, we chose iron and steel as the main material to be shared by both sets.

Great Expectations takes place during England's Industrial Revolution, a time when the production of steel and iron flourished and helped to lead to massive wealth inequalities and the stratification of society that Pip is navigating. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we use that same sense of industrial iron to create the feeling of an authoritative Court world in contrast to the fabric forest world.

Once we established the shared world of an imposing iron structure, I began the process of designing a large scenic gesture that could change out between each show. It was important that the gesture felt significant enough to put each play into the specifics of its own reality but not be so large that we would have a hard time meeting the demands for speed and flexibility essential to a touring set.

Early in the *Great Expectations* design process, we found inspiration in antique birdcages, Victorian Gothic Revival architecture, and Edwardian conservatories. So, for our changeover, we fill the large open arches of the base set with gothic pointed arches and additional window filigree. The added arches help to set the time period and the filigree add to the feeling of being stuck in a beautiful birdcage where you are forced to play out a role in a manufactured setting.

For *A Midsummer Night's Dreams*, we add two grand curtains that are a part of the court world—very clean and linear. We imagined that in Hippolyta's Amazonian world, the architecture was more inspired by nature, with elements of weaving and flowing natural shapes. When the play transitions to the forest, we see that curtain lift and expose a world of fabric flowers. Hippolyta has taken the only material in the court related to her homeland and used it to create a new flowing fabric world in order to have an escape, and to feel control over the conditions of her new reality.

This evocative but simple scenic design finds the connection point between two plays, and offers a canvas for the actors to bring to life all the different locations of these wildly different stories. Our iron and steel structure is transformed into a lush midnight forest, a rotting mansion, a London street, a swampy graveyard, a royal palace, and a young man's first apartment.

-Tanya Orellana

Your *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

ACTIVITY

Once you have seen The Acting Company's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, now you get a chance to imagine your OWN *Midsummer*. When you read a play, that is part of the magic: the words on the page are the prompt for you to imagine what it would all look like onstage.

Our *Midsummer* is a world where the contemporary finds its parallels in the stories of ancient Greece as filtered through the lens of Elizabethan London. It is a place where private school students run away into the forest.

But what would your *Midsummer* look like? Sound like? Where is it set? Who are the actors? How do they fight?

THE PEOPLE

The key to any production is the cast—they are the heart and soul of your show. When you close your eyes, can you see what Hippolyta's face looks like to you? How about Bottom? Or Puck? Do they look like you? Your neighbors? A movie star?

Go to the front of the guide and look at the cast list. For each role, find a picture online of an actor or historical figure that you would choose to play each role. With that, you can create your *Midsummer* facebook.

THE SET

Now, you have a cast, but where are they? Shakespeare's play takes place in the city states of Italy and Greece, but for your production this city could look however you want it to look. Downtown NYC, Tokyo at night, or your block. Think about this play, about these characters. What do you think would help an audience see it and understand the story?

Find three images that represent the world of your *Midsummer*.

THE SOUND

What does your play sound like? Are there the drums and pips of Shakespeare's Globe? Are there ukuleles like The Acting Company's production? Music can be the heartbeat of a production, shedding light on your world in surprising ways. What do you hear as you imagine your production?

Pick three songs from any artist that you think represent the sounds of your *Midsummer*.

THE COSTUMES

You've already picked the actors, but what are they wearing? What makes the two Faeries different from the Mechanicals? How do the Mechanicals dress up for the play-within-a-play? Are they casual or formal? Do they live today or a thousand years ago?

Find four images of people in clothes that you think represent your production.

*Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings*

- HENRY V, PROLOGUE

PARENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Loud noises, stylized stage violence, heightened language.

No nudity, profanity, or graphic sexuality.

MORE RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE

theactingcompany.org



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arts.gov

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