

**AA306 Shakespeare: text and performance**  
**AA306/VCR2 Staging dreams**

**Producer: Jenny Bardwell**

**Contributor(s) in the clip:**

**Penny Rixon**

**Jonathan Miller**

**Rachel Kavanaugh**

**Tony Gash**

**Peter Brook**

**Clip transcript: AA306 A Midsummer Night's Dream 1**

**Penny Rixon:**

What do you think a fairy should look like? It's this question perhaps more than any other, which has to be answered by the production team staging this play.

**Man, blue shirt:**

The way they did it at Glyndebourne a few years back when they were almost part of the trees, and then they appeared and....

**Woman, glasses, pearls:**

I, I mean it's nice if they do look pretty but then they've got to have a Mendelssohn and all that sort of jazz you know, well people don't do it like that these days do they?

**Young woman, red, curly, long hair:**

Like the sugar plum fairy.

**Young man, glasses, striped collar:**

You see you're talking to a man who actually sees different things like auras and all of that so I believe in the looking at the world differently so, for me, vibrant.

**Man glasses, white shirt:**

They're little things with wings.

**Penny Rixon:**

The Regents Park Theatre puts on the play regularly, and many of its patrons may well have seen three or four different versions over the years. A Midsummer Night's Dream is a childhood favourite, so audiences have strong ideas about what is fitting, and directors do as well.

**Jonathan Miller:**

I wanted to get rid of the whole idea of these awful people with diamante make up at the corner of their eyes walking on the balls of their feet, flitting in with yards of bejewelled chiffon behind them. And in the same way I wanted to get rid of all these gauzy diaphanous entomological fairies which somehow are regarded as de rigueur when people talk about the magic, "what are going to do about the magic"? And they always say "well that's not a, they're not fairies", as if someone has got some privileged access to fairies, and knows what fairies look like.

**Extract: A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1981, BBC**

**Contributor(s):**

**Helen Mirren**

**Titania:**

Sing me now asleep. Then to your offices, and let me rest.

**Rachel Kavanaugh:**

I mean there's a problem again about if you give them wings then what happens if we don't see them fly? You think well there's these people with wings but they never fly. So I decided not to give them wings, cos obviously they can't fly in this theatre I mean you could do it on wires or whatever, but flying in the play has, you know it is a poetic thing flying for the fairies, it's a journey that they go on, and the play is a dream and in dreams flying means all sorts of different things.

**Penny Rixon:**

So if directors can't make their fairies really fly, they have to come up with new ways of creating magic for the modern world.

**Man with mustard jumper:**

Well all I have is this memory of fairies in black bin liners, so I'm sure the it's gonna be better than that tonight.

**Man in suit and glasses:**

I mean Spielberg can do wonderful things with computers but here it's people it's sort of slightly more real, it's immediate.

**Man in glasses and white shirt:**

Do they have magic wands as well, they have magic wands as well. And they're very light and elf like.

**Tony Gash:**

We always have this stupid idea of something which is, and every generation recreates it, of something which is traditional Shakespeare. You know which is doublet and hose and gauze wings and in in this in this in this play. And, in a funny way we keep on creeping back to it, through rejecting those sorts of notions of the fact that it's an abstract space.

I think people have to you know learn again and be told again and again, particularly in a televisual age, that theatre is an abstract place, it's it's a you know a square in a circle or something like that, it's an empty space.

**Extract: A Midsummer Night's Dream, RSC, 1970, directed by Peter Brook**

**Lysander:**

Speak thou now.

**Puck:**

Here, villain; drawn and ready. Where art thou?

**Penny Rixon**

In this section of the video, I want to introduce you to some notable productions of this century.

**Lysander:**  
...straight.

**Penny Rixon:**

The first of these, Peter Brooks for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1970, has passed into theatrical legend. Watch how Brook interprets magic in the 20th century, and how he uses the physical resources of the theatre to conjure up his own brand of stage magic. You'll also see how he has influenced subsequent directors.

**Peter Brook:**

Every word has a meaning and words get debased. Magic has a meaning and has a reality. But that has nothing to do with conjuring tricks. We start with a brilliant white light, a white background and all the elements clearly seen.

**Jonathan Miller:**

I think for most of us who worked in the theatre, there was something quite revolutionary about the the Dream that Peter Brook did. I mean it didn't change my mind about the setting of The Midsummer Night's Dream, it changed all of our minds about the the way in which things could be staged. The fact that the plays didn't have to literally represent what seemed to be mentioned in them. And certainly that's what Brook showed us, that the fact that fairy flight is mentioned in the play doesn't mean that you have to use it in that way and what he did was to use metaphors of swings and trapezes and spinning plates on the end of flexible poles and so forth, to represent flowers and flight. And the fact that it didn't have to take place in something which literally represented a forest, it liberated us all from literal representations.

**Penny Rixon:**

What Brook was doing was rejecting a tradition of those little things with wings that had dominated productions for decades.

**Oberon:**

What thou see'st when thou dost wake,  
Do it for thy true-love take,  
Love and languish for his sake:  
Be it ounce or cat or bear,  
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,  
In thy eye that shall appear.  
When thou wakest, it is thy dear.  
Wake, when some vile thing is near.

**Peter Brook:**

I had a very strong feeling that behind the play as we know it was something much richer and fuller, and I felt that this could come to life in a theatre through using a very wide range of theatrical techniques.

**Hermia:**

Lysander! Out of hearing.

**Peter Brook:**

So that in rehearsals we'd arrived at this white box, and a lot of possibilities. Galleries and trapezes and a lot of brilliant colours in movement. The excitement of rehearsal is coming with open possibilities that then grow and developed through the collaboration with the actors.