

MEDIA RELEASE

Soulpepper presents *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Toronto, ON – January 18th, 2011 – **Albert Schultz**, Founding Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre Company, today announced that the company's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, part of the Soulpepper Family Series, will preview on February 17, 2011 at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts.

In one of Shakespeare's most beloved comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it's love in a forest complicated by meddling fairies, a hapless troupe of amateur actors, the Athenian court and love itself.

Rick Roberts, an accomplished playwright, actor and director (*4:48 Psychosis*, *Fish/Wife*, *Kite*) makes his Soulpepper directorial debut with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. **Roberts** will direct an outstanding cast that includes **Trish Lindström** as Titania & Hippolyta, **Gregory Prest** as Puck, **Abena Malika** as Hermia, **Brendan Wall** as Demetrius, **Mike Ross** as **Lysander**, **Karen Rae** as Helena, **Oliver Dennis** as Bottom, Founding members **William Webster** as Snug and **Michael Hanrahan** as Quince, **Derek Boyes** as Starveling, **Michael Simpson** as Flute, **John Jarvis** as Snout, **Ins Choi** as Oberon & Theseus, **Jason Patrick Rothery** as Philostrate, **Tatjana Cornij** as First Fairy as well as **Ken Mackenzie** and **Douglas John Alan**. The set and costume design is by **Ken Mackenzie**, the lighting design by **Lorenzo Savoini** and music direction by **Mike Ross**.

A Midsummer Night's Dream previews February 17, 2011 and opens February 23, 2011 at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, located at 55 Mill Street, Building 49, in the Distillery Historic District. Tickets range from \$28 - \$60 (plus HST) and are available by calling the Young Centre box office at 416.866.8666 or by visiting soulpepper.ca. \$22 tickets are available for 21-30 year-olds at www.stageplay.ca. StagePlay is sponsored by TD Bank Financial Group.

2011 Soulpepper Lead Sponsors are: Sun Life Financial, Scotiabank Group and TELUS. Soulpepper gratefully acknowledges annual operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council.

Soulpepper Theatre Company is an artist-founded, classical repertory theatre company with a three-tiered mandate: to present the world's greatest stories in vital Canadian interpretations; to train a new generation of theatre artists; and to inspire and enrich youth through mentorship and access programs.

BACKGROUND NOTES

"The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen man's hand is not able to taste ... what my dream was"

In Bottom's crazy, mixed-up, yet somehow absolutely accurate description, in this play Shakespeare takes us deeply into the fragility, unpredictability and fantastical nature of our dreams. Not only our night-side-of-the-eye dreams, but the cherished visions of our hearts as well: that we will find a perfect mate, that our work will find favour with others, that our children will obey us and recognize that we want what's best for them. A Midsummer Night's Dream has been called one of Shakespeare's "golden comedies," and it is hilarious, full of all the hallmarks of comedy: mistaken identity, ridiculous (perhaps nowadays we might say "inappropriate") love, and the zing of expert wordplay. However, as with a dream, the action is grounded in deeper themes.

A serious consideration of love in its many guises is woven through the whole play. There are the complexities of adult love, as personified both by Theseus who has fallen for Hippolyta, the Amazon queen he has conquered, and by Oberon and Titania, whose long marriage has devolved into "the forgeries of jealousy." Then we have the teenage trauma of Helena, whose unrequited love for Demetrius is set alongside the reckless passion of first love that causes her best friend Hermia run away to the forest with Lysander so they can be together. Parental love (or perhaps parental longing for control) is expressed through Egeus, who threatens his daughter Hermia with death if she doesn't marry the man he's chosen for her, and through Titania's fierce possessiveness of her adopted boy.

A great deal of the story deals with breaking free of parental restraints, and being free to make your own choices. Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius are all on the brink of adulthood. Passionate, changeable, certain of everything, these utterly recognizable teenagers escape to the forest. Here they test their readiness for freedom and confront the price of their choices. The forest is full of wildness, strange creatures and primal fears. It is a place, for example, where you can lose your virginity. Hermia is all too aware of this danger, insisting that Lysander sleep a distance away from her to preserve her modesty.

When they leave Athens, both Lysander and Demetrius are madly in love with Hermia. Due to the mistakes of the mischievous Puck, by the time their night in the woods is through both boys will be equally as passionately in love with Helena. Shakespeare has a deep understanding of this time in life: the boys don't seem to make much of a distinction between the girls, they just like feeling really intense and talking intensely about it. Puck's mistakes and their own make for a night of mayhem that ends in exhaustion. Only when they've all collapsed on the ground in sleep can everything finally be made right. Only after they have passed through the tests of this night can they emerge as fully functioning adults. (We hope.)

Continued ...

BACKGROUND NOTES CONTINUED ...

Shakespeare's genius is that he doesn't end the play there. In the final act, with the Pyramus and Thisbe play by the mechanicals, we see what might have happened to the lovers if the play had been a tragedy. Paradoxically, this takes the comedy to a sublime level. This painfully earnest, riotously terrible production is marvellously summed up by Theseus: "Merry and tragical! tedious and brief!/This is hot ice and wondrous strange snow."

The title has it right: only a dream could so blithely contain such impossible contradictions.

Tidbits

~ The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

~ Turning Bottom into an ass was inspired by Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*.

~ This play was registered with the Stationer's Company in 1600. It also appeared in the First Folio of 1623.

~ Many films have been made of this play, and notables from James Cagney to Kevin Kline have appeared in it. Perhaps the most unusual casting was in a Disney short. The four lovers were played by Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck and Daisy Duck.

Notes by

Soulpepper Associate Artist Paula Wing

PLAYWRIGHT BIOGRAPHY

1564 - On April 26th, the third child (and first son) of John Shakespeare, a glover, and prominent local businessman and the former Mary Arden, is baptised in Stratford-upon-Avon. Young William's actual birth date is not recorded, though many will later want to believe that it is April 23rd, St. George's Day.

1570 - He likely goes to King's New School in Stratford, to begin his education.

1582 - On November 28th, eighteen-year-old William marries Anne Hathaway, not only an older woman at twenty-six but also pregnant with their first child.

1583 - On May 26th Susanna Shakespeare is baptised.

1585 - Twins are born to Anne and William. Son Hamnett and daughter Judith are baptised on February 2nd. The Shakespeare family is a very small one for the time.

1586-1592 - These are sometimes referred to as Shakespeare's "lost years." There are no records of what he did, though colourful theories abound. For example, that he was forced to flee Stratford due to an accusation of deer poaching. Or that he began his theatrical career as the 16th century equivalent of a valet, taking care of theatre patrons' horses in London. Some say more prosaically that he was school master. He does leave Stratford for the big city sometime in this period.

1592 - Shakespeare is believed to have begun his theatrical career around this time. The first public mention of him that we have is an attack by playwright Robert Greene, who refers to him as "an upstart Crow ... with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide." His early plays are historical, among them Richard III and the 3 parts of Henry VI

1593 - On April 18th, his first poem, Venus and Adonis, is entered in the Stationers' Registrar.

1594 - His second poem, The Rape of Lucrece is registered on May 9th. Shakespeare is now part of a group of actors who own their own company. They are called the Lord Chamberlain's Men and are the leading acting company in London. They have Queen Elizabeth's patronage. The First Quarto of his works appears.

1595 - His early histories give way to comedies. A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night and As You Like It are written over the next few years.

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PLAYWRIGHT BIOGRAPHY CONTINUED

1596 - Back in Stratford - where his wife and family have remained - his son Hamnett dies of unknown causes. He is buried on August 11th.

1597 - Roughly 15 of his 37 attributed plays have been performed. The now well-known writer has an excellent business sense, possibly inherited from his father. He purchases the "second largest" house in Stratford during this year. Romeo and Juliet ushers in a prolific period in Shakespeare's writing that includes Henry IV parts 1 and 2, and Henry V.

1599 - A group of the Chamberlain's Men, among them Shakespeare, get together to build their own theatre on the south bank of the Thames. They call it The Globe and its popularity with theatregoers makes its original investors rich. Julius Caesar appears before the turn of the century.

1603 - Queen Elizabeth dies and the new King James I awards Shakespeare's company a royal patent. They change their name to the King's Men. This is the period of the problem plays like Measure for Measure, and the great tragedies like Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear.

1606 - Shakespeare's final plays are the so-called romances Cymbeline, A Winter's Tale and The Tempest. These stories tend to seek reconciliation and forgiveness, unlike the bleaker tragedies.

1607 - Henry VIII and Two Noble Kinsmen, his final attributed plays, are written very probably with the assistance of John Fletcher, who will become the house playwright for the King's Men when Shakespeare retires. He visits Stratford more frequently in these years.

1616 - On April 23rd (St. George's Day) William Shakespeare dies, survived by his wife and two daughters. In his will he leaves the bulk of his estate to his first born. He leaves Anne his "second-best bed," a bequest that has provoked a good deal speculation. Some claim it's a post-mortem slap in the face and others say this bed would have been the marital bed and thus of great sentimental value.