

An introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
by the director, Tim Supple

We bring this production of Shakespeare's play to Toronto after a long and eventful journey - many journeys. In 2005 I travelled to cities in India and Sri Lanka meeting, watching and working with an astonishing range of theatre artists. Many of these artists had worked for years, from very young ages, to acquire the skills they now have. And many would think nothing of travelling eight hours through the night to meet for a day's encounter. On my last trip to choose the cast and creative team, I travelled to one place only- Mumbai- and forty artists came from across the continent to join twenty resident artists for our final week-long session.

Once we knew who would be in our project, the designers came to London to prepare and then, in January 2006, I went to Chennai in Tamil Nadu, and our artists left their homes, for two months rehearsal. The production opened in New Delhi before touring India in outdoor venues that we created as we went. It has since played for two seasons at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon, for a season at the Roundhouse in London, in nine UK cities and in Verona, Perth, Adelaide, Sydney and San Francisco. It has had to transform several times: from outdoor to indoor venues; from 2,000 to 450 seats; from amphitheatres to thrust stages to proscenium arches.

There have been other major journeys. My encounter with Indian theatre has changed the way I see: the cast have travelled through a relationship with each other's languages and culture of performance; the production has developed hugely over two years and we have all travelled far and deep into the interior of a play of endless possibility. And over time being a participant in the journey of this production has inevitably taken on the feeling of life itself - or at least that aspect of life that is lived with others, working and experiencing together. People have left and joined, children have been born and parents died. Most recently, and most tragically, one of our group passed away and left the ultimate gap that can never be filled.

This loss puts us in mind of the bigger picture. Two mighty traditions met in this production: English and Indian theatre. For centuries audiences in both continents have been offered a heady mix of the sacred and profane - of comedy and tragedy. Shakespeare's *Dream* is itself a great balancing act: humour and seriousness, supernatural and worldly concerns, divine and corporeal aspirations co-exist in its ample flesh. This production is simply one more attempt to catch your attention for two short hours and give a fleeting, bright glimpse of our brief and shared mortality.