

'A Reimagined Midsummer Night's Dream'

by AJ Sheehy, Charlotte Paterson, Henry Wilson, Honor Boekeman, Isabel Grace, Jen Harland, Jess Dening and Trudi Anne Gribble.

Dramaturgs: Dr Suzanne Ingelbrecht and Louise Sheehy.

A NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

By Dr Suzanne Ingelbrecht

3 February 2023

The script was written from scratch over a series of 10 x 5.5 hour workshops on consecutive Saturdays (10AM to 3.30PM) that started on 21 May 2022. The venue for these workshops alternated between Spare Parts Puppet Theatre in Fremantle and Fremantle Hospital. Facilitator Dr Suzanne Ingelbrecht set up a three-table format facing a whiteboard so that participants could see and respond to each other and to the ideas written on the whiteboard as each workshop progressed.

The first script-writing workshop entailed introducing participants to a specially constructed Company Workbook detailing Shakespeare's characters and what happens in each scene. The facilitator drew participants' attention to various issues arising from Shakespeare's original work, for example the harsh treatment that would be meted out to Hermia if she did not marry Demetrius; the orientalism at work in the subject of the Indian boy who becomes Titania's ward; the issue of inaccessibility and 'othering' through the play (e.g. how Bottom's head becomes that of a donkey). Workshops 1 & 2 were therefore devoted to issues and problems within Shakespeare's original text and how the Company might wish to change or resolve these issues, including through making most of the characters in their new reimagined play neurodiverse.

Workshops 3 & 4 were devoted to fleshing out the neurodiverse idiosyncrasies of each character, then plotting a new scene structure based on the decisions made in Workshops 1 & 2 (recorded on the whiteboard). Shakespeare's 5-Act structure was reduced to 3 Acts (or 5 Scenes) in total, however, most of the characters from Shakespeare's original were retained as well as the settings of Ancient Athens (the place of sensory intrusion/inaccessibility/rigidity) and the Forest outside Athens (the place of magic/accessibility/freedom).

Workshops 5-10 were devoted to line and dialogue production through a combination of improv acting and group brainstorming following the 3-Act/5-Scene plot structure, guided dramaturgically by Dr Ingelbrecht and project lead Louise Sheehy. A further 3-hour workshop on 13 August 2022 featured a full read-through of the draft script with Company participants that timed the new play at around 40 minutes and identified a few areas to be fleshed out or rethought. The final draft of the play was produced following this read-through and included short biographies of all the characters.

Some creative highlights of the script include:

- 1) The mischievous fairy Puck becomes Oberon and Titania's son. He is now a shapeshifter and has changed himself into a fox when audiences first meet him. Even when Oberon and Titania give him their magic potion to try to bring him back as Puck, he retains his fox's ears and tail, symbolically affirming that 'it's okay to be different'.
- 2) A new character – the Voice of Reason (Azaelea-Rose) – is introduced to try to speak reason to Theseus, Duke of Athens, who represents the unfair Law dictating how Hermia should behave. Only Theseus can 'hear' her words of wisdom.
- 3) The Mechanicals are now 'tradies' (Australian slang for tradespersons). The tradies have sensory issues which can only be resolved through rehearsing their tragedy of 'Pyramus & Thisbe' in the Forest. As part of teaching them a lesson for trying to capture their foxy son Puck, Oberon and Titania turn them into foxes as well – just as the Duke's hunting party is approaching. Two of the tradies are now female: the carpenter Snug and Frances Flute.
- 4) The four Lovers of Shakespeare's original are now much more helpful and compassionate individuals. They are all neurodiverse and take delight in finding sensory toys littering the Forest floor to give away as gifts.
- 5) Bottom does not become a donkey. He briefly becomes a fox along with the other tradies.

Project Name: A Reimagined Dream – Towards a Neuro-Diverse Telling of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

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