

A MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY PRODUCTION

Based on the screenplay by  
**MARC NORMAN & TOM STOPPARD**

Adapted for the stage by **LEE HALL**

Music by **PADDY CUNNEEN**

Directed by **SIMON PHILLIPS**



*Shakespeare  
in Love.*

**15 JULY—14 AUGUST**

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE, THE PLAYHOUSE

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY  
— EDUCATION PACK PART A —

**MTCC** MELBOURNE  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

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**Activity**



**Discuss**



**Interview**



**Video**

# — MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY —



Photos by Tim Grey

MTC is Melbourne’s home of live storytelling, producing an annual mainstage season of up to 12 plays, an annual Education production and diverse learning program, play readings, and more. MTC is one of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world. Founded in 1953, MTC is also the oldest professional theatre company in Australia, and currently exists as a semi-autonomous department of the University of Melbourne.

As Australia changed, MTC has changed with it. We like to think that we have frequently been at the forefront of Australian culture, introducing new ideas and new ways of looking at our lives, our society and the world; helping to explain a swiftly evolving landscape as we moved through it. Today, with Southbank Theatre as our performance home and our headquarters in Sturt Street, Southbank, MTC strives to present Melbourne audiences with the best drama from Australia and overseas to the highest standards.

Our Vision: To enrich lives with understanding and empathy through the storytelling power of the finest theatre imaginable.

Our Artistic Purpose: To produce classic and contemporary Australian and international theatre with style, passion and excellence in order to entertain, challenge and enrich audiences.



## Go Backstage

Learn more about what happens behind-the-scenes to create MTC productions on our website:  
[mtc.com.au/backstage](http://mtc.com.au/backstage)

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Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the First Peoples of Country on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand. We pay our respects to all of Melbourne’s First Peoples, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.

# PREPARING TO SEE SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE

Part A of this Education Pack is designed to help you prepare to see the MTC production as a part of VCE Theatre Studies Unit 4, Outcome 3. This is a pre-show pack with information about context, setting, characters and the creative team. This resource will help you to get the most out of your visit to the theatre, priming you to see beyond the performance and consider the connections to your Theatre Studies curriculum. Once you've seen the production, download Part B of the Education Pack for further insights to the production roles, theatre styles, and elements of theatre composition.

## VCE THEATRE STUDIES UNIT 4 OUTCOME 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate acting, direction and design in a production. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3. Always refer to the VCE Study Design and VCAA documents when preparing for assessments and examinations.

### KEY KNOWLEDGE

- the character/s in the production including the function and purpose, objective/s, motivation/s, status and traits
- interpretation of a script in performance by actor/s, director/s and designer/s
- acting skills used by the actor/s to realise character/s, including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness and silence
- acting and directorial decisions made in interpreting a script and application of direction in the production
- design decisions made in interpreting a script and application of design in the production
- application of elements of theatre composition in the production
- focus and verbal and/or non-verbal language to convey the intended meanings of the script
- the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- the interrelationships between acting, direction, design and theatre style/s utilised in the production
- theatre terminology and expressions to analyse and evaluate a theatre production.

### KEY SKILLS

- analyse the character/s in the production including function and purpose, objective/s, motivation/s, status and traits
- analyse and evaluate interpretation of a script in performance by actor/s, director/s and designer/s, including the acting, direction, design and elements of theatre composition used and the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- analyse the use of focus, the acting space and verbal and/or non-verbal language to convey the intended meanings of the script
- analyse and evaluate:
  - the acting, directorial and design decisions made in interpreting a script
  - the application of elements of theatre composition in interpreting a script
  - the use of acting and design in the performance
  - the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- analyse the ways that actor/s, director/s and designer/s work with the theatre style/s utilised in the production
- use theatre terminology and expression appropriately

Source: VCAA (2018) *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design 2019–2023* on [vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://vcaa.vic.edu.au).



# — SYNOPSIS —

Will Shakespeare has writer's block as he waits for a new muse to inspire him. He begins auditions for a comedy (which we recognise to be a proto *Romeo and Juliet*) discovering a brilliant actor, Thomas Kent.

Kent is actually a woman named Viola. Because acting is illegal for late 16th century English women, she has had to disguise herself as a man. When Will comes to tell Kent that 'he' has secured the part of Romeo, Will interrupts a party designed to broker a marriage between Viola and Lord Wessex. On meeting Viola, Shakespeare falls in love with her. He has found his muse.

Rehearsals commence, as does correspondence between Will and Viola using 'Kent' as the intermediary. Will learns she must be married to Wessex and then, that she and Kent are the one person. With Viola unmasked they consummate their love.

Later, when Wessex arrives to take Viola to meet Queen Elizabeth I, Will accompanies them disguised as Viola's female cousin and, inadvertently, makes a bet with the Queen that theatre can replicate genuine emotion.

Rival theatre manager Burbage arrives at rehearsals to recoup the script that Shakespeare promised him but, deceived, leaves with the wrong one. Viola and Will briefly separate after her discovery of his wife and children back home. Rehearsals continue and, with Will still writing, the play becomes a tragedy.

Simultaneously, Wessex, Burbage and Tilney arrive to kill Will, get the script and shut down the production respectively. Viola, outed as a woman, leaves with Wessex. Burbage comes to their aid, offering his theatre for the production in which Will must now play Romeo.

Viola and Wessex are married but on the eve of her departure with him overseas, she runs away to watch the show. Their new Juliet has lost his voice so Viola must step on in his place. The lovers say their final goodbye on stage as Romeo and Juliet while the company members trap Tilney and Wessex, who both arrive to interrupt the production, underneath the stage. As Tilney breaks free, the Queen reveals herself and covers for Viola, silencing him. She declares Will the winner of the bet. As Viola sails away with Wessex, Will talks to the ghost of Marlowe about a new play that will capture the spirit of Viola – we know it to be *Twelfth Night*.



## Freeze frames synopsis

In small groups, stage this synopsis with three freeze frames per paragraph. Choose a piece of music that suits the scene. Present these in sequence as a whole class.



Deidre Rubenstein, Claire van der Boom, Michael Wahr, Francis Greenslade, Aaron Tsindos, Aljin Abella, Laurence Boxhall and Tyler Coppin

# — SETTING —

## SHAKESPEARE'S LONDON

The play is set in Elizabethan London (i.e. during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I) in 1593. At the time, London was big, and growing fast. In the fifty years leading up to the turn of the century, London quadrupled in population, becoming a bustling and over-crowded city of over 200,000. Within the city's medieval walls, a labyrinth of dark and narrow streets attracted crime and disease, and in 1593 the plague killed almost 11,000 Londoners.

The puritan-leaning city officials disliked the theatre – they associated it with sedition and transgression – so playhouses were built outside London's jurisdiction in places where brothels and taverns already abounded. The Rose and The Curtain theatres depicted in *Shakespeare in Love* were real playhouses, as were theatre managers Richard Burbage (better known as an actor, he established London's first playhouse, simply named The Theatre) and Philip Henslowe. Interestingly, Henslowe's account books for The Rose are history's best description of Elizabethan theatre, including information such as production schedules and fees paid to actors.

Queen Elizabeth I loved the theatre, and protected it from the resentful city government and church. She frequently invited companies to perform at court (it wouldn't be proper for the Queen to visit the bawdy neighbourhoods where the playhouses stood). Under her reign, theatre and literature flourished in England.

In the play we visit a variety of locations, including Will's room, The Rose theatre, Whitehall Palace, Greenwich palace, The Curtain theatre, various places at De Lesseps Hall (including Viola's bedroom and the ballroom), a tavern, and a boat on the river. At times 'backstage' is depicted, sometimes simultaneously with 'on stage' action.

Sources: Bate, J. (2007) 'General Introduction' in Bate, J. & Rasmussen, E. (ed.) *William Shakespeare Complete Works*. Hampshire: Macmillan, pp. 23-33; Shakespeare's Globe (2019) *London and Audiences* on [shakespearesglobe.com](http://shakespearesglobe.com).



### 1593 London mood board

Thinking about the locations depicted in the play, create a mood board that evokes what this world might look like on stage.



### Theatre technologies predictions

Think about theatre technologies that could be used to quickly transform the performance space into the different locations, such as a fly system, revolving stage, lighting in combination with scrim, stage trucks, and projections.



# — CONTEXT —

## SHAKESPEARE'S EARLY LIFE

*Shakespeare in Love* takes inspiration from the life of William Shakespeare, pre-eminent poet and playwright, embellished with witty allusions to recorded events. The story is full of characters who were alive during Shakespeare's life, but is a work of fiction.

Very little is known for certain about William Shakespeare. Traditionally his birthday is celebrated on 23 April 1564. William's father was an affluent glove maker, tanner and wool dealer and his mother was the daughter of a prosperous farmer. William had seven siblings, but three did not survive childhood. Shakespeare probably left school at the age of 14 or 15. In Shakespeare's youth, his hometown of Stratford was often visited by travelling troupes of professional actors, and these players probably sparked his interest in the stage.

When he was 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway (some eight years his senior), and they had three children. We don't know when or why Shakespeare left Stratford, or what he was doing before becoming a professional actor and dramatist in London. There are various stories about the so-called 'lost years' between 1585 and 1592, a period for which there is virtually no evidence concerning his life.

By 1592 he had moved to London, and was an actor before he was a writer. In 1594, Shakespeare became a founding member, actor, playwright and shareholder of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later named The King's Men under the rule of King James I).

## WOMEN IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

In Elizabethan times, women belonged to their fathers, and then to their husbands. Women couldn't own property of their own, which is one reason why Queen Elizabeth never married – she didn't want to surrender her power to a man. Women were allowed to marry from age 12, and many marriages were arranged in order to benefit the families. If a woman outlived her husband, only then was she allowed to be in charge of her life and property.

## THEATRE IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY

Just about everyone came to the theatre in Shakespeare's time, seated in areas separated by wealth, and audiences were very vocal and animated in their responses to plays. Women were banned from the English stage (a key plot point in *Shakespeare in Love* involves Viola disguising herself as a man in order to audition for Will's play), so female parts were played by boys whose voices hadn't broken yet.

Sources: Bate, J. (2007) 'General Introduction' in Bate, J. & Rasmussen, E. (ed.) *William Shakespeare Complete Works*. Hampshire: Macmillan, pp. 23-33; Royal Shakespeare Company (2019) *Shakespeare's Life and Times* on [rsc.org.uk](http://rsc.org.uk).



### Research context

Choose one of the context areas above and research it further. Create a short presentation with images that explores more about the world of this play.

# — CAST —

WILL SHAKESPEARE



Michael Wahr

VIOLA DE LESSEPS



Claire van der Boom

WESSEX



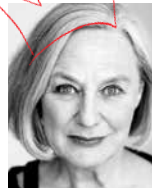
Daniel Frederiksen

MARLOWE



Luke Arnold

QUEEN ELIZABETH



Deidre Rubenstein

TILNEY



Francis Greenlade

FENNYMAN



Adam Murphy

HENSLOWE



John Leary

BURBAGE



Aaron Tsindos

WEBSTER



Aljin Abella

SAM



Laurence Boxhall

WABASH



Tyler Coppin

RALPH



Peter Houghton

NED ALLEYN

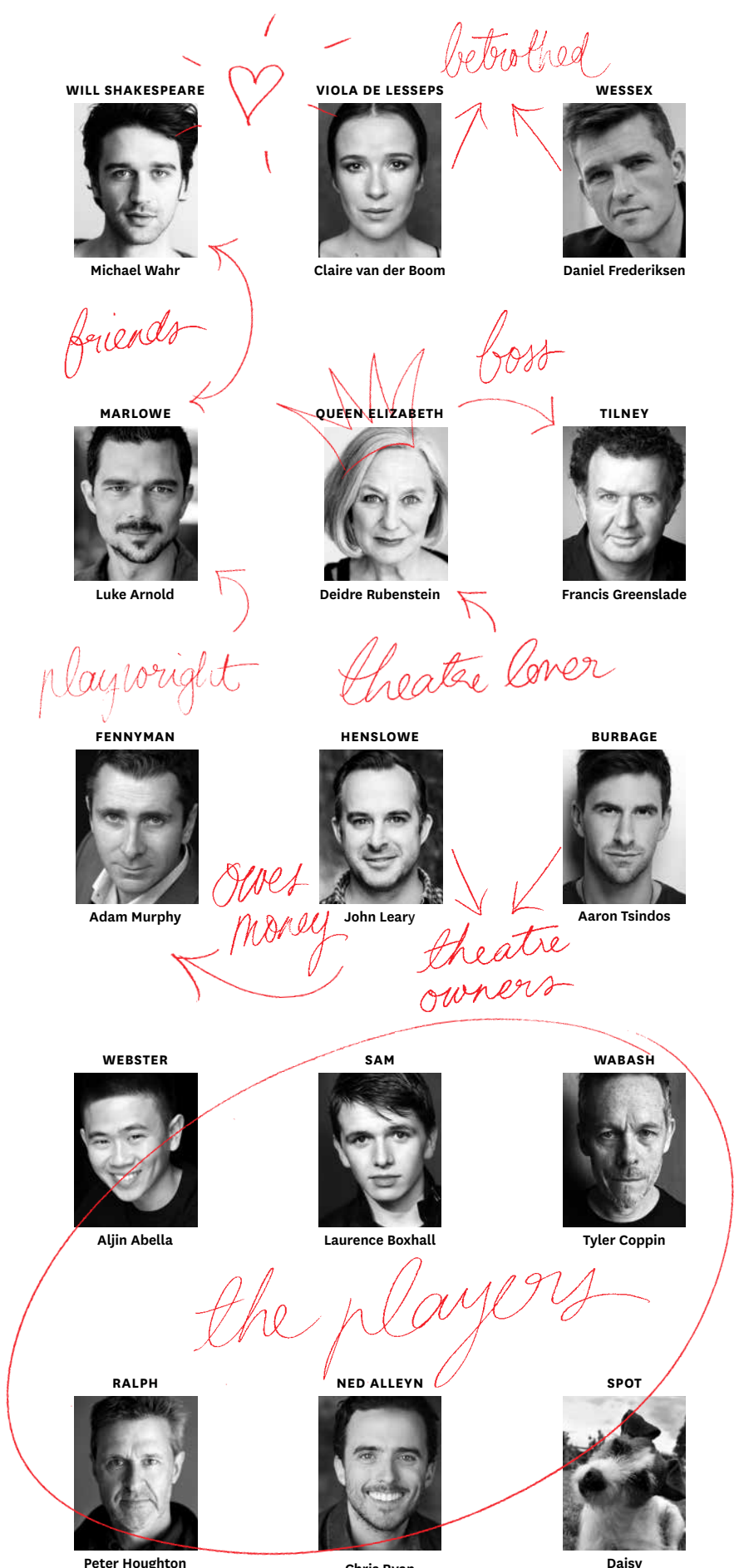


Chris Ryan

SPOT



Daisy





## — CHARACTERS —

The original stage production of *Shakespeare in Love* premiered in London in 2014 with a cast of 29 actors playing 23 characters, plus four musicians who doubled as ensemble members. Director Simon Phillips' challenge now is to tell the same story with half the cast. 'I knew MTC was the place to bring this,' he says grinning; thrilled by the challenge. 'The Company has the same sense of adventure as me.'

Michael Wahr, Laurence Boxhall, Tyler Coppin, Aaron Tsindos, John Leary, Adam Murphy and Chris Ryan



**Will Shakespeare** is based on the renowned playwright himself. At the play's outset, Will has writer's block and is struggling with a new work titled *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter*. He's trying to find his muse, and does so soon enough in Viola (after pursuing Rosaline and others first). Will is a romantic at heart, making grand gestures to show his love for Viola.

**Viola de Lessep** is a reluctant noblewoman who grew up in a world of luxury and privilege, and is engaged to marry Lord Wessex. Viola prefers the exhilaration of the theatre, and disguises herself as a boy (pseudonym Thomas Kent) to audition for Will's play.

**Lord Wessex** is the loathsome villain of this story, a gold digging aristocrat. He is betrothed to Viola, and will stop at nothing to make her his wife.

**Kit Marlowe** (Will's colleague, friend, and inspiration) is based on real-life Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe, a contemporary of Shakespeare and the foremost tragedian of his day. The two playwrights almost certainly collaborated, and one controversial theory suggests that Marlowe wrote Shakespeare's plays. Will claims to be Marlowe when accosted by Wessex, leading to some fatal mistaken identity.

**Fennyman** is 'the money', an Elizabethan producer who finances the plays that Henslowe puts on at The Rose. He has two henchmen that he uses to coerce people into paying their debts. Fennyman is eventually given a role in *Romeo and Juliet* as the Apothecary, which he takes very seriously.

**Henslowe** is the owner and manager of The Rose theatre. He's in debt to Fennyman, and is badgering Will to write a new play – he'd prefer a comedy – so his theatre can make money.

**Burbage** is the well-known lead actor of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (and was so in real life too). Burbage has a high opinion of himself and his talent. Burbage is the owner of The Curtain Theatre in this play.

**Ned Alleyn** is based on real-life actor Edward Alleyn, a major figure in Elizabethan theatre. Ned is full of himself, a talented actor who's a bit of a jerk. Will strokes Ned's ego in order to get him to sign on to his new play.

**Sam** is a young male actor whose voice has not yet broken. He plays Juliet in Will's new play.

**Wabash** is a novice actor with a stutter. He is also Henslowe's tailor.

**Ralph** is a novice actor who plays the Nurse and Petruchio in Will's play.

**Webster** is a street urchin who aspires to be an actor. Webster discovers Thomas Kent's true identity and is the one who outs Viola.

**Queen Elizabeth** is based on Queen Elizabeth I, who was a patron and champion of theatre in late 16th century England. The Queen wields her power deftly, but must still operate within the patriarchal and religiously conservative societal structure.

**Tilney** is the Lord Chamberlain and tasked with censoring the theatre. When he discovers that Viola is acting on stage, he closes The Rose theatre.

**Sir Robert** is Viola's overbearing father, who has betrothed her to Lord Wessex.

**Spot** is a dog who performs with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The Queen has previously enjoyed plays featuring a dog. In a reference to *Macbeth*, Burbage tries to remove the dog from the stage, saying 'Out, damn Spot!'

The cast play other ensemble characters including **Lambert** and **Frees** (Fennyman's henchmen), **Mistress Quickly** (a wardrobe mistress), actors playing **Valentine** and **Proteus**, Burbage's **Heavies** (i.e. henchmen), a **Nurse**, **Catling** (a guard at De Lesseps Hall), a **Boatman**, **Waiter**, **Barman**, **Musicians**, **Molly** and **Kate** (tavern whores), and novice actors **Nol**, **Robin**, **Adam** and **Peter**.

Sources: BBC (2019) *About Shakespeare: audience and social attitudes* on [bbc.com](http://bbc.com); Dugdale, J. (2016) *How close were Marlowe and Shakespeare?* on [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com); Hall, L. [based on the screenplay by Norman, M. & Stoppard, T.] *Shakespeare in Love*. Samuel French, 2017.



Claire van der Boom and Michael Wahr



### Discuss casting and characters

In this production, costumes, millinery, wigs and make-up will be used to transform actors into a range of characters. Make predictions about which roles will be played by which cast members.





(Foreground) Daniel Frederiksen and Michael Wahr (background) Laurence Boxhall, Tyler Coppin, Chris Ryan, John Leary and Aaron Tsindos



### Create costume designs

Design a costume for Viola De Lesseps, and her Thomas Kent disguise.

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### Status and motivation

Discuss the status, motivation, traits and objectives of three characters in the play and predict how these aspects will be represented in performance. Discuss how contextual information might influence an actor's interpretation.

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### Acting skills

Choose two contrasting character and make predictions about how the actor/s will use their voice, facial expression, movement, gesture, stillness and silence to inhabit those characters.

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# SHAKESPEAREAN SCRIPT REFERENCES

*Shakespeare in Love* is full of witty allusions to Shakespeare's plays, most notably *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*, and his sonnets.

*Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy about two ill-fated lovers from warring families. There are clear parallels between the play and the relationship between Will and Viola in *Shakespeare in Love*.

*Twelfth Night*, also called *What You Will*, is a comedy centred on twins Viola and Sebastian who are separated in a shipwreck. In *Shakespeare in Love*, the Queen requests Shakespeare write a new play for *Twelfth Night* to mark the end of Christmas festivities.

Shakespeare's Sonnets are an expression of a range of human emotions – from love to grief, anger, jealousy and lust. Sonnet 18 ('Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?') is the most famous, and is referenced in *Shakespeare in Love* in a scene where Marlowe helps Will brainstorm his poetry.

Sources: Shakespeare, W. (2007) *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night* in Bate, J. & Rasmussen, E. (ed.) *William Shakespeare Complete Works*. Hampshire: Macmillan; Kerrigan, J. (ed.). (2009) *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. London: Penguin.



Michael Wahr and Claire van der Boom



# — CREATIVE TEAM —



**Simon Phillips**  
Director



**Gabriela Tylesova**  
Set & Costume  
Designer



**Matt Scott**  
Lighting Designer



**Andrew Kroenert**  
Musical Director



**Andrew Hallsworth**  
Choreographer



**Nigel Poulton**  
Fight Director



**Leith McPherson**  
Voice & Dialect Coach



**Jacob Battista**  
Associate Set  
Designer



**Clare Springett**  
Associate Lighting  
Designer



**Dann Barber**  
Associate Costume  
Designer



**Janet Hine**  
Associate Cosume  
Designer



**Jess Burns**  
Assistant Director



Francis Greenslade, Peter Houghton, Michael Wahr, Simon Phillips, Daniel Frederiksen and Andrew Kroenert

## — DIRECTION —

The MTC production of *Shakespeare in Love* is being directed by Simon Phillips, who leads a large creative team. Phillips' first memory of *Shakespeare in Love* was watching the 1998 film and being amazed at how the narrative so deftly operated on two distinct levels. The first was the artful way Shakespeare's love story, *Romeo and Juliet*, was woven into the narrative, and the second was the script's implicit appreciation of the stage. Just as the film did, Lee Hall's adaptation of Tom Stoppard and Marc Norman's screenplay continues to take liberty with the period and course of the events in Shakespeare's life.



### Simon Phillips (Director)

'The way the story celebrates theatre without being too self-conscious about it was deeply satisfying for me ... If it wasn't done so playfully, perhaps I'd take issue with it, but it's so artful and full of spirit all we can do is celebrate it.'

Phillips notes that in reality, not much is known for certain about Shakespeare. Some historians have suggested that he might not have even written these plays. For Phillips, *Shakespeare in Love* taps into the heartbeat of Shakespeare's 'almost inconceivably brilliant body of work,' without being too concerned about historical accuracy.

Both Phillips and designer Gabriela Tylesova wanted the set design to pay tribute to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, but in the same way the music and language play with accuracy, they wanted their set to have a sweep of romanticism that would not be found in the Globe. The set will include a royal blue curtain that wouldn't have existed in Elizabethan theatre, however it represents the spiritual heart of the story and offers a skewed reality that helps the audience lean into the imagination of the story.



### Simon Phillips (Director)

'This will be a big, sprawling, love-filled, life-affirming romp of a play. It is, far and away, my favourite romantic comedy. Which is probably unsurprising, given it combines the work of two of my favourite playwrights: Shakespeare and Stoppard.'



Simon Phillips





### Discuss romanticism

Discuss what clues these comments from Simon Phillips give you about how this production will be staged. How might 'a sweep of romanticism' translate into design? Research Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and discuss what elements of this place might be present in the set design for *Shakespeare in Love*.

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### Video trailers

Watch the video trailers for this production at [youtube.com/melbtheatreco](https://youtube.com/melbtheatreco) and make predictions about the theatre styles, design elements, and music.

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## — THEATRE STYLES —

Director Simon Phillips says Hall's script prescribes a style that is both comedic and theatrical. 'To be funny, the play needs to be set in Elizabethan times; however the language is contemporary, which makes it accessible.' The use of music throughout, from composer Paddy Cunneen, stitches the narrative together fluidly, Phillips explains. Set and Costume Designer Gabriela Tylesova will be responsible for realising the visual language of the play, with strong influence from Phillips. The two are long-time collaborators having worked together on *Twelfth Night*, *Love Never Dies*, and *Muriel's Wedding – The Musical*. Phillips admits he's a 'freak' when it comes to controlling the overall vision of his work, which of course involves design, however Tylesova almost always brings an understanding of the work that Phillips doesn't. He describes her skill as a 'distinct distillation' of a million ideas.

The script of *Shakespeare in Love* lends itself to an eclectic theatre style, however a director could choose to apply a range of theatre styles to an interpretation of the play. Included below are some theatre styles that you may be able to identify elements of in this production.



Laurence Boxhall, Luke Arnold, Claire van der Boom and John Leary

### ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

This style of theatre is associated with a historical period in England when Queen Elizabeth I reigned. Theatre at this time was performed in public playhouses, by traveling troupes, and in the royal court for the Queen herself. Conventions of this style include: asides (an actor speaking privately to the audience, unheard by other characters); soliloquies (a character speaking their thoughts aloud to themselves, as in Hamlet's 'To be or not to be ...'); disguises and eavesdropping (where the audience is aware what's happening, but characters are completely duped); a presentational style (with large gestures); and elaborate, colourful and symbolic costumes (to communicate the status of characters). All the parts were played by men, as women were banned from the stage. As there were minimal sets, dialogue was rich in imagery to evoke places for the audience, but trapdoors were commonly used. Elizabethan Theatre commonly used musicians to enhance the play, and plays were performed in daylight hours as there was no theatrical lighting technology.



## EPIC THEATRE

Epic Theatre is a theatre style created by Bertolt Brecht in early 1900s Germany. His work had a strong political voice, as Brecht served as a medical orderly during the First World War and fled Germany when the Nazis came to power in 1933. His most acclaimed work is *Mother Courage and Her Children*, often regarded as one of the finest anti-war plays. Brecht sought to distance or 'alienate' his audience from emotionally investing in the characters so they could think critically about the message in his drama. To do this, he used conventions such as breaking the fourth wall, narration, direct address, placards, multi-rolling (an actor playing more than one character), minimal set/costumes/props, montage, and episodic scenes.

## MUSICAL THEATRE

Musical theatre combines songs, dialogue, acting and dance, often with spectacular sets, costumes and lighting. In many ways musical theatre overlaps with opera, however musicals put more emphasis on the spoken dialogue whereas operas are usually entirely sung. By their very nature, musicals are highly non-naturalistic, usually depicting a wide variety of locations, actors playing multiple roles, the conventions of song and dance accepted as normal behaviour, and solo songs used as a dramatic device to tell the audience more about a character's thoughts and feelings (a soliloquy to music, in a way). Most Western musical theatre emerged in the 19th century, with many conventions and structural elements established by Gilbert and Sullivan (in Britain) and Harrigan and Hart (in the United States).

## NATURALISTIC THEATRE

Naturalistic theatre was a movement in the late 19th Century that aimed to present accurate depictions of ordinary people on stage in realistic settings. Konstantin Stanislavski developed a 'system' for actors to create realistic performances (including techniques such as given circumstances, objectives and emotional memory). Naturalistic theatre makes use of the fourth wall, inviting the audience to observe the action unfold on stage.

Sources: BBC (2019) *Epic theatre and Brecht*, *Musical Theatre and Naturalism and Stanislavski* on [bbc.com](http://bbc.com); VCAA (2018) *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design 2019–2023* on [vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://vcaa.vic.edu.au).



### Make predictions

Make predictions about what conventions you might see on stage in this production. Your predictions should be informed by what you know about the synopsis, setting and characters.



Deidre Rubenstein and Daisy

# — WRITER'S NOTE —



Lee Hall

Lee Hall is an English playwright and screenwriter, best known for the 2000 film *Billy Elliot*. Hall's stage adaptation Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard's Oscar-winning screenplay *Shakespeare in Love* premiered in London's West End in 2014. Here he reflects on the creative forces who inspired the story of *Shakespeare in Love*.



## Lee Hall (Playwright)

Playwright Lee Hall reflects on the creative forces who inspired the story of *Shakespeare in Love*.

*'Shakespeare in Love* is Tom Stoppard's love letter to theatre. England's Greatest Living Playwright's joyful homage to England's Greatest Dead Playwright was an international hit. But the strange thing was: it was a movie. So when the chance came to adapt it for the stage I couldn't believe my luck. Not only did I have Tom's wonderful screenplay and the text of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* itself; I also had all the resources of theatre. Playing with all the conventions of Elizabethan Theatre in the theatre seemed to me like the story had found its natural home. It felt like I was writing the play that the film was based on. Just as Tom had plundered Shakespeare's comedies with their romantic confusions and crossdressing protagonists, I started to plunder other theatrical sources too. Tom had playfully suggested that Christopher Marlowe was responsible for Shakespeare's inspiration so I raided the plot of one of my favourite plays, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, so that the 'blocked' writer uses Marlowe's literary skills to assist his love life as well as his writing.

Of course the play is a complete confection. But that seems to be at the very heart of the piece. It is a celebration of invention. That we can invent ourselves as readily as we can create drama. Theatre is a place where the limits of ordinary life can be extended or indeed, completely broken. All we have to do is be willing to believe in the power of invention. We know very little of Shakespeare's actual life and even less about his writing process but what is clear is that in writing *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare was inventing a whole new way of writing plays. It is a huge leap forward in terms of dramatic construction as if Shakespeare was, in some ways, inventing himself. *Romeo and Juliet* is a new kind of writing about romantic love but Tom's tale is as much about how the chaos of theatre is as responsible for inspiring the play as it is about Shakespeare's supposed love affairs. While the love affair drifts off into the ether, the play endures. The contingent chaos of the theatre, the desperation about money, the vanity of actors, the follies of working with animals and children comically provide the circumstances for creation. Anyone who has worked in the theatre knows that even the best, most solid work seems a catastrophe when you are making it. Nothing seems to fit together. It can only be made at all through a strange combination of doubt and wilfully blind belief. Making a play, therefore, is rather similar to falling in love. How it all works out is a 'mystery', as they keep reminding themselves in the play.

The story is a very odd comedy. The marriage at the end is the wrong one. The lovers are parted yet this is no tragedy. Their affair vanishes just like the play 'melted into air' but the play has left them somehow renewed. And if the play works it should leave us with a strange, sweet melancholy. It's something that Shakespeare, more than any other writer, really understood. The theatre as an 'insubstantial pageant' is perhaps the perfect place to understand the mutable energy of life, which is always slipping beyond our grasp, because life, like theatre, is always in motion, always disappearing. It is something we can experience but can never own.

The theatre, like 'love' in the play, is a great collaborative venture. In this case the play is written as much by Marc Norman who invented the story, Tom Stoppard who wrote the screenplay we all know, Edmond Rostand who inspired the balcony bits and of course Shakespeare who inspired the whole thing. But really this play was as much created by Declan Donnellan who directed the first production and is made new, and different, with every cast and every production. I'm thrilled it's found its way so far from where we started. So for all the writers living and dead, we thank you for making it live again.'



## Discuss the power of invention

Discuss Lee Hall's comments above, and make connections between his writer's note and the contextual information earlier in this pack.

# — ATTENDANCE INFORMATION —



John Leary, Tyler Coppin (obscured), Michael Wahr and Adam Murphy



When you visit the theatre, share your experience on Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag **#mtcShakespeareinLove** and tag **@melbtheatreco**



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## CONTENT

MTC recommends *Shakespeare in Love* for ages 14+/Year 9+. For detailed information, visit **mtc.com.au/production-content-guide**

Part B of this Education Pack will be available once the production opens. To read more about visiting with school groups visit **mtc.com.au/education**.

## DURATION

Please refer to the MTC website closer to the production's season.

## BOOKINGS

Email **schools@mtc.com.au** or phone 03 8688 0963.

## GENERAL ENQUIRIES

For general MTC Education enquiries:  
Email **education@mtc.com.au** or phone 03 8688 0974.