

Pre-Show Notes

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)

Audio Description Transcript

Grace: Welcome to this introduction to *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*.

This play is written by Adam Long, Daniel Singer and Jess Winfield. Directed by Daniel Jenkins and presented by the Singapore Repertory Theatre. This audio described performance is at 6 p.m, on 13th November, and runs for about 90 minutes with no interval.

The touch tour will begin a little earlier than usual, at 4:30 p.m. Your audio describers will be me, Grace and my colleague Rodger. The play is directed by Daniel Jenkins. The Set Designer Is Wong Chee Wai. The Costume Designer is Tan Jia Hui. Lighting Designer is Gabriel Chan. Sound Designer is Ng Jing.

Rodger: How do you get to all 37 of Shakespeare plays in a single evening? Well, if you look carefully at the title again, it says "*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*" And then in very small print, in brackets, "*Abridged*".

It means you take a highly irreverend fast-paced look at the stories and roll several plays, such as the sixteen comedies into one while relying on lots, and I do mean a lot, of visual jokes instead of too much of Shakespeare's text, which has one of the actors, often says, are "Booooring!"

Three words to describe the show — Energetic, anarchic, manic and slapstick. Yeah, I know, that's four words. But that's kind of the show it is! Full of the unexpected and stuffed full of humor.

Three actors and a willing stage-hand play all the characters. Frantically switching costumes, wigs and enough hand props that they can open up their own joke shop.

In addition to mixing some very rare moments of very sincere Shakespearean speech, with many moments of buffoonery reminiscent of the Marx Brothers, the cast also sing, dance, fence, get splattered with paint and make spontaneous music, hitting each other with hollow plastic pipes. It's Shakespeare unlike you've never heard it told before.

Synopsis

Rodger: After a short introduction delivered directly to the audience by the three actors, the show begins. And the digital clock on the back wall starts counting down from 97 minutes. At the dress rehearsal, the show ended with forty-four seconds to spare.

Some of the plays are dealt individually. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* get done in about 15 minutes each while *Othello's* plot is turned into a raucous hip-hop song. And, the ultra violent *Titus Andronicus* gets hilarious Jamie Oliver treatment.

However, most of the plays are lumped together. All sixteen comedies in one ridiculous mash-up and the ten histories, in a piece of performance art, involving red paint, white underwear, a crown and a violin.

It's all wickedly tongue-in-cheek and the storyline doesn't really matter. Simply enjoy the physical inventiveness of the cast and the clever wordplay that takes some of the Bard's famous lines and uses them in and out of context.

The Set

Rodger: This production was originally intended and designed for the PowerHouse. The industrial grunge-feel of that location has been transferred to the KC Arts Center.

From the moment you enter the theatre, in fact, the lobby is unrecognizable. Ceiling to floor, opaque plastic sheeting masking off the walls while long scaffolding bars in metallic silver partition the space.

On stage, the set itself is composed entirely of scaffolding with more of the opaque plastic sheeting, masking the wings. Scaffolding bars, like the walls of the front of the auditorium, with strips of the LED lighting that cycle through red, green and blue, which together with a pumping rave music soundtrack, reinforces the sense that we've stepped into a very contemporary comedy club.

There are three main features in the scaffolding set, which runs along the back of the stage. On the left, offset about one and a half meters from the side of the stage is a tall tower that reaches up to the ceiling. There's a platform, at shoulder height, which actors clamber up to, up to, using the scaffold struts.

However, there's no safety barrier at the front of this platform, which causes the actor playing Juliet on the balcony to experience considerable, comical, anxiety before making an athletic and decidedly, unladylike dismount.

A step up from this platform is a bridge that runs, some six meters, to the right across the back of the stage to a larger L-shaped platform. With the leg of the L flushed, with the right hand side of the stage.

This bridge does have a scaffolding guardrail as the bridge is about two meters above the stage. And it's used for battlements and a place for actors to commentate on the action below.

On the wall behind, and above the bridge, is a very colorful spray-painted sign saying *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.

On the wall facing us, behind the platform, is another spray-painted piece of urban graffiti. A portrait of a bearded William himself suspended horizontally.

Under the bridge is a long LED sign board just wide enough to display a single line of text. Usually, the name of the play currently being performed... If that's the right word? And how many of the 37 plays are still left to do.

Beneath the sign hangs a curtain made of long thin strips of the industrial sheeting. Through which, the actors can enter and “*Exeunt!*” as Shakespearean Stage directions often like to say it in Latin.

When the cast wants to come down off the L-shaped platform, they either clamber down the scaffolding or use a flight of steps, which for the most part, is parked under the projecting leg of the L-shape. Until it is rolled out by Dennis, the dogsbody stage hand, and locked in position, for *Hamlet*.

Parallel with the bridge, there is also a squarish platform mounted on wheels. That's about the size and height of a table. It is kept behind the upstage curtain and rolled into position by Dennis the dependable. And used, for example, as a plinth for Romeo and Juliet to die on. Though unfortunately, or should I say deliberately, it's too small to accommodate both dead bodies with dignity and the decorum.

The platform has a seat-size step built into one corner, which enables an actor to step up onto the top of the platform in order to “declaim a speech” (*spoken in a deep voice with a cheeky tone*) or to conveniently sit and contemplate a scowl, for example.

The props list is ridiculously long and includes: Four fake arm casts, minus four amputated hands, two balloons for Juliet's nurse, as breasts, two sharp foils AKA fencing swords, clown noses, ginger beards for the Scots in the play whose name... we must never mention! (*exaggerated*) And two fake feet, each stuck on to the end of a long pole, which Dennis the ever dutiful, will hold in front of him, to create the illusion of Hamlet's father's ghost floating across the stage!

Characters and Costumes

Grace: **Erwin Shah Ismail** is a hundred and eighty centimetres tall, slender and olive skinned. He is the first to appear on stage.

Bald with a strong jaw and a neatly trimmed goatee, Erwin is the serious Shakespeare aficionado of the trio. He opens the whole show in a simple white tee with black tailored pants, black suspenders, bright red socks and black boots.

As all three performers juggle multiple roles, the array of costume changes are equally dizzying in this performance.

Erwin goes all Elizabethan on us when he plays Romeo by donning a short brown wig with a blue green velvet doublet, a jacket lined with gold lace, that has below wing sleeves and buttons. The shoulders are adorned with wings and decorative tabs, hanging at the waist, also known as piccadills.

The matching velvet trousers are knee-length known as Venetian Breeches and billows out over the upper thighs and hips. The look is completed with: White tights, and a white starch Elizabethan rough colour, a fan-like collar that is long, stiff, pleated and it looks pretty uncomfortable and awkward. Well, nonetheless, the Elizabethan collar dominated fashion during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as it was an indicator of wealth, prestige and social status.

Erwin goes on to play a multitude of characters, such as the nurse with a white apron, matching white headdress and hanging white balloons, (*Grace chuckles*), to portray an over-ample bosom.

Friar Lawrence's brown monk robes, a bloody white apron and in *Titus Andronicus*' "The Cooking Show", he flaunts his bare chest, with a heavy gold chain, and light brown fur coat to rap about Othello.

In a comedy segment, he puts on a black sparrow tail tuxedo jacket, with a big neon orange afro wig and red clown nose.

Then, it's an all-white shirt and pants ensemble in *Julius Caesar*. A kilt and wiry Ginger beard to channel to Scotland spirit for the infamous Scottish play, Macbeth. A light green snakeskin print leotard as a scaly backup backup dancer to Queen Cleopatra.

For the history plays, he ridiculously appears in a white singlet, white briefs, white swimming cap and goggles — All to get red paint smeared all over his body.

Finally, in *Hamlet*, he dons a business light grey jacket to play the titular character.

Tia Andrea Guttensohn is a tall, slim and fair beauty with long brown hair, sharp features and shining eyes. Half-Singaporean and half-Austrian, she is bubbly and the only female in the cast of three.

This does not mean she is restricted to the female Shakespearean roles as she takes on meaty male characters. One example is King Lear — in a long white wig and beard.

Tia appears as herself for the very first time in a tight white sleeveless tank, with black tailored pants, and black suspenders. Her socks are bright blue and paired with black leather boots.

She then goes on to slip in and out of her emerald green fur coat with cool big sunglasses for an *Othello* rap number.

A black tuxedo jacket, with red plastic nose, and moustache one can get from a joke shop.

For the comedy segment, red tartan pants for *Macbeth*, a well-cut white long dress for political fashion points in *Julius Caesar*. A sleek navy blue jumpsuit with thin straps to play a modern Ophelia for *Hamlet*.

And boy, was she a vision! An Egyptian vision, as Cleopatra, draped in gold fabric, a peacock blue cape and topped with a black braided wig with beads.

Shane Mardjuki, in his own words, is all knobby knees and elbows. Fair, slim and baby faced with short curly dark hair, he moves smooth, agile yet in a comical way on stage.

He, the ever ambitious actor, dying to be taken seriously, dashes straight on stage in Elizabethan finery. Crushed yellow velvet doublet, with matching shorts and intricate details of gold trimmings, white tights, bright green socks and black boots.

He cross-dresses as Juliet in a messy long blond wig, an white embellished dress with long billowing sleeves. And then goes on to don the same white bloody apron, fur coat and gold chain black tuxedo jacket with a plastic butcher knife in headband.

Green snakeskin leotard, white cap, white singlet and undies get-up, as well as a business jacket for subsequent scenes.

Finally, **Dennis Sofian**, the reliable stagehand, moving the set and handing out numerous props, is the shortest of the lot.

Youthful and stocky in appearance, he wears round-rimmed glasses and misleads us with his industrious dark blue working jumpsuit.

Dennis is more than the stage hand as he repeatedly stalks across the stage as the ghost of Hamlet's father in this hilarious get up of a plastic crown shower curtain hanging from two rods horizontally propped on his shoulders with leather shoes attached at its ends.

He also appears as a matronly Gertude in the *Hamlet* segment with a brown color shoulder-length wig and black sparkly dress.

Access Information

Rodger; SRT aims to provide an excellent experience and service for all patrons who may require additional support to access our venue and may enjoy our events.

For accessible booking options, please contact us at 6733 8166 from 10am – 6pm, Monday – Friday.

The nearest parking options are Robertson Quay Hotel, located at 15 Merbau Road, Singapore 239032, directly opposite the theatre's front door or in Robertson Walk Carpark at 11 Unity Street. That's Singapore 237995.

For Public Transport options, the nearest Bus Stop is B13211.

The nearest MRT stations are Clarke Quay (NE5), on the Northeast Line and Fort Canning (DT20) on the Downtown Line.

Please have your mobile device and headset with you. The Box Office will have headphones and devices on standby if needed.

KC Arts Centre, the home of SRT, is assistance dog friendly.

KC Arts Centre is accessible for wheelchair use from both the front and rear entrances. There is currently 1 wheelchair space on row Q in the theatre stalls. If you require a wheelchair space, or would like to understand more about transferring options, please contact our venue team at boxoffice@srt.com.sg or call 6733 8166.

We look forward to welcoming you and hope you have a wonderful time with us!

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