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Peter Brook's Production of
William Shakespeare's

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

for The Royal Shakespeare Company

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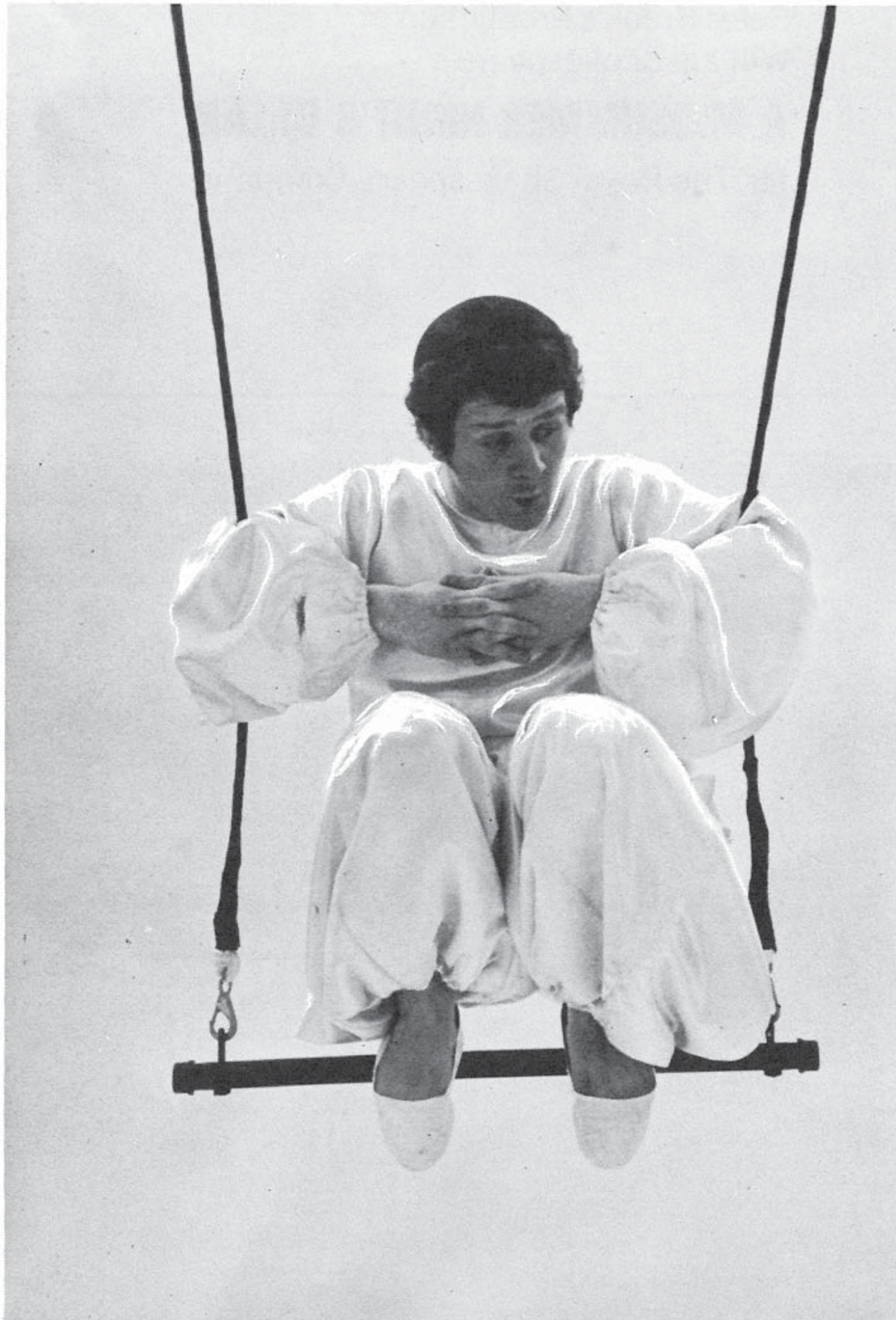

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Peter Brook's Production of
William Shakespeare's

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

for The Royal Shakespeare Company

The Complete and Authorized Acting Edition

Interviews with
Director, Designer, Composer, Cast and Crew

Set and Costume Designs and Data

Technical Data/Props List

Music and Sound Cues for Published Score

Production Photographs

Editing and Interviews
by Glenn Loney, City University of New York

The Royal Shakespeare Company

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INTRODUCTION

Filling the Empty Space With a Daring New Dream

> . . . Of course nowhere does the Deadly Theatre install itself so securely, so comfortably, and so slyly as in the works of William Shakespeare. The Deadly Theatre takes easily to Shakespeare. We see his plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way — they look lively and colorful, there is music, and everyone is all dressed up, just as they are supposed to be in the best of classical theatres. Yet secretly we find it excruciatingly boring — and in our hearts we either blame Shakespeare, or theatre as such, or even ourselves . . .[1]
>
> When I hear a director speaking glibly of serving the author, of letting a play speak for itself, my suspicions are aroused, because this is the hardest job of all. If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound. If what you wish is for the play to be heard, then you must conjure its sound from it . . .[2]
>
> Peter Brook, in ***The Empty Space***

"Conjure" is an operative word, especially when applied to ***A Midsummer Night's Dream.*** The play teems with references to magic and illusion. It is itself a kind of sleight-of-hand: the borders between dream and reality, between the fairy-world and that of human beings are subtly blurred.

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[1] ***The Empty Space,*** (New York: Discus/Avon, 1972), p. 10.
[2] ***Ibid.,*** p. 35.

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Blurring is one thing — it at least is a challenge to directors, designers, and actors to conjure sound from a play. Obliterating is quite a different matter. And that, as Brook points out in ***The Empty Space,*** in his chapter on "The Deadly Theatre," is what often happens to the plays of Shakespeare. Handsome settings, elegant period costumes, ingenious lighting effects, refined diction, striking stage compositions: these surfaces all too frequently pass for substances in Shakespearean productions.

Whatever it may be that the play has to say — and most of the Bard's works have a great deal to say, on a variety of subjects — becomes swaddled and muffled in the apparatus of production and the mannerism of performance. An effective parody of such Shakespeare production was offered with minimal means some seasons past in ***Beyond the Fringe.*** Out of the mad flurry of posturings and attitudinizings by Jonathan Miller, Allan Bennett, Peter Cook, and Dudley Moore, one meaningful line emerged: "Ha, saucy Worcester!"

Before Peter Brook and Peter Hall began to shake up the Shakespeare Establishment with unusual and provoking stagings at Stratford-Upon-Avon, a standard of dignified, respectful and carefully researched presentation seemed to have been set. Whether at Stratford or at the Old Vic, there was a sense of almost religious piety about the productions. One felt one was not so much seeing Shakespeare productions as offerings on the Bard's altar.

But Brook blames not only the idolatrous or unadventurous directors and performers who follow safe formulas. As he says: "To make matters worse, there is always a deadly spectator, who for special reasons enjoys a lack of intensity and even a lack of entertainment, such as the scholar who emerges from routine performances of the classics smiling because nothing had distracted him from trying over and confirming his pet theories to himself, whilst reciting his favorite lines under his breath . . ."[3]

Perhaps one reason Brook's dazzlingly different production of ***The Dream*** so astonished audiences was its contrast to the intellectual and visual images most knowledgeable people have had of the play. ***New York Times*** critic Clive Barnes referred to this imagery as: ". . .the magic of moonshine and fairyland, and — since no Shakespearean play has been so foully encrusted over with 19th century romanticism — the magic of Mendelssohn and bosky scenery looking good enough to eat."[4]

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[3] ***Ibid.***, p. 10

[4] Barnes, "Theater: A Magical 'Midsummer Night's Dream'," ***New York Times*** (Jan. 24, 1971), p. 27.

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That is certainly true for the generation of Americans who saw such things lushly visualized in Max Reinhardt's 1935 film treatment of ***The Dream*** — which featured Mickey Rooney as Puck. Two generations of central Europeans were effectually exposed to Reinhardt's gradually evolving conception of ***The Dream*** as a fantastic spectacular. ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** was Reinhardt's first major stage success in 1905, and thirty years later, it was to be one of his last major successes. During the years between those dates, he continually mounted new productions. In all, he staged ***The Dream*** eleven times, not counting European tours of some of those productions. In his own theatres, it was performed 620 times.

It was from just such romanticism — no matter how attractive and delightful — that Brook wished to free ***The Dream***, as well as from the dead hand of traditionalism and the chilling breath of literary scholarship. That there was a need for Brook's daring has been amply evidenced in the vitality and insights of the production itself, and in the critical and audience response. But even before such practical tests of value, it was painfully apparent that the mythic and magic potential of Shakespeare's ***Dream*** was vanishing like Oberon and Titania's fairy court at daybreak.

This was nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in adaptations of the play for other performing arts forms. As Andrew Porter, critic for London's ***Financial Times*** and guest-critic for the ***New Yorker***, pointed out in a program essay for the Washington, D.C. performances, Benjamin Britten's opera, ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, was only a "dream" of the play. Of its staging at Covent Garden by the Royal Opera in 1961, Porter noted: ". . .It opened with soft warm sighs from the orchestra that portrayed the breathing of the enchanted midsummer wood, and in that wood three very different kinds of people — well-born young lovers, fairies, and rustic tradesmen, sharply characterized by three very different kinds of music — dreamt their dreams, until Theseus's horns heralded the new day, and all misunderstandings seemed to have been swept away by the healing power of music." [5]

A similar quality was evoked by Sir Frederick Ashton's ballet, ***The Dream,*** first danced in 1964 by the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden. Of this work, Porter observed: ". . .His was an innocent interpretation; the darker sides of the drama, the cruelty, the bestial infatuation, the regrettable interchangeability of human affections, were not brought forward for analysis. All was mirth, delight and tenderness. The themes were love of poetry (turned into poetic dance images) and of the countryside,

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[5] Porter, "Dreaming of the 'Dream,' " ***Stagebill/JFK Center*** (April 1973), p.7.

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pleasure in quirks of character, and in romance that can blossom from unexpected situations. The music was by Mendelssohn. . ."[6]

Music by Mendelssohn! And how often have non-professional productions found themselves unable to compete with that justly famous but entirely too well known score? As is the case with Edvard Grieg's ***Peer Gynt Suite*** and Ibsen's plays, probably many people are familiar with at least some of the Mendelssohn score, but would be hard put to summarize the action of ***The Dream***. Whether the play is ***Peer Gynt*** or ***The Dream***, many innovative directors avoid these almost hallowed scores, for fear of having their intentions and concepts confused, confounded, or aborted by the subliminal imagery of the music. It is a measure of Brook's security — and sense of fun — that he retained the Wedding March in his production of ***The Dream***.

This volume contains an Americanized copy of the text and stage directions of Brook's production, as it evolved on its world tour. But it is more than that: it is an attempt to help theatre people and those who love the theatre to interpret, to understand the arcane symbols and necessarily abbreviated instructions they will find in the deputy stage manager's bible for the Brook ***Dream***.

To that end, the sketches and designs of Sally Jacobs, who created the costumes and the empty, white space that was ***The Dream***'s set, are reproduced, along with production photographs showing finished costumes in action in the completed set. Richard Peaslee's entire musical score is provided [published separately], together with an interview in which Peaslee explains how he worked with Brook and the cast to devise this score. Lighting plots and other technical plans are included, along with interviews with designers, technicians, and crew members who helped prepare, perform, and tour the production.

There is a particularly informative transcript of a Drama Desk meeting, at which Brook and several of his leading actors discussed the concepts and evolution of ***The Dream*** for this group of New York theatre critics and editors. And there are interviews with cast members, exploring such matters in greater depth.

The intent is to provide a record of a notable production, even though it is impossible to do that in complete detail. Every twitch of an actor's eyebrows, each subtle sliding inflection: these things would require several volumes to document, if one had the time and patience to set them down. Rather, this acting edition offers what most prompt-books do—and not much more than that. The sketches, plans, tables, quotes, interviews, music, and photographs help to flesh out the skeleton of the prompt-book. But only a color film, shot from various angles,

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6 *Ibid.*

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could hope to freeze forever the magic of the Brook ***Dream***. And even then, the live element would be lost, that interplay between performers and spectators which this production so strongly encouraged.

London critics, seeing ***The Dream*** in its empty white box at Stratford for the first time, were perhaps better prepared than most American reviewers who saw the production later at the Billy Rose in New York. Londoners had already been exposed to some memorable and rather revolutionary Brook stagings of the classics: ***Titus Andronicus*** (1955), ***King Lear*** (1962), and ***Oedipus*** (1968). Still, the ***King Lear*** had been shown — disastrously, as things worked out — at the New York State Theatre, and Brook's dynamic mounting of Peter Weiss's ***Marat/Sade*** was brought from London to New York, so those Broadway critics who do not make regular overseas pilgrimages to the West End knew they weren't going to see a revival of Max Reinhardt's theatre of spectacle.

When the American critic-director Charles Marowitz, who lives in London, reviewed ***The Dream*** for the ***New York Times,*** he was obviously impressed with just how cleanly Brook had stripped away all the visual trappings of 19th century romanticism and 20th century spectacle. As he said: ". . .this is a defoliated ***Midsummer Night's Dream.*** Gone from the Royal Shakespeare Company's production are the terpsichorean fairies, the vernal glades, the mischievous woods. In their place: a white, gymnasium-styled quadrangle hung with swings and ropes and surmounted by a metal catwalk from which hovering actors emit sounds, throw confetti, burble, heckle, kibitz, and brood."

He continued: "Brook's starting point seems to have been the '<u>contemporary</u>' notion of magic. Since woodland sprites and evil fairies no longer convince, on what magical basis can ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** be founded? Brook's answer is theatre-magic: A sleight-of-hand composed of scenic tricks and stage illusion, but with the mechanics laid bare for all to see. The herb, love-in-idleness, which drugs Oberon's victims and is responsible for all the amorous confusions of the evening, is here translated as a silver dish magically rotating on a silver rod — a conventional conjurer's trick passed spinningly between Puck and Oberon."

Representing the shooting stars of the night sky — actually thunderbolts! — with streamers thrown from side to side, Marowitz noted, using the phrase of the London ***Times*** critic Irving Wardle, ". . .is out-Meyerholding Meyerhold." Marowitz catalogued the influences he felt at work; in addition to Meyerhold and circus-technique, he saw evidence of Oriental theatre devices, turned into a kind of western theatre-short-hand.

"The shock," Marowitz observed, "of dislocating the play is so great, the effect of seeing it re-assembled in a bright, hard context free of traditional associations so refreshing that we are hypnotized by the very

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'otherness' of the creation. . ."[7] Ultimately, Marowitz did not feel that Brook had either transcended the material or reconstituted it into something different. For him, the production was ***The Dream*** still saying what ***The Dream*** always says ". . .but in a flashier context."

A less demanding reviewer, Milton Shulman, praised the production on its London opening — after the first tour to America — with a string of quotable quotes: ". . .this is the gayest, most exuberant, most inventive, least inhibited interpretation of a Shakespeare comedy that London has seen since the war."[8] That was saying a lot, since the war to which he was referring had ended in 1945. Apparently Brook's intentions of exposing the basic truths which lie concealed in the play miscarried somewhat with Shulman. There is an obvious pain and cruelty in the events, and this was thoroughly explored by the cast in rehearsals and performances. Yet Shulman could conclude his notice with: "The astonishing thing is that so radical a departure from the traditional approach to the play should still leave behind that essential illusion of having lived for a moment in a dream-world untouched by the complications of existence and the pain of truth. It's a rare and enchanting experience."[9]

Anyone who tries to recreate the quality and the effect of the Brook production from the bare bones of a prompt-book has taken on quite a challenge. One thing he will do well to consider is the matter of actor-audience relationships, at which Brook's cast were so good. British critic Ronald Bryden, seeing the production for a third time, on its return from America, strongly praised the interactions of players and spectators. Previously, with Brook's ***Marat/Sade*** and ***US***, he felt that the attempts to involve the audience were aggressive — in the sense of attacking or confronting them — and that they were not effective.

For Bryden, ***The Dream*** was successful in that respect, as in many others. He noted: ". . .if you want to demolish the barriers between persons, you're more likely to succeed by the traditional methods of conciliation: offering a show of vulnerability (what else is comedy?), friendliness, play, and, finally, physical contact. His cast tumble and dive through their white cage of swings and ladders like sportive otters, pausing from time to time to grin at you and invite you to join the fun. Each tumble brings them nearer — Barry Stanton's Snug, playing the lion over-entnusiastically, even falls into the front row. When the cast interpret

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[7] Charles Marowitz, "Brook: From 'Marat/Sade' to 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' " ***New York Times*** (Sept. 13, 1970), p. D3.

[8] Milton Shulman, "Peter Brook's Flying Circus—A Dream of a Show!" ***Evening Standard*** (June 11, 1971), p. 14.

[9] ***Ibid.***

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literally Puck's farewell 'Give us your hands' and bound up the aisles shaking any they can reach, it would be as difficult to refuse their clasp as an offer of love."[10]

Not all critics were as admiring. John Simon, acerbic reviewer for ***New York*** magazine, darkly discerned in the production what he regarded as the malign influences of two Polish theorists, Jan Kott (***Shakespeare Our Contemporary***) and Jerzy Grotowski. His comment: "Small wonder then that this 'fond pageant' emerges here black as the pit from Pole to Pole." [11]

For Simon, despite diverting visual effects, the text was not well served: ". . .lines do not come to new life; we are merely tickled by the strange discords, the cunning weirdness, the dépaysément of it all. And instead of being allowed to savor Shakespeare's genius, we are forced to admire Brook's cleverness. . ." [12]

Walter Kerr, reviewer for the Sunday ***New York Times***, seemed to agree with Simon: "Some of this is amusing by the way, but all of it is less funny than the actual psychological humors that infect Shakespeare's play and that are here scanted in the scurry. Words are barely brushed in, often at a mysteriously low key; they are never savored, never lifted as high as the lowest overhanging bar. The result is a loss of wit, of intellectual slyness. . ." [13]

Clive Barnes disagreed: "Brook has behaved as if ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** had been written just last summer by a young man with an archaic turn of phrase, an immortal gift for poetry, and no ability whatsoever to write stage directions.

"He has taken this script and staged it with regard for nothing but its sense and meaning. He has collaborated with Shakespeare, not twisted his arm or blinded his senses, not tried to be superior, but just helped him out to get this strange play on the stage." [14]

In that connection, some remarks Peter Brook made — during rehearsals for ***US*** — about Weiss' ***Marat/Sade*** are worth remembering: "The text is not the play. Only a small part. Words change or say different things in another time and place. The director has to go beneath them and find the author's true intent." With Weiss nearby, Brook could ask about meanings and intentions. That was useful, but he could still

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[10] Ronald Bryden, "Brook's Dream Revisited," ***Observer*** (n.d.).

[11] John Simon, "Bardicide," ***New York*** (Feb. 8, 1971), p. 48.

[12] ***Ibid.***

[13] Walter Kerr, "The Play Is Scanted in the Scurry," ***New York Times*** (Jan. 31, 1971), p. D5.

[14] Barnes, ***op. cit.***

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have staged ***Marat/Sade*** without Weiss on hand. "I have to do Shakespeare that way. Actually, a play is really a mass of material: thoughts, feelings, ideas, actions. The printed words are a very small part. Shakespeare's text is not what he did on stage. But the mass is still there. It's always there – and we have to find it."[15]

Many people who saw his production of ***The Dream*** think he found it in that mass of myth, mystery and magic. Brook sums it all up best in this quote from ***The Empty Space.***

> I know of one acid test in the theatre. It is literally an acid test. When a performance is over, what remains? Fun can be forgotten, but powerful emotion also disappears and good arguments lose their thread. When emotion and argument are harnessed to a wish from the audience to see more clearly into itself–then something in the mind burns. The event scorches on to the memory an outline, a taste, a trace, a smell–a picture. It is the play's central image that remains, its silhouette, and if the elements are rightly blended, this silhouette will be its meaning, this shape will be the essence of what it has to say. When years later I think of a striking theatrical experience, I find a kernel engraved on my memory: two tramps under a tree, an old woman dragging a cart, a sergeant dancing, three people on a sofa in hell–or occasionally a trace deeper than any imagery. I haven't a hope of remembering the meanings precisely, but from the kernel I can reconstruct a set of meanings. Then a purpose will have been served. . .[16]

Surely audiences who were entranced by Brook's ***Dream*** imagery will long retain that white box and its antic human clowns as a deep engraving in memory.

––Glenn Loney

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[15] Glenn Loney, "Theatre Abroad: Oh To Be in England," ***Educational Theatre Journal*** (March 1967), pp. 89-90.

[16] Brook, ***op. cit.***, pp. 123-124.

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RONALD BRYDEN:

A Drama Critic Introduces Peter Brook

One of London's most astute observers of the theatrical scene Ronald Bryden, has appropriately enough reviewed plays and commented on the past, present, and future of dramatic art for ***The Observer***, a major British Sunday newspaper. His admiration for the work of the Royal Shakespeare Company is something he has proved not only in words, but also in deed. Currently, he is a valued member of the RSC's staff.

His reactions to Peter Brook and his work should be an effective introduction for people who have not had the opportunity to hear Brook discuss his ideas, to join him in workshops, or to see one of his productions. He has recorded his impressions, shortly after the opening of "The Dream," for ***Observer*** readers and for "Dream" program purchasers. Generously, he shares them here:

"I was one of the people who interviewed Brook before the opening of 'The Dream.' Talking to him, it was easy to come away with the impression that the production was simply a routine job, something he felt he owed to his position as one of the Royal Shakespeare's directors. He seemed far less interested in his forthcoming first night than in the rehearsal he'd held before an audience of children: 'The perfect audience — they crystallize things without judging as adults do.'

"More than either, he talked about a recent trip to Iran on which he'd seen some marvellous ancient Persian folk-plays, like Old English sagas played by the medieval mummers, he said, and about the project he was going to Paris to launch as soon as 'The Dream' was out of the way — his new Centre for Theatrical Research, sponsored by the French Government. In it he hoped to bring together, he said, the sort of free-ranging experiment the young actors of the avant-garde are totally committed to with

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the traditional skills and sense of form of the older theatrical generation. He also wanted to experiment with playing before different kinds of audiences: children, boulevardiers, workmen, people who shared no language with the actors.

"It wasn't until I caught up with his production of 'The Dream' three months later that I realized he'd been telling me all about it. All these enthusiasms, from which staging Shakespeare's most familiar comedy seemed a dutiful detour, in fact had seethed in its creation. The moment his cast marched, to a roll of drums, on to Sally Jacobs' white squash court of a set, wearing the baggy trousers and gaudy satin nightshirts of Oriental acrobats, it was clear that this was to be a supra-national translation of what he'd found in those Persian folk-plays.

"As they launched into Shakespeare's story, miming and dancing through an imaginary Athenian wood of dangling wire coils, halting to address Shakespeare's poetry straight into the auditorium, they ranged effortlessly between the kind of avant-garde group improvisation one associates with the Living Theatre and its progeny, and the most traditional, formalized speech and playing you look for in great classical ensembles like the Comedie Francaise. And as they addressed themselves to the audience, you realized they were aiming at every conceivable auditor: children, peasants, intellectuals, Renaissance courtiers, beery Blackpool holidaymakers. It was poetry, ritual, ballet and circus rolled into one; as hieratic as an investiture, as spontaneous as 'Hair'. You could imagine it drawing the same belly laughs and enchanted silences from a New Year banquet at Elizabeth I's Whitehall, on a Japanese Noh stage, in an off-off-Broadway cellar, an African market-place or at the Palladium.

"It is his fascination with audiences that makes Brook uniquely important, and uniquely successful, among theatrical experimentalists. He has always seen himself as a kind of scientist in the theatre — both his parents, who emigrated to Britain from Russia after the revolution, were scientists. For rehearsals he wears a blue denim laboratory uniform, severe but faintly dandified in cut, as if Pierre Cardin had designed it for Chairman Mao to visit atomic plants.

"For years, he regarded his theatrical career as a back stairway to the more technological field of film direction. At Oxford during the war he spent all his time, until sent down for neglecting his studies, producing a film of Laurence Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey' (he shot it on condemned stock, which he got a Soho blue film maker to print for him cheap) and he

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candidly admits undertaking the early productions which made him the theatre's boy wonder of the 1940's because he could think of no other way to gain acceptance at his age in the post-war British film industry.

"With this end in view, he directed whatever he was offered — Sartre, Anouilh, Shakespeare, operas, American musicals. Gradually his kaleidoscopic hopscotching from one field to another focused to a single overriding interest: a concern, as he puts it, with the nature of the theatrical event. The turning point was probably his production of Genet's 'The Balcony' in Paris in 1960. For the first time, he got his actors to improvise around the actual text, working up their own off-stage incidents as aids to finding the moods of Genet's revolutionary fantasy. It was a revelation, he says, discovering how much more actors could bring to a play than anyone normally asked of them: 'Some of our improvisations were more fun than anything we put on the stage.

"The next step was to see how much more one could ask from audiences. His 'Lear' for the Royal Shakespeare placed Shakespeare's tragedy on a bare, Brechtian stage, under full white lights throughout, and revolved round a stubbornly ambiguous performance by Paul Scofield. Audiences had not only to imagine storms and heaths for themselves, but to make up their own minds about the story — were the old king's daughters monsters, or simply reacting as anyone might to a tyrannical father?

"Out of 'Lear' came the kernel of an experimental group who worked with him on his major projects of the 1960's: his Theatre of Cruelty season, the nursery which produced 'Marat/Sade' and Glenda Jackson, and the RSC's Vietnam documentary 'US'.

"Both the 'Marat/Sade' and 'US' were attempts to break down the old theatrical conventions of actors reciting words written for them to passively listening audiences. Weeks of rehearsal and improvisation went into the production of Peter Weiss's view of the French Revolution as seen from a madhouse, so that its actors were stretched and drained by the effort of creation demanded from them. Much of 'US' was actually written in rehearsal by the cast: as Brook explained afterwards, it was less a play about Vietnam than an exploration of what a group of English actors could feel about it.

"Both were assaults on the traditional actor-audience relationship. Reaching to the bottom of their own feelings, the players required that audiences feel as deeply with them and refused to

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let them go with a formal burst of applause. At the end of the Marat/Sade, the 'lunatics' clapped back ironically at the complacent sane. In 'US', they sat staring fixedly into the auditorium, demanding a response from you as individuals.

"Not everyone liked the breaking down of the safe, invisible wall between actors and public, and for many 'The Theatre of Cruelty' became synonymous with the bullying of audiences. Perhaps as a result, one began to hear it said that Brook was a magpie and populariser, snapping up the latest fashions of Europe's avant-garde. Certainly 'US' owed as much to the Polish director Grotowski as 'Lear' had to Brecht and the Theatre of Cruelty experiments to Artaud — Grotowski worked with the cast during rehearsals as a guest adviser, putting them through the stringent physical and spiritual exercises he used at his own Theatre Laboratory in Wroclaw. The influence of Grotowski's and Artaud's definition of theatre as ritual, expressing men's deepest, most primitive emotions and fears, was evident in Brook's National Theatre production of Seneca's 'Oedipus', as well as some lessons absorbed from the agile, aggressive nomads of the Living Theatre.

"Possibly there is something in Brook which makes him susceptible to rigid, external ideas and disciplines. In 1955, when he visited Russia for the first time with his production of 'Hamlet' with Paul Scofield, he wrote about if for the ***London Sunday Times*** as if it had been a voyage of discovery to the origins of his own nature. Russia, he declared, gave the impression of a country of naturally dreamy, unpunctual enthusiasts forcing themselves to build an efficient modern industrial State. It sounded as if he were recognizing a similar struggle in himself, between the slightly soft, beaming face he sees when shaving and the austere denim uniform he dons for work.

"What saves him from being one of the authoritarian monsters he respects among the European avant-garde is his concern with audiences, and Shakespeare. In his book 'The Empty Space', he makes the case for Artaud's and Grotowski's kind of theatre — the 'holy' theatre of intense, ritualized emotion. But alongside it he places 'rough' theatre — the theatre of street, music hall and musical comedy: the theatre of the people, whose greatest exponent is Shakespeare. While valuing the intensity of Grotowski's kind of drama, its use as a discipline for actors, he recognizes that it is drama for a minority — Grotowski refuses to play to audiences of more than 40 people. Brook cannot bring himself to love avant-garde audiences — 'You've only to look at them

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beside the marvellous health of a musical comedy audience,' he says – or to turn his back on the kind of theatre Shakespeare represents.

"So that almost alone among avant-garde directors, he insists on testing his experiments on popular audiences. What Grotowski achieves in his Wroclaw test-tube is impressive, but its value remains to be demonstrated in open performance – how will it work on an audience of ordinary ticket-buyers, who come to the theatre not because it is a cult or a socially prestigious custom, but to be moved and delighted and entertained? A theatrical event is not an event, Brook insists, until it is seen; not by experts or aficionados, but by people.

"This is why he is determined that his actors at the Paris Centre for Theatrical Research will not work only in the vast, bare warehouse in the Gobelins district which the French Government has given them, but before as many kinds of audiences as possible; why their first appearance before the international critics was in the country where he saw those wonderfully direct, simple folk plays, at the Shiraz Festival of Arts in Iran. Some of its actors come from that faithful kernel who have been with him since 'Lear' and the Theatre of Cruelty season. Others are seasoned professionals whose traditional skills he knows and has used before. But around them he has recruited young actors of many nationalities, in the hope that by lending their various temperaments and abilities he may arrive at a truly universal kind of theatre, as 'rough' and 'holy' as Shakespeare.

"Meanwhile, he has already achieved 'The Dream'. Argument will go on, probably for years, whether it is really the finest thing he has done. Some older theatre-goers may continue to swear by his 1955 'Titus Andronicus' with Olivier; sentimentalists by his Stratford 'Romeo and Juliet' of 1947, the beginning of his great collaboration with Scofield. But others who have worked with him (John Gielgud is one) are convinced that his 'Dream' has ushered in a new era in Shakespearian production, and there seems little doubt it will reach his greatest audience yet. Given his definition of a theatrical event, that seems what matters."

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