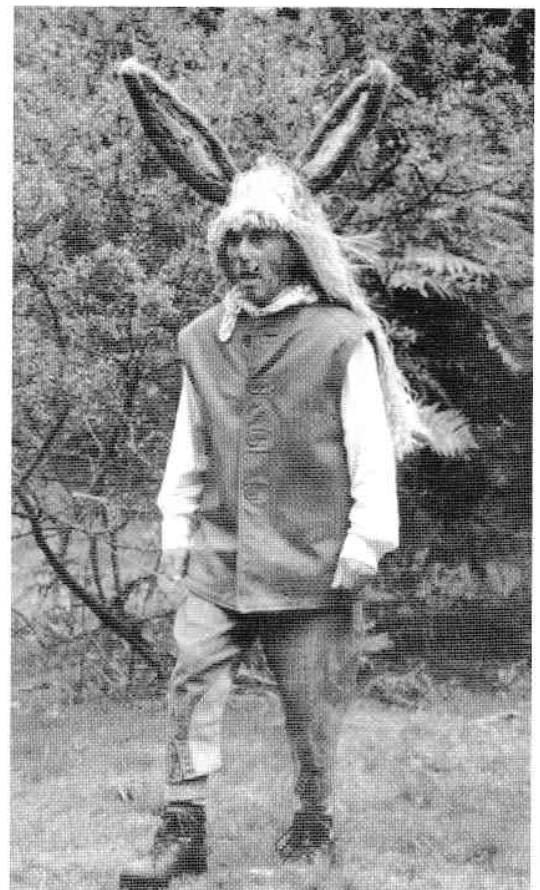


## report

Ten deaf actors went to Wales for two weeks last August to take part in the filming of Shakespeare Link's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'



Carole Tweedy as Titiana



David Hirshman as Bottom

## a midsummer's night dream

The Deaf cast knew the story and had to present their parts quickly. Every Shakespeare play is difficult to read and their stories are very complex so everyone had a copy of the Shakespeare 'Made Easy' edition of the script, which has a modern translation of Shakespeare's language alongside the original text of the play.

To finish a whole play in only two weeks seemed to me at first not to be a good idea as the actors would have hardly any time to develop their characters, unlike stage actors who would spend several weeks in rehearsal. The fact that the play was being filmed meant that all the actors had to concentrate on body movement, eyes and hands. Most of the actors were already familiar with interpreting Shakespeare into sign.

Phil Bowen, the director, would suggest how the actors should pose or

move in front of the camera and it was then the responsibility of the actors to express the meaning in sign. I was amused because Phil could not always follow exactly what was being signed although he was the person directing them!

But that did not matter. Phil would watch and if he liked a particular gesture he would ask for it to be emphasised or John Lee, operating the camera, to zoom in on it. The basic gestures really highlighted the emotional content of the play which is such an important feature of Shakespeare's writing.

Not to make a political point, both cast and crew realised that when interpreting Shakespeare including a little SSE made the play look and feel more exciting. Phil cannot change the style of the actors but encourages them to use their own style in developing the character they are playing.

Having a variety of signing methods will make the video more accessible, particularly to deaf people whose first language is not BSL.

**Debs Neve**



Paula Garfield as Mustardseed

**left to right:** Ian Stewart, David Hirshman, Phil Bowen, Sue Best, Jeff Wilson, Paula Garfield, Darren Saunders and Ilan Dwek



**David Hirshman reports:**

Looking around the group I had joined for the auditions I started to wonder whether I was in the right place.

All these young people, many of them not even born when I last did any acting. I was not very confident that I would get a part after the audition but was very pleasantly surprised by a fax the next day inviting me to Wales. Having been away from acting for such a long time I hesitated at first but then thought, go for it! That was definitely the right decision and I was very glad I made it.

Wales is very calming which was good for me because I was nervous about working in front of a camera; so different from working on the stage. But the other members of the cast helped me along and I became more confident as time passed. For that I owe them thanks.

It was hard work but I enjoyed it enormously. It has given me a taste for Shakespeare and I hope that one day I will be asked again!



**Jason Taylor as Puck**

**Fellow actor Jeff Wilson adds:**

The short hours of sleep, the panic of trying to remember lines, tracking down missing costumes, getting to the set on time, all turned out to be worth it as the whole project was wonderful, and the company was great.

The whole cast came from very dif-

ferent backgrounds, were of different ages and had different experiences but really formed a team. Everyone had the opportunity to use their skills and it was fascinating to watch people using the experiences they had to interpret the roles in the play.

I have developed a much greater insight into Shakespeare as a result of this project. What was especially helpful was the way that people were supporting each other through the translation work. It was easy to ask for help without feeling that you would be judged and for me that was a large part of the project's overall success.

Granted, not all of the time was spent grafting. There was time for leisure activity, particular over evening meals which turned into great big family gatherings around a wood fire full of good humour, joking and laughter.

Sadly all good things come to an end and this one had to end. Leaving all the crew was very hard and really quite emotional.

# a midsummer's night dream



**Above left, from left to right:** Phil Bowen, John Lee, Jeff Wilson as Demetrius, Paula Garfield as Hermia and Ian Stewart as Egeus.

**Above:** John Wilson as Oberon, King of the Fairies, studying the magic potion inside a flower.

**Far left:** Sarah Beauvoisin as Helena, acting out a scene after Demetrius rebuffs her advances.

**Left:** Jeff Wilson, Paula Garfield, Ilan Dwek and Darren Saunders

**Below:** Carole Tweedy as Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

Shakespeare Link and Sign Language Video People will be producing another play in the summer. If you would like to buy a copy of the video or you'd like to know more about the Shakespeare project, contact:

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This project was filmed by John Lee of Sign Language Video People

