



InsideCover



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Midsummer Night's nightmare

A dream almost turned into a nightmare for Perth Festival organisers when a major international play ran foul of quarantine officials.

The inspectors at Fremantle harbour were concerned that the timber set of the Anglo-Indian production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might be more like a Trojan Horse that would let all sorts of nasty bugs infiltrate the country.

The root of the problem was the bark on more than 200m of ash sapling logs that are tied up and used as a scaffold for the actors to clamber over during the show. Ash bark is a known host of a creepily named plant disease called Sudden Oak Death, which is present in the Old

Dart and could infect Australian flora.

The shipment from Britain had been fumigated but the potential nasties under the bark required tougher measures.

With time running out to install the set before opening night at His Majesty's Theatre, Festival organisers faced four options: cancel the show (too costly and embarrassing), sand off the bark (too time-consuming), chop down some local saplings (not authentic) or find a big enough industrial oven to bake the timber above 85C for a requisite eight hours.

A hectic round of calls eventually located a 12m oven at a mining company in Welshpool, which the Australian Quarantine and

Inspection Service promptly accredited at the prompting of the responsible Federal Minister, Tony Burke.

As soon as the bell rang on the oven, the timber was rushed to the theatre in the middle of the night and installed in time for the Indian cast to have full rehearsals before *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opened last night.

"There was a mad panic trying to find a solution to this problem," said Festival technical officer Drew Diamond, dipping his lid to the quarantine officials who helped ensure the show went ahead.

"I've found out quite a bit about quarantine matters in the past three days."

