

# ON TOUR

On Tour Ltd, ACT Productions Ltd, 20 - 22 Stukeley Street, London WC2B 5LR

DAILY MAIL

THE MAIL ON SUNDAY - 11 / 6 / 06



**Georgina Brown**

**Market Boy**  
Olivier,  
National  
Theatre,  
London

2hrs 30mins  
(including interval)

★★★★★

**A**  
**Midsummer  
Night's  
Dream**  
Swan  
Theatre,  
Stratford-  
upon-Avon

2hrs 30mins  
(including interval)

★★★★★

**E**arly on in *Market Boy*, there's a wonderful Cinderella moment. A black geezer in spray-on ski-pants, who can judge a size five from 20 paces, slides a shiny red stiletto on to the foot of a dumpy mum. Suddenly, she too can go to the ball.

As he slips an easy Lady Godiva into his pocket, our resident Romford lothario feels pretty cocky, confident he'll be having her in his love wagon before long, like he does with all the ladies.

To the buoyant soundtrack of all my Eighties favourites (*Come On Eileen*, *The Power Of Love*, *Last Christmas*, *The Final Countdown*), David Eldridge's big, boisterous play recreates Romford Market in the Eighties, when Essex Man was born.

Urged to get on their bikes by the Tories, the working classes are grafting to buy their council house and a souped-up Ford Escort.

With Maggie as their champion, England truly is a land of hope and glory. A Spitting Image-style Mrs T swoops in to remind us 'there's no such thing as society', which makes it all the better. It's every man for himself, the survival of the fittest and let the rest rot.

This play charts the unsentimental education of a naive 13-year-old, played by Danny Worters, (known as Boy) who learns the wicked ways of the world courtesy of the market traders.

In Rufus Norris's superb, exhilarating staging, a huge cast of 31, wheeling and dealing in a bristling street argot, create the vulgar, vibrant market.

Lads in shell suits swing like the monkeys they are from the scaffolding; a voracious old slapper sells tea and offers sexual favours. You can get anything here, including Ecstasy, and, of course, agony.

Boy's girlfriend dumps him, he discovers his mum in the van with his boss, and boom turns to bust, as it inevitably does, to the sound of breaking glass. Presumably shattered dreams.

*Market Boy* could have been a satire as well as a celebration, and had some plot and some real characters rather than caricatures. But, superficial as it is, it is funny, extremely

smutty and captures a time, a place and an atmosphere with thrilling theatricality.

In the first scene of *Market Boy*, a Transit van on its way to market rips through the gigantic poster telling us 'Labour isn't working', making an economic point with splendid dramatic economy.

A ravishing and enchanting new production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* uses the same theatrical technique when the wild, whooping band of gymnastic fairies bursts through plaster walls, actually made of paper and causes havoc among the mortals.

Tim Supple's all-Indian production is a *Dream* as you've never seen it, nor heard it. More than half is spoken in six Asian languages, the rest in English.

Amazingly, after a while you scarcely notice, for this remarkable band of actors, specially when speaking in Hindi, Tamil, Malayan and so on, do so with so much emotional and physical expression that I felt I understood. (Just as Desdemona says in *Othello*, when her husband is wrongly accusing her of adultery: 'I understand a fury in your words. But not the words.')

Indeed, the foreignness raises the temperature of the play and releases a fresh new ferocity and passion.

There's mystery and magic in the music, too: Puck draws eerie sounds from rubbing a distinctly phallic-looking stone.

Sumant Jayakrishnan's design gives the piece a matching visual richness and sexiness. The moonlit midsummer night shimmers on a groundsheet of silver satin that is whipped away to reveal the rusty earth of Rajasthan.

Trees are columns of red cloth, which the characters shimmy up, then gather into a hammock where they hide or sleep.

Shakespeare's comedy has never been funnier: Joy Fernandes's plump and beguiling Bottom's transformation into an ass is courtesy of an aubergine; Ajay Kumar's Puck is a chubby jester with a goofy grin, who spins a web, quite literally, around the lovers, and remains supremely confident that all shall be well in the end.

A silky, Supple, unforgettable dream of a *Dream*.

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