

# ON TOUR

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THE INDEPENDENT  
ON SUNDAY  
11/6/06

## Up and away with the fairies

Two girls are sprinting high above your head, very strangely slanted 45 degrees to the horizontal. It's as if you've keeled over and are viewing some dreamlike spirit world. This aerial show, *Fuerzabruta*, by the Argentinian troupe De La Guarda, is a thrilling kick-off for the refurbished, legendary avant-garde Roundhouse. The girls, in floaty pink dresses, emit wild shrieks as they circle the dark amphitheatre (a vast domed ex-locomotive shed). They look like feral flower fairies riding the Wall of Death. But they're in fact moving forwards curiously slowly with their feet bouncing off a massive billowing wall of silver cellophane, more like sea sprites.

*Fuerzabruta* has no plot or script. It is nearer to circus and dance or a rave-influenced happening than straight theatre. Installation-style sets roll through the standing audience accompanied by a soundtrack of primal drumming, rock music and carnival whistles. Essentially, it's a sequence of oneiric visions. A guy in a white suit races on the spot just above the crowd (on a giant conveyor belt). He is alone, surrounded by fleeting strangers, then alone again. He hurtles through walls of paper and cardboard which bomb toward him from nowhere, sending the debris flying like confetti, only to be suddenly shot in the back. Splattered with blood, he sinks to the ground.

This nightmare recurs but interspersed with glimpses of an aquatic-erotic heaven. Most amazing is the celestial swimming pool with a transparent floor like a massive aquarium, which inches down from on high, ultimately so close you can reach up and touch it. Inside, a shoal of young women, like souls in bliss, swish and glide in swirls of water. Intermittently they turn furious, hurling themselves down violently in your face, or stamping - their feet silhouetted amidst a million pointillist droplets or explosions of ripples evoking cloud formations.

This is like some dazzling physics experiment and, simultaneously, a living painting in water, light and flesh. Whilst probably a boy's wet dream, it's also a girl's one, being ferociously impressive and clearly storming fun.



Occasionally, one wishes De La Guarda would develop their dramatic vignettes further. This isn't a fully mature piece, ending rather abruptly and with a couple of the cast acting as if they're on an adrenalin-jerking ego trip. But there are images here which will live in your mind for years. *Fuerzabruta* also has things to say - albeit wordlessly - about existential anxieties, ecstatic and aggressive sex, death, and the angry, joyous spirit of youth.

Equally electrifying is the Indian *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, imported for the RSC's Complete Works Festival, directed by Tim Supple and co-produced by his new company Dash Arts with the British Council. This *Dream* is performed by a troupe of beautifully vibrant, warmly funny actors from India and Sri Lanka who move seamlessly between naturalistic acting and stylised dance, speaking in a fluid mix of English, Hindi, Malayalam and other languages. Magically, you understand everything and sometimes the switch into an unfamiliar tongue works like a charm, as if the speaker has started weaving a spell or, more comically, has been driven into an incomprehensible rage. I don't think I've ever seen this play make so much emotional sense.

The staging is not just visually exciting, with Theseus's princely court, carpeted in silver silk, transmuting into a tropical/urban jungle as the fairies burst through its paper walls to scamper like thieving monkeys round rope-lashed wooden scaffolding. While never losing sight of the playful, Supple takes the wild forest of misdirected love seriously. Firstly, it seems to spring, psychologically,

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from the anger of the court's marriage-arranging patriarchs and rebelling young lovers. Then there's a real threat of rape or murder in the frenzied chases, especially from the sickle-wielding Lysander. As for the magic flower juice, it's a smear of ritualistic scarlet face-paint applied almost like a mugging.

Oberon's jealousy is all the more vivid because Titania literally has a little Indian boy here, maternally hugging him before she tucks up in her bower, weaving herself into a swinging cocoon of crimson cloth like an exotic, incubating moth. As for Bottom, he proves a hilarious and disturbing ass, with a swinging aubergine between his thighs and an angry grunting whinny, like a groaning slave to sex. Not to be missed.

Alas, David Eldridge's new NT play, *Market Boy*, is disappointing. Set in Romford market in Maggie Thatcher's 1980s, this charts Britain's boom and bust while following an adolescent's rites of passage: shyly starting work on a shoe stall, learning the patter, getting bullied, laid and furiously shocked at his single mum having a bit of fun. Autobiographically informed but with the underlying structure of a medieval morality play, *Market Boy* has its amusingly wacky and touching moments, especially in scenes between Danny Worters's fist-clenching Boy (left) and Claire Rushbrook's tender Mum. Really though Rufus Norris's splendidly whirling, stylishly choreographed production can't conceal puerile caricatures and feeble political satire.

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Celestial visions:  
the dreamlike spirit  
world of De La  
Guarda's  
'Fuerzabruta'  
GERAINT LEWIS

'Fuerzabruta' (0870 389 1846) to 30 July;  
'A Midsummer Night's Dream'  
(0870 609 1110) to 17 June; 'Market Boy'  
(020 7452 3000) to 3 August

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