

March  
7-24 2019  
AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL

The  
DREAMERS  
惊梦

Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre  
Gecko Theatre Company

21-24 March • The Civic

## Synopsis

*The Dreamer* is principally inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and focuses on the character of **Helena**<sup>1</sup> and her pursuit of love. The show also pays homage to *The Peony Pavilion* through visual and thematic references to the story and a strong female protagonist.

Reimagined for the modern world, Helena is a timid office worker in her late-twenties. Her job is repetitive and unfulfilling, and she is overshadowed by **Hermia**, a popular co-worker whose group of admirers includes **Demetrius**<sup>2</sup>, a man she secretly pines for.

The mundane reality of Helena's life in Shanghai – and pressures she feels as an unmarried woman in Chinese society – is contrasted against an increasingly bizarre and liberating series of dreams. In Helena's dream life, she is joined by office colleagues and lovers **Hermia** and **Lysander**. She is also haunted by the lovelorn legend of **Du Liniang**<sup>3</sup>, and is swept along by the magic and mischief of **Oberon**, **Titania**, **Puck**<sup>4</sup> and **Bottom**<sup>5</sup>.

*The Dreamer* is a physical play. The story is conveyed primarily through movement, sound and visuals, with minimal character lines in both Mandarin and English.

<sup>1</sup> One of four young lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Obsessed with Demetrius, Helena enters the enchanted forest with Hermia and Lysander.

<sup>2</sup> Indifferent to Helena's affections in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Demetrius is in love with Hermia.

<sup>3</sup> The tragic heroine of *The Peony Pavilion*, Du Liniang meets a young scholar in her dreams. Haunted by the romantic memory, she dies. Years later, a young scholar encounters Du's spirit and falls in love.

<sup>4</sup> Oberon (Fairy King), Titania (Fairy Queen) and Puck (Oberon's servant and jester) are the main fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Their role is to question and poke fun at true love.

<sup>5</sup> Bottom is a comic character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, best known for having his head transformed into a donkey.

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1hr 5mins no interval

## About *The Dreamer*

*The Dreamer* was originally created as part of the British Council's Shakespeare Lives Programme, commemorating the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. The show is inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and, as an additional celebration of this unique collaboration between China and the UK, the production has also been influenced by *The Peony Pavilion*; a classic text written by Shakespeare's Chinese contemporary, Tang Xianzu.

In September 2015 four Gecko team members visited Shanghai to work with 12 performers from Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre's ensemble for a week of research and development. Through movement workshops introducing the performers to Gecko's performance style, the company explored the relationships, emotions and interactions within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which are still pertinent to our contemporary existence.

An intense creation period followed in July and September 2016 led by Gecko's Associate Director Rich Rusk and Devising Performer Chris Evans, who have been heavily involved in Gecko's creation process over the past nine years. Gecko's Artistic Director Amit Lahav guided them through this journey with support from long-time Gecko collaborators Rhys Jarman (design), Chris Swain (lighting design) and Dave Price (composer). *The Dreamer* was performed at SDAC in October 2016 to glowing audience reviews, and went on to win the prestigious 2016 One Drama award in China for Best Stage Design.

The team came back together in June 2017 to re-work the show and prepare it for its future touring life. Employing Gecko's trademark style, the production blends emotionally driven movement, a spine tingling soundscape and striking visual storytelling to bring a new twist to these classic texts.





## A note from director Rich Rusk

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Chris Evans and I were invited to reimagine characters and dreams from two visionary writers. I knew that I wanted to explore Helena from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Helena is stupefied by what she thinks love is, but has great humour and there is a fire in her belly. Dropping her in modern day Shanghai in a dead-end-job felt like a great

place to start. We also became fascinated by the characters in *The Peony Pavilion*, particularly a woman who falls in love in her dreams and holds on to that purity of feeling even in the face of her downfall. Tang Xianzu's writing is epic and lyrical and we have distilled his story to offer Helena a positive role model.

We developed the show in Shanghai, introducing our Chinese performers to the process of devised physical theatre. We learned about 'left over women' – women in their late 20s who have been branded as such because they are not yet married. It's not a nice term and the pressure from parents and friends on these women is very present.

We visited the famous Shanghai marriage market where parents of singles gather to negotiate dates and matches, often without their children knowing. Shakespeare's Helena is a woman who feels left behind by her peers, constantly asking what is wrong with her. It's a sentiment that is just as present 400 years after his death and the place where *The Dreamer* began.

# Credits

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**Director**

Rich Rusk

**Movement Director**

Chris Evans

**Design**

Rhys Jarman

**Lighting Design**

Chris Swain

**Original Music**

Dave Price

**Technical Manager**

Andres Velasquez

**With performers from  
Shanghai Dramatic  
Arts Centre**

Yang Ziyi  
Liu Peng  
Lan Haimeng  
Wu Jingwei  
Yang Jingran  
Li Chenshan  
Wang Weishuai  
Zhou Zidan  
Zhao Yunlong

**Musician**

Ni Peiwen

**SHANGHAI DRAMATIC  
ARTS CENTRE****Executive Producer**

Yang Shaolin

**Artistic Director**

Lv Liang

**Supervisor**

Tian Shui

**Producer**

Wu Jia

**Associate Producer**

Shi Tang

**Dramaturg**

Nick Yurongjun

**Translator**

Qian Lin

**Assistant Director**

Fang Ge

**Designer**

Sang Qi

**Lighting Designer**

Wang Beijun

**Sound Designer**

Wang Yixuan

**Costume & Make Up Designer**

Leng Jia

**Setting Designer**

Cui Haigang

**Prop Designer**

Liu Yiping

**Stage Manager**

Luo Jixin

**Logistician**

Chen Longqing

**Assistant Stage Manager**

Sheng Ruoyu

**Publicity Manager**

Zhao Yanxiang

**Casting Director**

Lu Renjie

**GECKO THEATRE COMPANY****Artistic Director**

Amit Lahav

**Executive Producer**

Rosalind Wynn

**Associate Director**

Helen Baggett

**General Manager**

Belinda Farrell

**Finance Manager**

Andy Brumwell

**Project &  
Participation Manager**

Pippa Fox

**Production Manager**

Nathan Johnson

**Administrator**

Manwah Siu

**With thanks to**

Mishi Bekesi, Luo Youcheng,  
Zou Weijin, Qiu Jiahao,  
Shanghai International Dance  
Centre, Helen Goalen, Alex  
Gomar, Joe Shen and Beijing  
707 N-Theatre Co. Ltd (Institute  
of Assistant Director).

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## SHANGHAI DRAMATIC ARTS CENTRE

Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre is Shanghai's only national theatre company. Located in China's financial capital, the company houses a large group of highly skilled and experienced theatre makers including playwrights, directors, actors, technicians and designers. SDAC owns three versatile theatres totaling 1,000 seating capacity, presenting more than 800 performances every year and reaching more than 300,000 audiences around the world. Upholding core values of artistic development with a global outlook, SDAC aims to be the leading model for China's performing arts industry, creating work that centres on people, and continuing its development as a world-renowned, first-rate, modern theatre company befitting of Shanghai's status as an international cultural metropolis.



## GECKO THEATRE COMPANY

Founded in 2001, Gecko is an award-winning, internationally acclaimed physical theatre company, led by Artistic Director Amit Lahav. With an expanding ensemble of international performers and makers, Gecko creates work through collaboration, experimentation and play. The company tours nationally and internationally, developing strong partnerships around the world. Gecko currently has three productions touring worldwide: *Missing*, *Institute* and *The Wedding*. Previous touring productions include *The Overcoat*, *The Arab & The Jew*, *The Race* and Taylor's *Dummies*. *The Dreamer* marks Gecko's first international co-production and is an exciting new strand of the company's work.

# AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL

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