Shakespeare’s Globe

From 1997 Shakespeare’s Globe flourished once more on London’s South Bank after an absence of four hundred years. The playhouse is now a major attraction for theatregoers, scholars, tourists, teachers and students of all ages, who come to experience Shakespeare’s plays and those of his contemporaries performed in their original conditions.

The team of artists and education specialists who made this happen come together here to reflect on their ten-year experiment. Principal actors, designers, musicians and Globe Education staff engage with international scholars in a lively debate about the impact of this extraordinary building. Featuring an in-depth interview with former Artistic Director Mark Rylance and a contribution from Patrick Spottiswoode, Founder and Director of Globe Education, the book highlights the complex relationship between designer, composer, actor and audience that gives energy to this thriving Shakespearean centre.

Christie Carson is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Farah Karim-Cooper is Lecturer in Globe Education, oversees all research activities at Shakespeare’s Globe and chairs the Globe Architecture Research Group.
SHAKESPEARE’S GLOBE:
A THEATRICAL EXPERIMENT

Edited by

CHRISTIE CARSON

and

FARAH KARIM-COOPER
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of colour plates</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes on the editors</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes on contributors</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword ANDREW GURR</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTIE CARSON AND FARAH KARIM-COOPER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The 'essence of Globeness': authenticity, and the search for</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare's stagecraft</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANKLIN J. HILDY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART I: THE ‘ORIGINAL PRACTICES’ PROJECT</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTIE CARSON</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage action</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Practising behaviour to his own shadow’</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIM CARROLL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ‘Original practices’ at the Globe: a theatre historian's view</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALAN C. DESSEN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage appearance</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Exploring early modern stage and costume design</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JENNY TIRAMANI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Cosmetics on the Globe stage</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARAH KARIM-COOPER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Contents

### Music and sound

6 Music and aural texture at Shakespeare’s Globe  
**Claire Van Kampen**  
7 Music, authenticity and audience  
**David Lindley**  

### Actor/audience interaction

8 Research, materials, craft: principles of performance at Shakespeare’s Globe  
**Mark Rylance**  
9 Democratising the audience?  
**Christie Carson**

### PART II: GLOBE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

10 Contextualising Globe Education  
**Patrick Spottiswoode**  
11 ‘That scull had a tongue in it, and could sing once’: staging Shakespeare’s contemporaries  
**James Wallace**  
12 Learning with the Globe  
**Fiona Banks**  
13 Research and the Globe  
**Martin White**

### PART III: RESEARCH IN PRACTICE: PRACTICE IN RESEARCH

14 Performing early music at Shakespeare’s Globe  
**Claire Van Kampen, Keith McGowan and William Lyons**  
15 Discoveries from the Globe stage  
**Mark Rylance, Yolanda Vazquez and Paul Chahidi**  
16 Directing at the Globe and the Blackfriars: six big rules for contemporary directors  
**Ralph Alan Cohen**
CONTENTS

Conclusions .......................................................... 226

CHRISTIE CARSON AND FARAH KARIM-COOPER

Afterword ............................................................... 230

GORDON McMULLAN

Appendix 1: Globe Theatre and ‘Essence of Globeness’ projects since 1970
by Franklin J. Hildy .................................................. 234

Appendix 2: A draft Artistic Policy – 1988 ......................... 236

Appendix 3: Ten Commandments for the new Globe by Alan C. Dessen, 1990 237

Appendix 4: Shakespeare’s Globe productions 1996–2007 ........ 239

Appendix 5: ‘Read Not Dead’ staged readings .................. 243

Appendix 6: Globe Quartos ......................................... 253

Bibliography ............................................................. 254

Index ..................................................................... 260
ILLUSTRATIONS

1 Old Globe Theatre, Century of Progress International Exhibition – World’s Fair, 1933–4, Chicago, Illinois (Franklin J. Hildy’s collection) page 20
2 1936 Old Globe Theatre, Great Lakes Exhibition, 1936–7, Cleveland, Ohio (Cleveland Public Library, photography collection) 21
3 Timothy Walker as Malvolio in Twelfth Night (2002), Shakespeare’s Globe, photographer John Tramper 36
4 Michael Brown and Rhys Meredith as the twins in Twelfth Night (2002), Shakespeare’s Globe, photographer John Tramper 71
5 Mark Rylance as Olivia, Twelfth Night (2002), Shakespeare’s Globe, photographer John Tramper 72
6 Musicians, Measure for Measure (2004), Shakespeare’s Globe, photographer John Tramper 78
7 Mark Rylance as Richard II (2003), Shakespeare’s Globe, photographer Andy Bradshaw 102
8 Colin Hurley as Autolycus in The Winter’s Tale (2005), Shakespeare’s Globe, photographer Andy Bradshaw 116
9 Southwark schoolchildren perform a scene from Othello as part of the annual Our Theatre production (2004), photographer Andy Bradshaw 138
10 A Rutgers movement session on the Globe stage, photographer Andy Bradshaw 143
11 Read Not Dead staged reading of Philotas, photographer Sheila Burnett 146
12 Globe Education Practitioner Jack Murray leads a workshop as part of the Excellence in Cities programme, photographer Kieron Kirkland 162
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

13 Musicians, Edward II (2003), Shakespeare's Globe, photographer John Tramper 184
14 Yolanda Vazquez as Hermione in The Winter's Tale (2005), Shakespeare's Globe, photographer Andy Bradshaw 198
15 Paul Chahidi as Maria in Twelfth Night (2002), Shakespeare's Globe, photographer John Tramper 206
COLOUR PLATES

Between pages 58 and 59

1 Mark Rylance as the Duke of Vienna, Measure for Measure (2004), Hampton Court Palace, photographer John Tramper
2 Cymbeline (2001), Shakespeare's Globe, photographer John Tramper
3 The Winter's Tale (2005), Shakespeare's Globe, photographer John Tramper
4 Hamlet, Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza (2000), photographer Jenny Tiramani
5 Twelfth Night, Middle Temple Hall (2002), photographer John Tramper
6 Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis (2003), photographer Jenny Tiramani
7 Jig from Much Ado About Nothing (Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank, 2007), Shakespeare's Globe, photographer Andy Bradshaw
8 The interior of Blackfriars Playhouse, the American Shakespeare Center, Staunton, Virginia, photographer Tommy Thompson
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**MUSICAL**, The Taming of the Shrew, Tamer Tamed, Woyzeck (all RSC); Faustus (Northampton), Engaged (Orange Tree), Arabian Nights (Young Vic), Misalliance (Clwyd) and All’s Well that Ends Well (Oxford Stage Co.).

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KEITH MCGOWAN studied trombone with George Maxted and early music interpretation with Bernard Thomas. While studying music and Russian at the University of Nottingham and the Leningrad Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography he became fascinated by the sound and social history of early wind music. His association with Shakespeare’s Globe began in the opening season as a musician in Henry V, and Keith has since directed music on a number of productions, including Twelfth Night (2002) and Measure for Measure (2004–5). He has also led sessions for Globe Education undergraduates on early music.

GORDON MCMULLAN is Professor of Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama in the Department of English, King’s College London. His publications include The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher (1994), the Arden Shakespeare edition of Henry VIII (2000) and Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death (Cambridge University Press, 2007). He has also edited or co-edited four collections of essays, the most recent of which is Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England (Cambridge University Press, 2007). He is a general editor of Arden Early Modern Drama. He initiated the MA in Shakespearean Studies: Text and Playhouse that is collaboratively taught by King’s College London and Globe Education.

MARK RYLANCE was Artistic Director of Shakespeare’s Globe from 1995 to 2005. Mark trained at RADA under Hugh Cruttwell and at the Chrysalis Theatre School, Balham, with Barbara Bridgmont. He is the Co-Artistic Director of the London Theatre of Imagination and a member of the creative ensemble, Phoebus Cart, an Associate Actor of the Royal Shakespeare Company, an Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple Hall and Chairman of the Shakespearean Authorship Trust. Mark acted in many plays at the Globe, beginning with Othello at the Bear Gardens in 1985, then The Tempest on the site of the reconstruction in 1991, and ending with The Tempest
in 2005. His seventeen roles included Henry V, Richard II, Hamlet, Cleopatra, the Golden Ass, Olivia, the Duke in Measure for Measure, Proteus and Bassanio. He only directed one production himself during his tenure, Julius Caesar, in 1999. In 2007, he was the co-recipient with Claire van Kampen and Jenny Tiramani of the Sam Wanamaker Award for pioneering work that has contributed to the understanding and enjoyment of Shakespeare. More recently, in 2007, he wrote and acted in the successful play, The Big Secret Live ‘I am Shakespeare’ Webcam Daytime Chatroom Show, at the Chichester Festival Theatre.

Patrick Spottiswoode joined Shakespeare’s Globe in 1984 and became founding Director, Globe Education in 1989. Globe Education’s twenty-three full-time staff provide lectures, workshops, courses and productions for over 100,000 people at the Globe every year and for many more through outreach and distance learning. Projects other than those referred to in this book include an International Hamlet Project involving 10,000 school students from Denmark, Germany, the UK and Poland, the commissioning of thirty-seven poets to revisit Wordsworth’s ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge’ for the poem’s two-hundredth anniversary; translations of Spanish and Italian plays, Globe Quartos, Occasional Research Papers and Globe Folios. Patrick has been a visiting professor at Washington University, St Louis; Course Director for undergraduate courses at the Globe for several US universities; and co-convenor of conferences including Shakespeare and Martyrdom, at the Globe, and Shakespeare in Venice, in Venice.

Jenny Tiramani is an independent theatre designer and dress historian. She was Director of Theatre Design at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre from its opening in 1997 until 2005. In 2003 she received the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Costume Design for the all-male Globe production of Twelfth Night, and she was the co-recipient with Mark Rylance and Claire van Kampen of the 2007 Sam Wanamaker Award for her contribution to Shakespeare. Many of her theatre designs have been produced in the UK and abroad. She has given papers on the history of dress, theatre architecture and design practices in the time of Shakespeare at conferences and institutions such as the National Portrait Gallery, Royal Holloway University of London and the Society of British Theatre Designers. Her published works include articles in Costume, the Costume Society’s journal, and she completed Janet Arnold’s book, Patterns of Fashion; The Cut and Construction of Linen Shirts, Smocks, Neckwear, Headwear and Accessories for Men and Women c.1540–1660 (2008).

Claire van Kampen trained at the Royal College of Music. In 1986 she joined the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre, the first female musical director with both companies. She has since developed an international career as a composer, writing and playing for theatre, television and film.
soundtracks as well as producing music for Shakespeare’s plays in both the UK and the USA. In 1990 she co-founded the theatre company Phoebus Cart with Mark Rylance and their production of Shakespeare’s The Tempest was performed in the foundations of Shakespeare’s Globe in 1991. From 1997 to 2005 she was Director of Theatre Music at Shakespeare’s Globe, creating both period and contemporary music for thirty of the Globe’s productions. Claire also lectures to undergraduates, MA students and visiting scholars for Globe Education’s programmes. Claire is a frequent broadcaster on BBC Radio 3 and has been a guest on many radio and television programmes worldwide.

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JAMES WALLACE is an actor, and trained at the Central School for Speech and Drama 1990–3. He has also taught on the classical acting course at Central School and at the Globe. James has co-ordinated over thirty staged readings for the Read not Dead programme and has directed scenes for undergraduate performances in Globe Education’s higher education courses.

MARTIN WHITE is Professor of Theatre at the University of Bristol. His research on the lesser-known playwrights of the early modern professional theatre is conducted through both practice-led and traditional forms of research. He has directed over fifty productions. He advises the Royal Shakespeare Company and until 2007 chaired the Architecture Research Group at Shakespeare’s Globe. His publications include Middleton and Tourneur (1992); Renaissance Drama in Action (1998); ‘Working Wonders: Mark Rylance at the New Globe’, in Extraordinary Actors (2004); The Roman Actor by Philip Massinger (Revels Plays, 2007); and The Chamber of Demonstrations (2007), an interactive DVD exploring early modern theatre practice.
When we were working on the evidence for the design of the original Globe in order to identify the shape and materials needed to realise Sam Wanamaker's vision, we did sometimes discuss whether the end-product of our labours would work as a modern theatre. None of us seriously believed that it might attract big crowds. The most clear-sighted objective any of us had was to get the replica of Shakespeare's Globe as right as we could, so that we could then see what might be done with it. At a different time and in different books I had suggested that Elizabethan playgoers probably behaved more like a football crowd than modern theatre audiences, but none of us had any idea that the novelty of groundlings round the stage would transform the experience of modern playgoing in the way it has done since the first performances at the new Globe in 1996.

The greatest single benefit of the Wanamaker project was that it drew together a huge assembly of expertise, from theatre-history scholars to architects to historians of English vernacular building. It was a truly international enterprise, too. Besides Sam from the USA, the architect Theo Crosby was from South Africa, John Orrell was an Englishman resident in Canada, and I was from New Zealand. We all shared the same fascination with London that first drew Shakespeare to the city. We worked to complete most of the first step in the enterprise over a decade ago. In the ten years since it opened the Globe has used the skilled actors, directors and students of theatre to see how the old type of theatre might still work. The result has been to show that it works in a wholly fresh and invigorating way, a way that has told us a lot that is exciting about Shakespeare and his contemporaries. This book is a record of these first ten years, and what they have accomplished.

Underpinning all the work, and Sam’s own vision, was and still is the assumption that Shakespeare as player and co-owner of his company’s two theatres always knew exactly what he was doing. Therefore, the theory goes, a fresh approach to the original staging of his plays through the surviving play-texts should be able to show
us a lot more of his practical genius than we have discovered through the last century or so. To establish that required digging into the state of theatre in Shakespeare’s own time. It means not only creating a version of his own physical workplace but uncovering the stories behind his two theatres, finding out why his company from the outset wanted different summer and winter venues, and how they used them. Shakespeare invested 10 per cent of his own savings in the Globe, a theatre already old-fashioned when he helped build it in 1599, and nine years later when Richard Burbage finally secured the Blackfriars indoor playhouse to use for his company he took a similar share in it. From then on, as they had planned from the outset in 1594, the Shakespeare company was the outstanding theatre company of its own day and indeed of any time. For nearly fifty years it played with wonderful extravagance and indeed arrogance, leaving one of its playhouses empty each season while using the other, at a time when London suffered from an extreme shortage of playhouses.

Reproducing the full set of conditions under which Shakespeare produced his plays is impossible now, as we are often told. This book acknowledges that problem in several places. Now we have a version of what the Globe might have been like in 1599, in the same materials and therefore offering similar acoustics (though before the final painting and carvings were applied to the interior, as Martin White says in chapter 13, ‘Research and the Globe’). Since then we have experienced the staging of several plays in what is now called OP (versions of what might have been the ‘original practices’). And playgoers have flocked to this new/old theatre to experience the shock of the old.

The effect on actors and audience of open-air playing, where large crowds make themselves into visible and active participants in the event, has been the biggest revelation of the whole project so far. This book registers some of the ways in which so many people have navigated through what Claire van Kampen calls in chapter 6 the ‘turbulent seas of mistrust’ (see p. 79) to find out what they can from it all. They have evoked, quite rightly, many reservations about the discoveries that have been made and about what might be found in the future. It is vital to keep these reservations in mind as you read these accounts.

Perhaps the most weighty doubt of all is the obvious distance between playgoers then and modern audiences. Here is just one instance of that gulf. It shows itself in the difference between the performance conditions in Shakespeare’s years and those of today in the minds of the audiences for whom George Chapman wrote his first comedy, The Blind Beggar of Alexandria, in 1595. He, and the Admiral’s Men led by the greatest actor of his day, Edward Alleyn, knew exactly what they were doing. When they staged the play, the Admiral’s had been set up a year before along with the Shakespeare company, the Chamberlain’s Men. The two companies shared the exclusive right to perform at the Theatre and the Rose in the London suburbs, where they were free from the Lord Mayor’s hostility. This meant that Londoners
had only the two playhouses and the two companies to go to if they wanted to see a
play. By late 1595 both companies were fully aware that their audiences were seeing
the same faces on stage each day playing a different role, creating a problem of
overfamiliarity. They had seen Alleyn as Hieronimo in Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy, and as
Tamburlaine, Faustus and Barabbas in Marlowe’s great plays. So what Chapman
did was create a farce using multiple disguises so that the audience could watch
Alleyn posing as parodies of his own characters from other plays. He starts the play
disguised as the Blind Beggar who is really Cleanthes, Egypt’s banished general
returned in secret to Alexandria. He also disguises himself as Leon, a usurer with a
bottle-nose like Barabbas in The Jew of Malta, and as Count Hermes, a braggart who
rants lines from Tamburlaine. In these four roles Alleyn spoke more than a third of
all the lines in the play. The Barabbas and Tamburlaine-like figures allowed him
to burlesque his own famous roles as a ‘fustian king’, the term he self-mockingly
called himself in a letter to his wife in 1593. As the blind prophet he prophesies
to three court ladies how they will meet their future husbands. Then in turn as
Cleanthes, Leon and Hermes he meets and marries all three.

The play is a hilarious farce for which modern readers simply lack the experience
to identify the parodied characters, let alone Alleyn’s own self-mockery. The late
Millar MacLure, for instance, said regretfully of the play that modern readers ‘will
have cause to reflect grimly (as every reader of minor Elizabethan drama must)
on the curious tastes of our ancestors’. Unless you could recognise the false nose
that Alleyn wore for The Jew of Malta and already knew his resonant lines spoken as
Tamburlaine, and unless your playgoing was confined to the plays of the only two
companies then permitted to perform in the vicinity of London, there is no way you
could make sense of, let alone enjoy, Chapman’s rollicking farce. We cannot now
share the information the first playgoers had at the staging of these plays. Language
is our most obvious loss – we proudly entitle the standees (an oddly American term
for such a positive posture) in the yard with the name ‘groundlings’, ignoring the
scorn that Hamlet packed into the word when he invented it to describe the gapers
at his feet. In his time a groundling was a small fish, a loach with a huge sucker
for a mouth that enabled it to feed off the algae from the stones at a river’s bottom.
As a pretend prince he might be expected to scorn the gapers staring up at him
from the yard. Richard Burbage, playing that prince for the first time, is told how
the boy companies have dislodged the adult players from the city. He grieves for
the players, as we hear, but the original audiences would have known very well that
the landlord of the boy company then playing at the Blackfriars and profiting from
their success was Burbage himself. Lacking that information now, we are alienated
from the thrill and comedy of the immediate moment on the original stage.

That is one enormous task the Globe’s actors still have to confront. But in the
first ten years’ working with the Globe great progress has been made towards
a more thoroughgoing reconstruction of Shakespearean playing conditions, and more is to come. Just as the Shakespeare company started at their one old-fashioned outdoor theatre and later added to it seasonal playing with their indoor theatre, so the addition of a version of the Blackfriars should allow Shakespeare's Globe to copy the original company with performances all the year round. The versatility and mobility of the original company, happy to transport its plays from one venue to another at the drop of a purse, is a challenge to creative theatre work now; that was one of the standard expectations then. Taking plays like The Tempest and The Winter's Tale indoors after a summer at the Globe, or starting them indoors and then taking them into the daylight, offers rich new possibilities that should teach us more about the principles and the practices of Shakespearean staging.

The Oxford English Dictionary says that the word ‘maverick’, used by Patrick Spottiswoode about the Globe project, was originally the name of a Texas rancher who neglected to brand his calves. The word was subsequently picked up to define a thief, anyone who stole and then branded such calves. While resisting any suggestion that the Globe is an illegal activity, the idea that it might be thought of as a not-yet branded calf ready to grow into a mighty bull does have its appeal.
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