

Just Acting Through

Words [Jesse Scaccia](#)

Photos [Andrea Bourguignon](#)

Wednesday, November 4th, 2009 at 6:42 pm

It's easy to feel comfortable at Empire Little Bar Bistro in downtown Norfolk.



Barry and Lemenager.

The staff is nice. The food is comforting. For those of us who live downtown and prefer our beer without the bump-and-grind, it is the bar where we can relax and be ourselves.

For the cast of Virginia Stage Company's *//romeo&juliet/*, it has been their most popular spot for after-show drinks and snacks. They're only in town for six weeks. Someplace has to be home.

When the waitress came to take orders from Jeff Barry, who plays Mercutio, and Nancy Lemenager, who plays Capulet, they could have ordered for each other.

"What do I order every time I come here?" asked Lemenager.

"The broccoli," answered Barry, and sure enough she ordered the broccoli.

They had an easy rapport with each other. Barry's arm hung casually on the back of Lemenager's chair. When someone at the table made a joke they would often look to first share their laughs with each other. I asked them how long they've known each other.

"We've never met before," Barry said. He wasn't joking. [It was just over a month ago that the cast and crew came to Norfolk for their first rehearsals and production meetings.](#)

They leave on Sunday; a stay that, I'm sure, doesn't feel much longer than the time it takes to raise the curtain at Wells Theatre.



Mullins and his Capulet.

“In every way it has been a streamlined production,” said the show’s director, Patrick Mullins, who sat at the head of the table like a bit of a mother hen. Not only is the run of the show abnormally brief for this kind of production, the show itself is too, at only about 100 minutes with no intermission. This hasn’t left the actors much time to find their stride.

“Each day is a progression. We’re still really trying to find a rhythm,” said Lemenager. “It’s only until you’ve done a show for a good month to five weeks do you really find your rhythm.”

From a non-actor’s perspective, this seems like a bit of a grueling emotional expedition. These people are asked to relocate their lives for one of those in-between amounts of time—not long enough to let roots catch hold in local soil, but too long to hide in the Company-supplied apartment when not onstage. Through all this, for an hour and a half a day, they are supposed to be embodying some of the most well-known characters in the history of storytelling.

“You learn over the years as an actor to be where you are,” said Lemenager, who recently starred as Velma in the Broadway production of *Chicago*. “You’re grateful to be working.”

As an only child, Barry has thrived in this transient lifestyle. He’s been to every bar on Granby Street except for Velvet. He plays a lot of golf at Riverfront Golf Club in Suffolk. He reads a lot.

“I don’t have a girlfriend back home or anything like that,” he said with a shrug and a bit of a smirk.



This short time in Norfolk seemed to be harder on Lemenager who, unlike Barry, is unsure of what her next job will be. She has left a significant other back home. She seemed to get a little misty-eyed talking about the rigors of the lifestyle.

“If you’re going to live the life of an actor, you do it because you love it,” she said.

They’ve been here long enough to find their favorites around our fair city. Lemenager favors Ghent. Barry loves how accommodating restaurants are with splitting checks, and he has a manager at Farm Fresh who looks out for him.

“Billy?” Mullins asked.

“Every time I go in there that guy has my back,” Barry confirmed.

On Sunday it all comes to an end, at least for now. There’s talk of the production doing a regional tour, or finding a home in a theater in another city. But who knows with these things.

After paying the bill, Barry held the door for Lemenager and they spilled onto Granby. Rivals onstage, friends for now, they pulled their jacket collars tight against their necks and strode into the crisp fall night.

The show continues through the weekend, with discounts for students and groups. [Click here](#) for tickets or more info.