





Theatre Review: Romeo & Juliet A Must-See

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By Montague Gammon III

Brilliant! The Virginia Stage Company production of *//romeo&juliet/* manages to be wholly contemporary, yet remain utterly respectful of Shakespeare's text and of his characters. It's a wonderful example of what live theatre can be, of why we have companies like the Stage Company, and of how relevant Shakespeare remains to everything essentially human, no matter the era or the milieu.

These particular star crossed lovers live in the era of the laptop and the 'Net, wooing in the milieu of the webcam and Facebook - exactly as teens and young adults, Juliet and her Romeo, would today.

Time and again, director Patrick Mullins arrives at novel staging devices that are immediately and clearly right - almost definitive.

The Prince - or his representative - amplifies his voice with a bullhorn when he breaks up street brawls. Of course! It's so effective, so potently theatrical, that you wonder how else it could be done!

Soliloquies are addressed to laptop cams, or to video cams that the characters hold, and the captured images are projected onto screens above and behind and to the sides of the stage. Of course! They're making video journals! That's why these people are talking to themselves out loud! At last the act of soliloquizing isn't just an arbitrary stage convention, but springs from the text and character.

Mullins' use of video provides the audience with a full-face view of the actor, augmenting what we see on stage, and gives the performer a chance for some truly detailed acting.

A few quibbles:

One - no reason not to have an intermission.

Two - using a pop style song to accompany one scene only reminds the listener of why Shakespeare is the bard and no one else is. It's not the clash of eras that makes the modern oddly out of place in this modern setting, but the gulf of talent between the pop lyricist and the master poet.

Three - not every actor here is as good as Mahira Kakkar, who plays Juliet. However, that would be a very tall order, especially with such a necessarily young cast.

Kakkar brought a wonderful command of the verse, and pinpoint, natural control to every moment on stage. Among the other especially praiseworthy actors, Joe Delafield, as Romeo, had a perfect sense of the young man's impulsive nature, his wild emotional swings, and his impetuous behavior.

Matthew Cabbil is especially well cast as Tybalt, seen here as an outright thug - a bully devoid of gentility, but a character filled with credibility. Once Natasha Bunnell breaks away from the caricature that Mullins lets her use in her early scenes, she gives a sharp and intelligently sympathetic performance as Juliet's Nurse.

As Mercutio, Jeff Barry carries off the famously long, famously manic speech about Queen Mab quite memorably. Nancy Lemanager, who plays Capulet - the head of household role has been quite plausibly assigned to Juliet's widowed mother - projects an impressive strength.

The ensemble is quite believable and clear, and the whole production wholly cohesive.

Samuel W. Flint's scenic design of multi-use platforms and stairways, and of the projection screens that multimedia designer Michael Miceli uses so well, forms a well integrated, unobtrusive but attractive frame for the play.

The costumes, which always seem just right for these characters, are by Tori Depew. Traci Klainer's lighting seems ideal.

Wonderfully innovative and also in the finest traditions of Shakespeare and of live theatre, this *//romeo&juliet/* a must-see.

//romeo&juliet/ by William Shakespeare

Virginia Stage Company

Through November 8

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