

Romeo & Juliet Review by Sharon Drummond North West Theatre Arts Company (NWTAC)

This classic text by Shakespeare was rewritten by NWTAC as a play for schools who study the Bard. It was set current day with a rivalry with the Montagues and Capulets through the football teams of Manchester City and United. The football connection worked beautifully and the youth audience in on the night I watched totally understood what was going on. Each Act was 45 minutes to coincide with a football half and therefore was abridged.

The opening big screen penalty shoot out between the two Manchester teams was a great way to grab the audience's attention and I loved the kickabouts that happened when text was being delivered. The set was great with minimum disruption to scene changes and was well lit and miked.

The costumes being current day worked well for each character with United and City football shirts featuring prominently. The Indian costumes were stunning and the fancy dress outfits worked beautifully and looked fabulous for the party scene. The use of props including mobile phones with Skype and text conversations being displayed on the big screen was fabulous and really appealed to me so I can imagine the younger members of the audience loved this. I'm a huge lover of Shakespeare and have been since school but no one else in my class enjoyed it. This production will appeal to young people (and their teachers!) who are currently studying Shakespeare as it makes the language more accessible. Shakespeare wrote these as plays to be performed and not read from a book where the humour and despair isn't tangible unlike this production which was beautifully staged.

The eight cast members were tremendous and characterised each part with humour and despair when needed. The underscore music made it seem like a movie which I loved but sometimes it did distract from the dialogue particularly when the softer spoken cast members delivered their lines.

Tybalt was played menacingly well by Paddy McAuley and I always felt something was going to kick off when this character was on stage. He played the role well with clear diction and delivery.

Prab Singh who also directed this piece was excellent as Benvolio and the Friar. Both very different but both delivered with clear diction (even during Benvolio's drunk scenes which is a difficult trick to master) and conviction. Prab is an expert in time and space and how to use the audience through humour and emotion. As Director and actor the younger members can learn so much from just watching his delivery and interaction on stage both with his fellow actors and audience. His Friar scenes were touching and thoughtful and as Benvolio his party scenes were hilarious but his other scenes with the lads were calming and inquisitive. A fantastic performance Prab, I've missed seeing you on stage.

Lady Capulet was regally played by Holly Norbury. Her demeanour, elegance and delivery suited the role perfectly. Her interactions with her daughter and husband were played so the awkwardness of those relationships came through. With perfect facial expressions and attitude to the part this role was very well played.

Liam Watson as Capulet put in a great performance. His anger when he believes his daughter is making poor choices was tangible and the change when he believes she is accepting his choice of groom for her into a softer warmer character was lovely. The scenes when the Capulet's believe their daughter is dead were very emotional with both Holly and Liam making their loss very believable.

Mercutio was expertly played by Alex Slater who made the language come alive with great facial expressions and gestures which fitted the character so well. His death scene was totally believable as was his drunken party scenes. A fabulous performance and again lovely to see you doing Shakespeare again Alex.

Katie Gough was wonderful as Nurse. Her size being so small was perfect for a stick walking older woman who has looked after Juliet all her life and loves her like her own. Her lines were crystal clear with great projection. Her reaction to Juliet's death was completely overwhelming and delivered with such passion it started me crying! (again).

This is the hardest Crit I have ever had to write as Juliet was beautifully portrayed by my Elouise Drummond. Her first professional Shakespearean role, I have always felt she has a great look for Shakespeare and her comic delivery I knew would suit the role but she far surpassed what I expected. Her delivery was impeccable with sweet love lines and funny teasing lines delivered expertly. Her relationship with the rest of the cast looked so natural like they had been together for years and I know they all guided and encouraged Elouise to allow her to enjoy the part fully. Her scenes with Adam playing Romeo were sweet at the outset and filled with distraught later in Act 2 but always felt real. Crying on stage has to be committed to fully to look real but then you have to hear the dialogue too and Elouise did this with style, never looking false or contrived. A wonderful believable performance of which I am very proud.

Adam Whitmore played Romeo with such ease and stage presence and looked the part of the young man who falls for the wrong girl (his family believes). His speeches declaring his love were mesmerising and I hung off every word. His ease of delivery of Shakespearean text is stunning to listen to as the dialogue comes to life in his hands. I am sure the school pupils in earlier in the week would have completely understood and felt the feelings he was having with their first loves although these days the speech may not be quite so eloquent. His commitment to the part was evident from how easy he made it look and feel and he never put a foot wrong with entrances, exits and timing. His scenes with Elouise looked and sounded beautiful and the scenes with the lads who teased him about his love showed a slightly different side to Romeo but felt natural and with a great friendship between them.

The final scenes were touching and emotional and our whole row was in tears such was the brilliant acting from all the actors on stage. The whole piece was gloriously staged with fantastic acting and direction. I look forward to seeing more in the Shakespeare season if this is the calibre you produce.