

Theatre Newsletter

The Department of Dramatic Arts (PAC 1052 ; Mobile Alabama 36688-0002

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Theatre USA Presents William Shakespeare's Tragic Love Story Romeo & Juliet April 17 - 23

Perhaps William Shakespeare's most famous play, *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy full of contrasts – immature love and long-standing hate, humor and sorrow, peace and strife, and life and death. A tale of hastiness, infatuation and selfishness, *Romeo and Juliet* is the classic story of two young star-crossed lovers in Verona, Italy.

First published in 1597, *Romeo and Juliet* was republished in 1599, 1609, and 1623. Shakespeare's primary source for the play was the poem "Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet," written by Arthur Brooke in 1562. Although generally true to the form of Brooke's poem, Shakespeare transforms the events that take ninety days in the poem into a few days.

Two rival families—the

Montagues and the Capulets—have been feuding since before any of the present members were born. The feud continues since neither family is willing to forgive the past. The townspeople are well aware of the feud, since over the years altercations between the two families in the public streets have disturbed the peace of this town. The families have been forewarned that another public fight could result in death, but neither seems to heed this sage advice.

As the play opens, Romeo, a Montague, is recovering from the loss of his last love, Rosaline, and is still very upset. Juliet, a member of the Capulet family, has just been introduced to a wealthy man, Paris.

Romeo finagles an invitation to a masquerade ball at the home of the Capulets and falls in love with Juliet at first sight. They later learn of each other's lineage and lament that they have fallen in love with an enemy of their respective families. Nevertheless, they proclaim their love to each other and are secretly married by the local friar unbeknownst to their



Jamie Cheatham choreography's fight between Jessica Allison and Robert Tucker.

parents.

After their secret marriage, Romeo witnesses the death of Mercutio by Tybalt, in yet another duel in the streets. Romeo then avenges Mercutio's death by killing Tybalt. Upon learning of the murder of Tybalt, the Prince banishes Romeo from Verona forever. Juliet hears of the news of Tybalt and Romeo, she gives her ring to her nurse to deliver to Romeo. That night he sleeps with Juliet, but is forced to leave the next morning at dawn when Juliet's mother arrives.

Juliet's father decides

she will marry Paris. Her refusal enrages her father. To circumvent her father's plans, Juliet obtains a potion from the friar that will make her seem dead for at least two days. The friar promises to notify Romeo so that he can join Juliet in two days. The next morning, when Juliet is supposed to marry Paris, she is found "dead" by her nurse. The Capulet family mourns her untimely death and she is placed in the family vault.

Romeo quickly receives word that Juliet is dead and hurries back to Verona.

Artist Spotlight Fight Choreographer Jamie Cheatham

Romeo and Juliet takes place in a society being destroyed by the animosity and hate of two rival families. It is a world with violence constantly erupting through a thin veneer of refinement. Theatre USA's production teams with street brawls and sudden fights to the death with rapier and dagger. Working side by side with Director Matt Ames to create this world of "civil unrest" is Fight Director Jamie Cheatham.

Jamie is a certified fight director through the Society of American Fight Directors, an organization founded in the mid'70's to provide safe instruction and staging of violence on stage, film and television. He arrived in Mobile March 18 and put the actors through an intense two weeks of training while choreographing the fights for this production.

His interest in fight choreography started early on with a fascination for the swashbuckling movies of Errol Flynn and was reinforced as an undergraduate acting student when Society President David Leong was brought in to teach a combat workshop. "I loved performing Shakespeare and as a stage combatant I had an extra edge being cast. So I attended the S.A.F.D. National Stage Combat Workshop that summer and became a certified combatant."

It paid off. His first professional acting job was as Jusac in **The Three Musketeers** at the Champlain Shakespeare Festival in Burlington, VT. He has performed, choreographed fights, and directed at some of the most prestigious theatres and theatre schools in the country. The New York Shakespeare Festival, Actors' Theatre Louisville, Julliard, NYC Opera, the Alley Theatre and that's just a few. As a teacher, he was head of the Stage Combat program at the AMDA for 10 years and now teaches at Brooklyn College.

His approach to staging a fight is rooted in the theatrical experience. There is no gratuitous violence. It's part of telling the story and is based on what's happening to the characters and how they respond to it. This production has rapier and dagger fights, hand to hand combat, actors catapulting around the set, and yes blood. The effects are based on focus and timing. "A lot of it is a magic show." It is an integral component of this production and adds an element to this production you don't want to miss.

Romeo arrives at the tomb only to find Paris mourning his betrothed. Romeo and Paris duel, which results in Paris' death. Romeo enters the tomb finding Juliet "dead," drinks the poison and dies. Juliet awakes to find Romeo has poisoned himself, and kills herself with his dagger.

With their untimely deaths, the long-standing feuds, altercations, hatred and prejudice between their parents' rival households are also buried. The price for this ultimate reconciliation, however, is that neither family line can continue, since with Romeo and Juliet were only children.

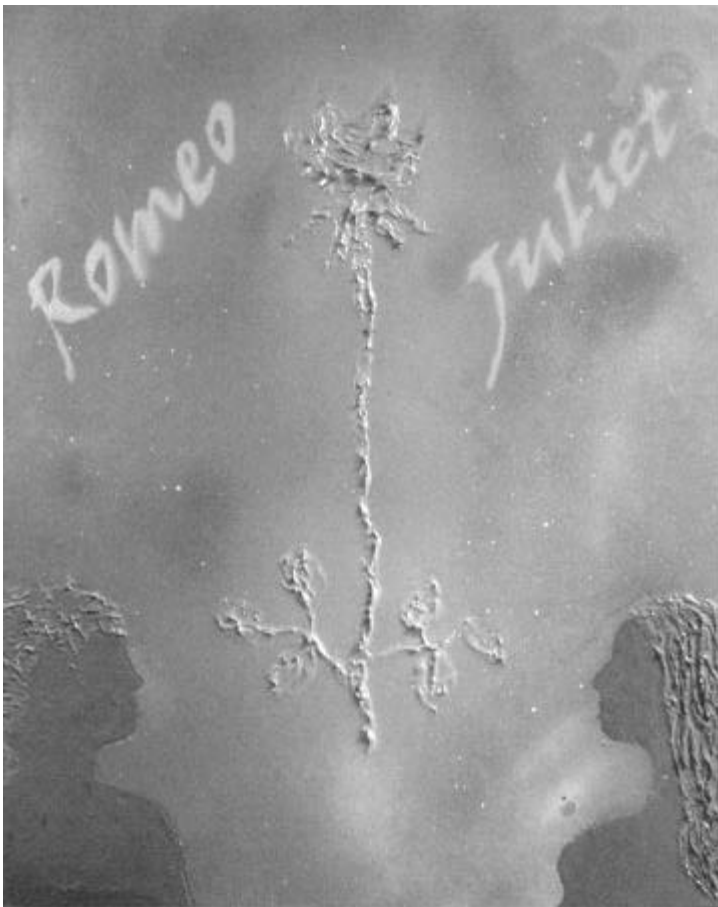
From the Director Matt Ames

You probably know the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is certainly one of the most widely produced and adapted texts in the history of the English language... how, then to go about the business of making this so familiar tale compelling to a contemporary audience? Many different approaches have been taken. Virtually any society where there are tribes, families, or governments at odds (Northern Ireland, the Middle East, the United States during the Civil War) is fertile ground in which to set the story of

these "two households," Capulet and Montague. Further, the uneasy peace that exists in the theatrical Verona of the play exists in reality in Belfast, Kosovo, or the West Bank. As a director however, I am loathe to burden a text, especially a Shakespearean one, with a "concept." Shakespeare had no "concept"-- he didn't even have a director. His primary goal was to entertain his audience, an audience that was liable to be a good deal more overtly critical than a contemporary one (I can't remember the last time I threw rotten fruit at the stage). Telling the story well with a unified production rooted in technically skilled, emotionally formidable

performances must be uppermost.

In order to keep our focus on the telling of the story, I have decided to set this story in a multi cultural Nowhereland, with design and performance elements that echo or are culled from a variety of cultures. Norse and Celtic mythology, the Elizabethan world of the playwright, ancient Persia, twentieth-century America... aspects of all these cultures and epochs appear in our production. *Romeo and Juliet* is a universal tale, a timeless, cultureless human story, as resonant and moving today as when it was written. I want to draw the audience's attention to the



Original art work by Kenneth Kudlis for the poster.

story, not away from it with a pasted-on, overbearing “Director’s Concept” which tells an audience little but how clever the director thinks he or she is.

The set, lighting, and costume designers have worked toward this “universal” vision as well. Shakespeare sets his piece in “fair Verona,” but Shakespeare’s sense of Italian culture and geography wasn’t all that accurate, and he probably didn’t care. There is no need to recreate Renaissance Italy on the stage. Shakespeare’s King’s Men certainly didn’t. Our “fair Verona,” our playing space, speaks, again, to the strength of the text. This story can take place anywhere at

any time, and we have endeavored to emphasize that concept with a very fluid but not easily identifiable set. The same

is true of the costumes, which, while lush and rich in texture like some Renaissance clothing, can be tied to no one period or place in human history. With our design elements, we have strived to create a new world, an innately human world about whose culture an audience would have no preconceived notions. Again, ultimately, with the goal of emphasizing the story, the text, and the actors as of primary import.

When you come and see Theatre USA’s production of *Romeo and Juliet*, it is my hope that you will enjoy and be entertained by the world we have created. We believe our vision tells the story well. *Romeo and Juliet* still fall in love, and they still meet an untimely end, but their story still speaks to us about the frailty of the human condition. Anywhere, anytime, anyplace...

The Cast for *Romeo & Juliet*

- Romeo Jim Willsey
- Juliet Jean Parker
- Mercutio Jared Peregoy
- Tybalt . . . Keone Fuqua
- Prince Escalus
- Jonathan Conner
- Paris Robert Wells
- Montague Douglas Cook
- Capulet . . . David Mims
- Lady Montague
- Mandi Elliot
- Lady Capulet
- Natasha Tucker
- Nurse Sara Argiro
- Benvolio Kenny Kudulis
- Friar Laurence
- Paul Thomas
- Friar John . TJ DeZauche
- Sampson . . Jason Beane
- Abram . . Jessica Allison
- Balthasar Mason Merrill
- Peter . Charles Lambert
- Gregory . Kate Hampton
- Citizens of Verona;
- Amanda Murdick
- Shon’Della Means
- Boy April Ortiz
- Watchmen 1
- Robert Tucker
- Watchmen 2 Jason Beane
- Watchmen 3 Jill Laiche

Box Office & Ticket Information

Additional Performances Added

Do to audience demand we have added two additional performances Monday, April 22 and Tuesday, April 23 at 8:00 p.m.

Tickets for *Romeo & Juliet*

- \$10.00 General Admission,
- \$7.00 all students with valid student ID.
- One student ticket per ID.

Tickets will be available for advance purchase from 10:00 am till 5:30 pm Monday thru Friday starting Monday, April 8 at the Laidlaw Performing Arts Center Box Office.

Tickets are sold on a first come first serve bases. All seats reserved. All sales final. No refund or exchange. Cash or check only... No Credit cards as we do not accept any credit cards at this time. ; Sorry. ;

For additional information call the **Theatre USA Box Office at 460-6306** during regular box office hours.



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The Department of Dramatic Arts
Theatre USA
Presents

William Shakespeare's
Romeo & Juliet

April Wednesday 17 through Saturday April 20 at 8:00 pm,
Sunday April 21 at 2:00 pm.
With additional Performances
Monday April 22 & Tuesday April 23 at 8:00 pm

Laidlaw Performing Arts Center Theatre
on the University of South Alabama Campus