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San Diego Arts

"Romeo and Juliet" at the Old Globe

The Solid Family Model

By Welton Jones
 Posted on Jul 03 2008
 Last updated Jul 03 2008



Welton Jones

Order a solid, mid-range, durable, family "Romeo and Juliet" and you'll get something like Richard Seer's version, now playing as the second of three summer Shakespeare shows in rotation outdoors at the Old Globe Theatre's Davies Festival Theatre.

I would wish for a few more soldiers, some better background music but not much else as a catalogue of changes.

Well, maybe more risks taken, more passions torn, more blood and tears. This is not the play where one worries over good taste.

I long to fidget in the irritating heat of the Verona summer, gape at the fancy excesses of Renaissance youth, marvel at the speed of true first-sight love and agonize over the rotten breaks that produce such a pile of young corpses.

Too often, however, that way lies empty bombast and silly strut. This version strives more for clarity, heft and grave emotional truth.

In so doing, the elders fare better than the youths.

Both the grave prologue and the impassioned speeches of the Prince are read flawlessly by Jonathan McMurtry. Friar Laurence is a dear, holy aesthete of restorative sincerity as played by James R. Winker. And Deborah Taylor joins together the aspects of Juliet's prattling, fond old Nurse as snugly as a fine piece of custom furniture.

Wynn Harmon's Capulet, driven by grief and frustration to the brink of hysterical violence against his tender daughter, boosts the plot into the plane of tragedy and Kandis Chappell hints darkly at the complex sorrows of Lady Capulet.

Among the shadows cast by all this maturity, only Heather Wood's Juliet truly sparkles. A tiny, delicious, plucky treasure, she makes believable all the fuss over her precious person and launches herself into her unexpected new life without hesitation.

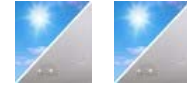
Graham Hamilton's Romeo spends so much time marveling at others or taking his own emotional temperature that he sometimes seems surprised at the all-consuming passion engulfing him. He misses the sudden grim adulthood thrust upon him by fate and stays too much the likeable boy.

Michael Kirby as Benvolio, John Keabler as Paris and Anthony von Halle as Tybalt don't suggest much promise for the next generation of Veronese leaders and Owiso Odera pursues Mercutio's quicksilver fantasies into the thicket of silliness four or five times too often for me.

These guys are way far apart in their fencing skills, too, causing fight choreographer Steve Rankin to seemingly throw some of the battles.

Anna R. Oliver's wardrobe is a Renaissance fantasy come to life. Ralph Funicello's unit set is sensually provocative with its stained glass, iron gates and dark wood while York Kennedy's lighting is

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particularly tucked in around the corners.

It's hard to follow the intent of Christopher R. Waller's music, scratchy percussion and sterile electronics jarring the mood of all this resolute period look.

Richard Seer has trimmed very little (the "two hours' traffic of our stage" mentioned in the prologue becomes three hours), mainly the comedy music scene featuring Peter (a role nicely sketched by Sloan Grenz). This is indicative of his approach to the play: Respectful, rational, inclusive and tightly controlled.

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Dates : Rotating in repertory nightly at 8 except Mondays through Sept. 28, 2008.
Organization : Old Globe Theatre
Phone : 619 234-5623
Production Type : Play
Region : Balboa Park
URL : www.oldglobe.org
Venue : Lowell Davies Festival Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

About the author: Welton Jones has been reviewing shows for 50 years as of October 2007, 35 of those years at the UNION-TRIBUNE and, now, six for SANDIEGO.COM where he wrote the first reviews to appear on the site.

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