

'Romeo and Juliet'

Thursday

Posted Mar 16, 2017 at 10:14 PM

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By Keith Powers / Correspondent

If you go...

WHAT: Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe, "Romeo and Juliet"

WHERE: Gorton Theatre, 267 East Main St., Gloucester

WHEN: through March 18

TICKETS: \$15, \$10 students, \$5 under 19. At the box office or reserve at cast2008@prodigy.net
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Romeo and Juliet needed time, but they didn't get it. They needed luck, but they found no good fortune. They needed compassion, but they found it only in each other.

At least they had Matt Recine and Ariel Sargent.

The two actors take on the lovers' roles with intensity and spirit in the Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe's staging of Shakespeare's tragedy, bringing together a spare production and turning CAST's staging at the Gorton Theatre into a solid presentation.

Director Ray Jenness kept it simple: one unchanging set, with two stools and a bench; modern dress (plus swords), with little effort to characterize through costuming; and basic blocking (with a fight or two or three thrown in).

In the main, the approach worked. Trying to replicate the shifting visuals in the play—city square, noble's courtyard, fancy party scene—has been done so lushly in so many film and stage versions. Trying to replicate that on the community stage can lead to disappointment.

So the characters relied on Shakespeare's language—always a good plan. In a play with multiple complex roles, requiring more than a dozen actors, there were of course hits and misses.

But there was no missing the robust engagement of the lovers. Recine dressed in "whatever" blue jeans and sneakers; Sargent was the lone actor to go repeatedly to wardrobe, changing with each scene. She wore mostly smart dresses that reflected her coming of age.

In a nice touch, however, she shows up in her opening scene—where the emphasis is on her "not even seeing 14 years"—sporting a pair of puppy-dog slippers. In the very next scene, the Capulets' party, she wears a pair of, well, let's refer to them as fetching silver disco boots.

Jenness recognized that humor plays a crucial, complementary part in the tragedy, and was fortunate to have Andy LeBlanc to bring some of that to life as Romeo's compadre Mercutio.

Taking on the lusty role and layering it with swishy antics—something queer studies of Shakespeare have given much credence to—LeBlanc stole every scene he figured in. His "Queen Mab" rhapsody had fiery energy—leaping from one allusion to the next, all with different characterizations.

The spare sets and direction made some scenes stagnant, with characters simply facing each other and declaiming. Volume was sometimes an issue. The balcony scene, tastefully lighted, was a winner though: with Romeo upstage, facing the audience, turned away from Juliet, who was deep backstage. It felt intimate and nocturnal, and not a little foreboding.

The fight scenes (there are many) had realistic sword play (coached by Jeph Ellis, who also played the angry Tybalt with flair). David McCaleb's Lord Capulet stood out as well among the secondary roles.

With its shifting language—from Petrarchan to locker-room, sometimes in the same speech—and its multiple, layered themes of fortune, haste, passion and family loyalty, "Romeo and Juliet" still brings a diversity of ideas and styles to the stage, more than 400 years after its first appearance.

Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe's "Romeo and Juliet" runs through March 18 at the Gorton Theatre. The troupe then plays host to London's Tower Theatre Company, who will stage Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest," April 18-23 at the Gorton Theatre. Email cast2008@prodigy.net for more information.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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