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Monmouth staging 'excellent' production on 'Romeo and Juliet'

David A. Sargent, Special to the Sun Journal

[Encore](#) | Wednesday, July 30, 2014

MONMOUTH -- Theater at Monmouth's production of William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" is a gem in this 45th summer repertory season at historic Cumston Hall.

Sometimes called the world's greatest love story, the familiar plot is often summarized as a tale of two lovers whose lives are cut short by fateful circumstances. There is much more to this play, and this staging of the famous Shakespearean tragedy is an excellent opportunity to see a complete presentation of it.

Excellent performances by several Theater at Monmouth (TAM) veterans and newcomers energize the play for all members of the audience, whether casually acquainted or well-schooled in the works of Shakespeare.

Janis Stevens, in her 13th season with TAM, excels in the important role of Juliet's nurse. She delivers a deeply moving portrayal of loyalty to Juliet and dread of the consequences of the ill-fated match.

As Friar Lawrence, Bill Van Horn also exhibits theatrical expertise that has made him a TAM favorite over 13 seasons. The Franciscan friar is one of the few characters who knows of the relationship of the young daughter of the House of Capulet and the son of their sworn enemies, the Montagues. He arranges to supply Juliet with a potion that will fake death and, upon revival, provide a means for the couple to be united.

Van Horn's performance is outstanding. His speeches and actions provide easy comprehension of the story's development.

The central roles of Romeo and Juliet are played by Leighton Samuels and Lindsay Tornquist, both in their first seasons on the TAM stage. They are well-paired for the parts, giving the audience heartfelt portrayals of the doomed lovers.

Max Waszak, third season with TAM, plays Tybalt, Juliet's cousin who is enraged that Romeo has sneaked into a masked ball given by the Capulets. His anger leads to him killing Romeo's friend, Mercutio (well-played by Michael Dix Thomas), and ultimately to his death at the hand of Romeo.

The role is well-played, but more important is Waszak's contribution to "Romeo and Juliet" as the fight captain. The swordplay in this production is fierce and extremely well choreographed by Waszek.

Will Harrell (third season) gives a riveting performance as Capulet, the anger-driven head of Juliet's household.

Turner Francosky debuts at TAM in the role of Paris, whom Capulet has chosen to wed Juliet. Also presenting fine performances are Lisa Woods as Lady Capulet, Erica Murphy as Benvolio (Romeo's best friend), Ryan Simpson as Peter and Balthazar, servants of the Montague household, and Ardarius Blakely, Prince of Verona.

Stacy Koloski, set designer, has provided a large and impressive balcony as the only stage setting. It serves well as the focal point of the play's well-known balcony scene and other locations including the tomb. Lighting by Cecilia Durbin also enhances the various scenes.

Dawn McAndrews, who is TAM's producing artistic director, directed this production, and she said in her program notes that the focus is on day and night, light and dark. She said the intent is to emphasize the numerous what-if junctions in this play, and the failure of characters to consider consequences of their acts.

Remaining performances of "Romeo and Juliet" in repertory are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Aug. 8, 12, 16 and 20; at 7 p.m. on August 10 (with post-show talk-back), and at 1 p.m. on Aug. 2, 13, and 24.

Theater at Monmouth, founded in 1970, was named the Shakespearean Theater of Maine by the State Legislature in 1975.

TAM's production of the outrageous comedy, "What the Butler Saw," opens Friday, Aug.1.

For tickets, call 933-9999 or go on-line to www.theateratmonmouth.org.