

Streamlined 'Romeo and Juliet' dishes standout actors, humor

Theater review

Jacquelyn Lewis
Pulse Editor

The sad tale of Romeo and Juliet is recounted time and time again on stages across the country. This familiarity results in a twofold potential: The rendition can be confining and stale, or the play can offer a challenging, malleable script overflowing with endless possibilities. Lord Leebrick Theatre Company's "The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet" Sunday matinee was an unforgettable example of the latter.

Sunday was serendipitous; actress Mindy Nirenstein's illness left the troupe without the Nurse character. The scenario was unfortunate for Nirenstein and could have been disastrous for the performance — the Nurse is an imperative part of the play. However, director John Schmor took on the role at the last minute, seamlessly transforming the comical female character into a hilarious, eccentric male.

Schmor appeared in a suit, sometimes draped with what appeared to be pieces of the original Nurse costume, with script in hand. However, he never even glanced at the pages. Schmor, an assistant professor in the University's theater arts department, is as talented an actor as he is a director, and he pulled the role off with grace and style.

The play, which runs through April 27, has several standout features. Schmor widdled the script down to its most significant, dynamic scenes — resulting in a simple, beautifully streamlined production. The technical aspects follow this theme; the set consists of straight-edged platforms and the costumes are a subtle mix of modern and period. A lone cello expertly played by Matthew Wilkonso provides the melancholy soundtrack.

Under Schmor's direction, the entire drama is lighter and more humor-infused than other versions. Romeo and Juliet appear drunk on first love, awkward and flirtatious. The balcony scene, instead of sticky sweet, is saturated with youthful angst.

All of this gels into a cohesive whole largely due to the stellar cast. The script presents worn, familiar lines, yet the dialogue is full of tongue twisters and difficult to voice believably. However, the Lord Leebrick company ac-

complishes the task with élan. Each member stands out in his or her own way. Cassie Schwanke and Quinn Matfeld portray the pair of star-crossed lovers with true chemistry; Romeo is earnest and clumsy, Juliet is quick-witted and dramatic.

Cameron Carlisle plays a petulant-but-tough Tybalt, and new actor Jasper Patterson is a subdued Benvolio. However, Ian Hanley, as Mercutio, is the production's true standout artist. He portrays a character true to Shakespeare's original, both playful and heartbreakingly sorrowful — with a modern twist. Mercutio's death and absence from the second half of the play is more tragic than usual, leaving the audience yearning to see more of Hanley's talent.

Highly recommended, Lord Leebrick's production of "The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet" has the power to make viewers fall in love with romance again, or simply renew our faith in good theater.

Lord Leebrick Theatre Company is located at 540 Charnelton Street, and times and ticket prices vary. Call 465-1506 to reserve tickets.

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Sugar Beets


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including older songs, crowd-favorites and also new tunes.

Burham added that in spite of The Sugar Beets' hiatus, and members' busy schedules, there has been plenty of practice time for the group.

"Yes, we have been playing, and yes, we will be hot," he said.

Contact the Pulse reporter at aaronshakra@dailyemerald.com.



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