

A *Romeo and Juliet* with a lot of homoerotic horseplay but no balcony, a gripping production of *Coriolanus* with a bare-chested wrestling match setting the tone for this hyper-masculine staging, and *Love's Labor's Lost* with four early-Elizabethan feminists moving stage center—these are the highlights of the outdoor summer season at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The most discussed production of the summer

Theater

is undoubtedly Shakespeare's rarely staged *Coriolanus*, a huge hit in the playwright's lifetime and, interestingly and understandably, a popular title with Hitler and his Nazi officials. Set in the days of ancient Rome, this *Coriolanus* successfully plays it both ways—the costumes and sets are a blend of modern military outfits and golden Roman breastplates and a gilded laurel-wreath crown.

Directed with nonstop energy by Tony Taccone in his second outing at OSF, *Coriolanus* basically ignores the famous OSF outdoor stage and builds a high-tech metal scaffolding in front of the seven levels of the Elizabethan stage.

Armed soldiers run through the aisles, actor-held megaphones blare from the upper balcony of the seating area announcing military commands, a whirl of helicopter blades and flashing lights brings the title character on stage (creating a "Has *Miss Saigon* finally reached Ashland?" titter in the press rows). This is Shakespeare unlike Shakespeare's ever been seen in Ashland. At the end of Act 2, as Coriolanus flees Rome, the brawny Derrick Lee Weeden literally climbs the walls of the playhouse to escape. When he returns to Rome in Act 3, he rappels down the other side of the theater's enclosure like Stallone in a mountain-climbing adventure.

For director Tony Taccone, *Coriolanus* is his first Shakespeare staging. "I avoided it forever," he laughs. "People always say they want to see Shakespeare and then just sit there and fall asleep. I wanted to do a production that will keep the audience awake."

And he succeeds. Strong characterizations support the director's hyper-masculine military concept. Weeden gives a memorable performance as the bloodthirsty yet sensitive and intelligent military leader. Ray Porter, newly slimmed down and obviously buffed up, makes a cunning foe. Their bare-chested wrestling match sets the play—and their rivalry—in action.

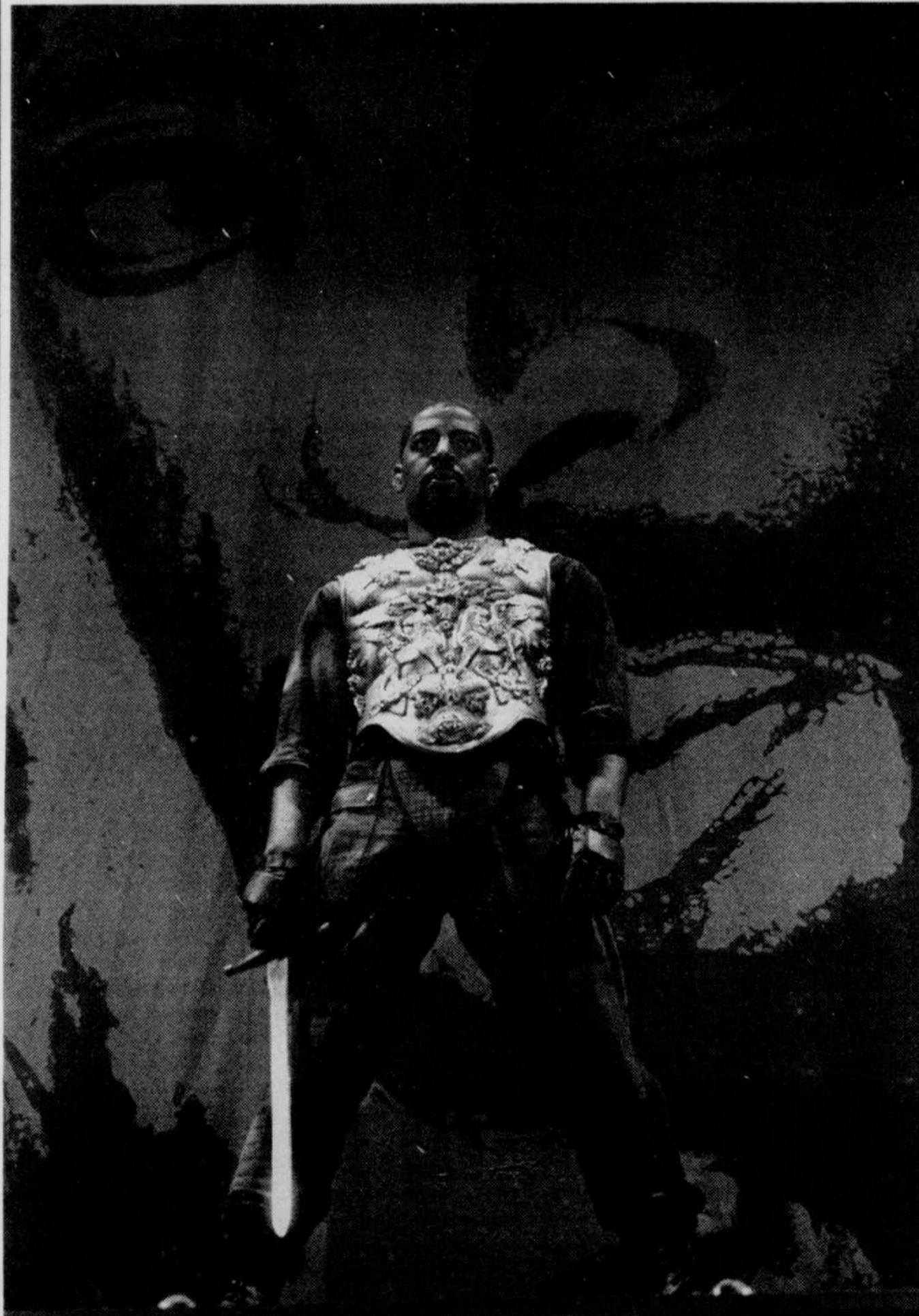
Homoerotic horseplay between Romeo and his friends, black leather jackets and stylized black modern-day street wear, a lot of slow-motion sequences and a balcony scene with no balcony gives this *Romeo and Juliet* a decidedly nontraditional feel.

Director René Buch, making his OSF debut, is a specialist in Spanish theater. "I learned English just to be able to read Shakespeare in the original language," Buch laughingly confesses.

PLAY IT UP

*Shakespeare reigns at OSF this summer—
but make haste, forsooth, tickets are going fast*

by Christopher Kamera



Derrick Lee Weeden in *Coriolanus*

He sees a strong tie between the passionate actions of Shakespeare characters and the classical Spanish theater. "Shakespeare's time was one of great passion and crude humor—the concept of the reserved British behavior of the later Puritan period was not an influence on Shakespeare," he notes.

For this year's *Romeo and Juliet*, Buch stayed true to the characters and the poetry—if not to the traditions. Gone are the velvets and brocade of Renaissance Italy, gone are the lavish decorations and accessories of the masked ball, gone are most of the sets.

The missing balcony was a great cause of discussion during opening weekend. Younger audiences seemed to have no trouble with the play's most famous scene—and perhaps Shakespeare's most famous scene—being played center stage with neither Romeo nor Juliet acknowledging the other. Purists obviously missed the traditional approach—when no "light through yonder window" broke, much of the audience grew briefly uneasy.

Mikael Salazar makes a likable Romeo, and his bare-chested wedding-morning scene proves him to be a physical hunk. Vilma Silva was a strong, independent Juliet, easily believable as the lovesick adolescent yet confident in her tragic decisions. Shawn Galloway provided strong support as Mercutio, but Tyrone Wilson's biker-look Tybalt was a disappointment. The set—a huge assembly of metal pipes—served as a wind chime-like screen, again blocking out the traditional Elizabethan stage.

Love's *Labor's Lost* represents OSF at its traditional best. The elegant costumes, the songs and dances, the use of the multilevel stage much as Shakespeare would have used it, all combine to bring this infrequently staged comic digression to stage center. Pat Patton, directing his last show at OSF, goes for a very traditional production—and audiences love it. In a season where nontradition rules, tradition seems a brilliant concept.

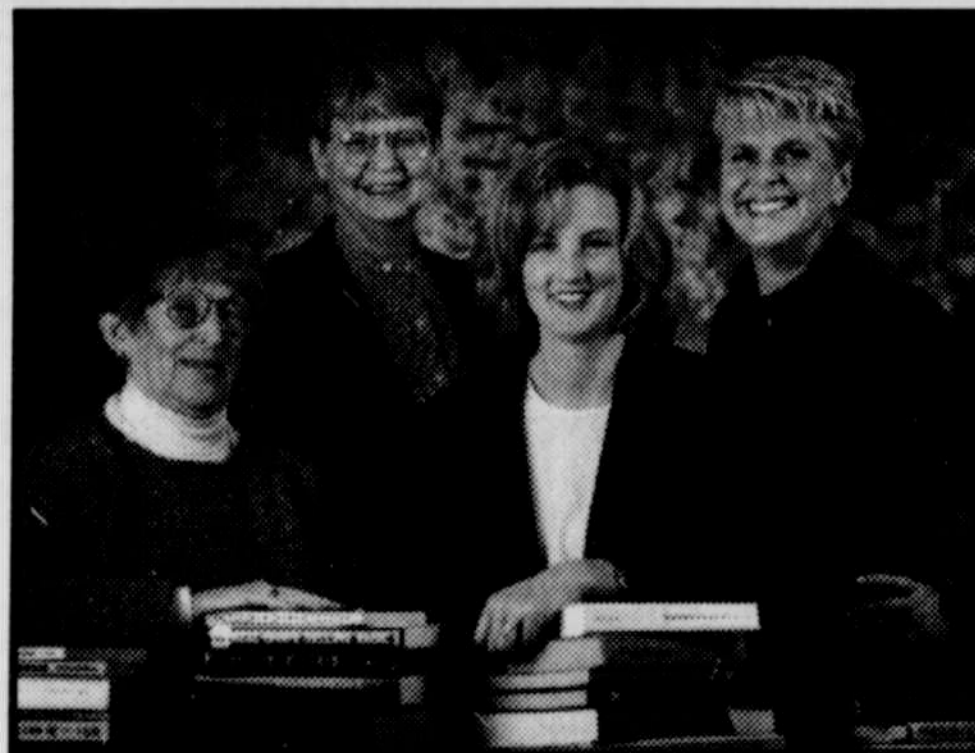
Love's Labor's Lost is one of Shakespeare's "problem plays." It's a comedy without a happy ending. It's a romance with no weddings. It's a serious discourse on love and fidelity, but all the concerns are lightweight and frivolous. In Patton's staging, the women walk away with the show. Lise Bruneau, as the French princess, and Robin Goodrin Nordli, Vilma Silva and Mhari Sandoval as her ladies in waiting are simply scene-stealers in the best tradition of The Bard. The men in the play provide solid support, but the four French noblewomen—clearly crafted with a modern-day feminist feel—run the show. It's a joyous comedy of manners that had opening night audiences cheering its subtle humor.

With three out-and-out hits in the outdoor Elizabethan Theatre, OSF should have one of its strongest seasons in years. Juliet asks Romeo, "What's in a name?" The OSF box office can respond: "virtually sold out," which the run of *Romeo and Juliet* was before it opened, OSF officials noted at a recent press conference. Scattered tickets remain, and good seating is still available for *Coriolanus* and *Love's Labor's Lost*. The outdoor season continues through Oct. 6.

The indoor season, continuing through Oct. 27, is highlighted by *A Pair of Threes* and the just-opened *Cabaret Verboten* at the intimate Black Swan Theatre. In the Bowmer Theatre, memorable stagings of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing!* continue through the fall. Rita Dove's eagerly anticipated *The Darker Face of the Earth* opens on July 24, and Tom Stoppard's highly praised *Arcadia* returns to the repertoire Sept. 24 for a fall encore. A disappointing *Molière Plays Paris* is also on stage at the Bowmer. Complete ticket information is available at (541) 482-4331.

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