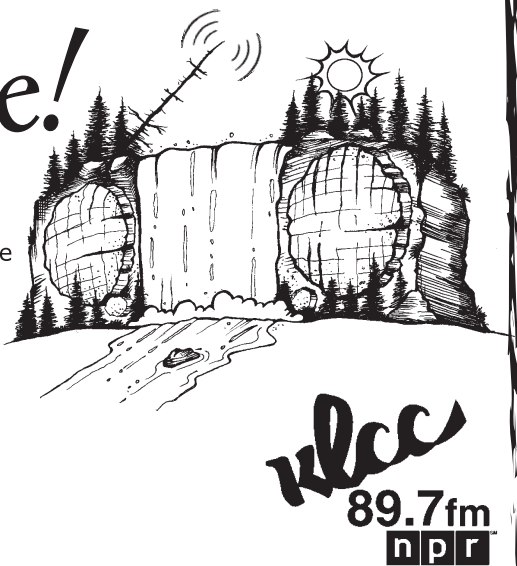


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THEATER BY SHARLEEN NELSON

Enduring Love

Local productions explore relationships, tragedy and honesty.

Lord Leebrick Theatre's production of *The Tragedy of Romeo & Juliet* closely follows Shakespeare's classic tale of star-crossed lovers and the all too human elements of love and revenge, tragedy and comedy, but with some restructuring by the show's director John Schmor. Shaving the script to 12 roles and 21 scenes, Schmor's adaptation stylishly integrates Shakespeare's poetic verse with a mélange of contemporary dialogue.

The action takes place on an attractive, yet functional single set that, through the use of lighting and a few props such as paper lanterns or a bed drape, serves as the solemn interior of a church, Juliet's bedroom and balcony, a party site, the streets of Verona, and in the final scene, a crypt. The theater's horseshow seating invites the audience into the action, and the players make use of this arrangement to enter and exit from all sides.

Quinn Mattfeld is altogether charming as lovesick young Romeo. Mattfeld shows superb capability at handling an array of complex emotions with convincing intensity — from the earnest and likeable suitor to the inconsolable lover. Likewise, Cassie Schwanke is fabulous as Juliet. Like Mattfeld, Schwanke also easily balances comedy and drama. Her tearful scenes are not only heart-wrenchingly credible, but Schmore's script provides another dimension to her character that blends her sweet demeanor and playfulness with a strong, less victimized role.

Ian Hanley and Jasper Patterson are impressive as Romeo's sidekicks Mercutio and Benvolio, respectively. Together they make a dynamic comedic team, but it's Hanley who stands out. Looking like a cross between a swashbuckling pirate and Jim Morrison, Hanley's rambling homily about life and love are high points in this production.

Mindy Nirenstein also does a first-rate job as Juliet's nurse. The rest of this fine cast includes John Muellner as the Priest, Joshua Vargas as Paris, Cameron Carlisle as Tybalt, Ron Hart as Father Capulet, Denise LaCroix as Lady Capulet, Greg Foote as Father Montague, Sharon Wetterling as lady Montague, and Marlowe Johnson as the altar boy. Cellist Matthew Wilkonson performs live music.

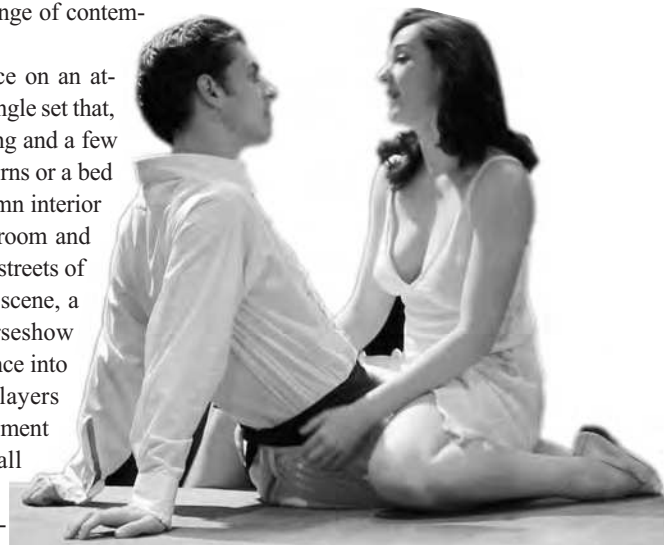
Whether following the classic script or some other variation, Romeo and Juliet exemplify our expectations of youthful infatuation — the first breathless kiss under starry skies; the unexpected obstacles, and the realization that while ours may not have ended in tragedy, it was still painfully heartbreaking.

The theme changes a bit down the road. Farce, folly, and a timely examination of the duplicity of society are the focus of Molière's *The Misanthrope*, playing at the UO's Robinson Theatre.

The play opens on Philinte and Alceste, who are discussing the hypocrisy of their

time. Alceste has become cynical of the motives of people — he despises their faux sincerity masquerading behind showy displays of flattery and courtesies, yet he faces a conundrum. He is hopelessly in love with Célimène, a coquettish young widow who exemplifies all that Alceste detests.

Célimène has a weakness for engaging in scandalous and spiteful gossip and is the



The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, Lord Leebrick.

object of desire of several men, including Alceste's friend Oronte and a pair of frivolous marquis who flatter and indulge her. Yet Célimène's charm outweighs her faults and Alceste is weak with love. What is more, Alceste discovers that telling the truth comes with a price. His honesty lands him in hot water for commenting on a simply dreadful sonnet written by his friend Oronte. Because Alceste refuses to flatter him, Oronte punishes him with a lawsuit for telling the truth.

Christopher Hirsh is amusingly energetic as the beleaguered Alceste. Hirsh emotes with ultra dramatic flair and demonstrates his expertise at physical comedy. Likewise, Andrew Beck puts in a strong performance as Philinte, straight man to the absurd and often comically disgruntled Alceste. Leticia Maskell is exceptional as the coy, yet razor sharp Célimène.

Gushing dreadful poetry and wearing the most outlandish hat, Ian Armstrong is picture perfect as Oronte; and Margie Kment is charming and sweet as Eliante, Célimène's good and reasonable cousin.

Sarah Griner is terrific as Célimène's foil Arsinoé. A high point in the play is a caustic exchange of witty gibes between the two women, complete with a scoring panel of judges. Alexander Dupre and Elizabeth Helman as Clitandre and Acaste, respectively, are delightfully silly as Célimène's fawning suitors. Rounding out the superb cast is Edward Volkert as Du Bois, Alceste's jittery manservant, Mindy A. Linder as Célimène's personal assistant Basque, and Parisse Boothe as a messenger of the Marshals of France. More than 100 people were involved in this lavish production — and it shows. From the elaborate and finely detailed period costumes to the grandiose set, *The Misanthrope* is a *tour de force*. **EW**



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