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From woo to woe to WOW

McNary's *Romeo and Juliet* urges audience to enjoy the ride

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

There are certain things one expects when going to see yet another production of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Among them are: misunderstandings, teenage affairs of the heart and mind, and of course, a healthy dose of tragedy.

With McNary's High School's latest production of the play, the director, cast and crew are setting out to defy a lot of those expectations. The play opened Thursday, April 28, and continues its run with performances April 29, 30 and May 5-7. Curtain time is 7 p.m. for all shows. Tickets are \$5 and are available at the door or online at mcnarytheatre.weebly.com.

"In a lot of productions, most of the conflict can be attributed to miscommunication," said Dallas Myers, McNary drama director. "With our version I melded a script from a friend of mine, Scott Palmer, with the original text and did some heavy editing and cutting. The result is that there are some much more intentional decisions by the characters."

In addition to script changes, the play is set against the backdrop of 1940's Hollywood, and the two warring families, the Capulets and Montagues, are heavily involved in film production. McNary student Katherine Gray supplied the vision for most of the scenery that comprises the set. The play's soundtrack is provided

Postmodern Jukebox, a music group that takes modern era pop songs and rearranges them as period pieces ranging from New Orleans jazz to torch songs – think Taylor Swift's *Blank Space* as sung by Fiona Apple. Several of the *Postmodern Jukebox*'s videos will be projected above the stage during scene changes and during some pivotal scenes.

Changes in the script and setting have echoed even in the smallest aspects of the play, said Dorothy Woolford, who plays a genderswapped Tybalt, a cousin of Juliet.

"Because of the updated time period, we aren't using swords, we're using knives and switchblades. The combat is much closer quarters and there's not as much room for interpretation in the fight scenes, when someone dies it's the result of intent," Woolford said.

The same can be said of the actions of certain characters, added McKinley Friesen, who plays Benvolia, a genderswapped version of Benvolio and cousin to Romeo.

"By the end of the play, my character is very angry and broken and things she does are the reason why Romeo and Juliet take the actions they take," Friesen said.

While some of the additions add a more serious tone to parts of the play, others are much more freespirted.

Senior Fatima Falcon Ontiveros is playing Juliet's nurse and she's been encouraged to bring her own cultural background to the character.

"Because it's set in Los Angeles, we thought it would make sense for the nurse's character to be Latino and even use Spanish for some lines in the play," Falcon Ontiveros said.

The play's leads Ryver Nakayoshi, as Romeo, and Skyla Cawthon, as Juliet, are



also attempting to make their characters memorable in ways that audiences won't be expecting.

Nakayoshi is playing his Romeo as if he were a budding star in the Hollywood scene, but he set out to avoid cliché from the moment he found out he was cast.

"One of the first things I noticed was how overly dramatic Romeo has been played by other people and I didn't want to annoy people. I've been playing a lot more with his wit because he's a very smart character," Nakayoshi said. "He's also new money in the Hollywood scene and aware of it. He's going to have certain ways he acts around some people and not others."

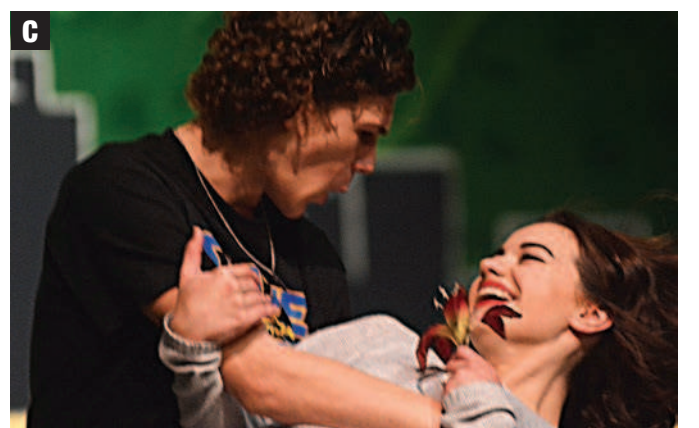
Given that most people in the audience have read or seen a previous production of the Bard's tale and know precisely how it will end, Myers encouraged Nakayoshi and Cawthon to focus on the moments leading up to the finale and not dwell on the ending.

Cawthon has made efforts to play up Juliet's strength rather than her whimsy and it's



opened her own eyes to all the play encompasses.

"It's made me more aware of how much fun the play can be. There's so much that is expected when people go to see *Romeo and Juliet* and this isn't that. It's still very emotional in parts, but there's a lot more variety to the emotions," Cawthon said.



KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald
A: Ryver Nakayoshi and Skyla Cawthon, as Romeo and Juliet, share their first intimate moment. B: Serena Dufour, as Lady Capulet, tries to quiet her husband, Cameron Engle as he fights with Tybalt, Dorothy Woolford. C: Ashton Thomas as Mercutio and McKinley Friesen as Benvolia in a moment of lightheartedness.

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