



## Romeo and Juliet

### Great Verse + Teen Passion – Horniness = A Chaste Play

[American Shakespeare Center](#), Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, Va.  
Sunday, April 25, 2010, G–6&7 (center stalls)  
Directed by Jim Warren

It is the best of William Shakespeare, and it can be the worst of Shakespeare. Sometimes when you read or hear the play, it is the most beautiful poetry ever written; sometimes it's just silly.



Curt Foy as Mercutio and Joseph Rende as Benvolio work on their swordsmanship during a production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Blackfriars Playhouse. From his entrancing Queen Mab speech to his death after his duel with Tybalt and, between those moments, leading a Michael Jackson dance at the Capulet party, Foy was a Mercutio full of fun. Photo by Tommy Thompson, American Shakespeare Center.

With this performance, we got some insight into why this is so. Shakespeare did write incredible poetry for this play, in keeping with the magical poetry of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the majestic poetry of *Richard II*. But rather than being spoken by fairies and enchanted lovers or scheming politicians and disgraced monarchs, *Romeo & Juliet's* poetry is put in the mouths of horny teens. If you play it straight, as ASC's Rough, Rude, & Boisterous Tour troupe did, you get the incongruity of two lovers eager for orgasms spending most of their time in extended conversations, and virile youths engaging in wit-play more than fighting. If you choose to let the language flourish, you lose some of the sexual and violent passion; if you focus on the passion, the poetry can get quite obtuse.

The more I see this play, the more I feel it works better in the mouths of young

actors not far removed from their teen-age years, where the language has greater urgency and the characters are truer (the Folger production remains our benchmark in this regard). Watching Josh Carpenter and Brandi Rhome in the title roles of this production, I commend their command of the language, but in hearing them speak, I wished for much more lust in their behavior: I wished for Romeo to hotly hanker for Juliet in the balcony scene rather than being as far removed from Juliet as the audience; I wished for constant kissing in Friar Lawrence's cell; I wished, for Juliet verging on orgasm — "Come night" — awaiting Romeo's arrival after their marriage. This is not so much a criticism as an observation: in his notes, Director Jim Warren wrote that ASC does not "feel the need to illustrate each and every dirty joke with gestures and gyrations," and it is a credit to the actors' abilities that their language can fire my imagination the way it did. Still, it seemed a bit sterile.

Nevertheless, this production made some keen discoveries within the play, insights that seem obvious now that we've seen them played out. For example, Juliet's behavior mimics that of the nurse, who, after all, raised her. Ginna Hoben's nurse, meanwhile, was bawdy,

## WILL POWER ON STAGE

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yes, but also truly devoted and protective of Juliet. Another example: as David Zimmerman's Tybalt prepared for a formal sword duel, the angry Romeo just ran him through, reflecting what Mercutio earlier said of the two's capabilities. Rick Blunt gave Capulet an overriding goal: maintaining his status. It was there at the party as he dissuaded Tybalt from taking on Romeo; it was there in his rush to marry Juliet to Paris and his anger at Juliet when she resisted; it was even there at the end when he was the first to offer conciliation to Montague and then, after Romeo's father vowed to raise a statue to Juliet, matched him with promise of one as rich for Romeo. His angry rant at Juliet in act three is no more nor less in intensity than his railing at Tybalt in act one.

A special shout-out to a performance that didn't really offer anything new but was fun to watch, Curt Foy as Mercutio, from his entrancing Queen Mab speech to his death after the duel. This Mercutio, alone, was capable of pulling off the production's most incongruous moment: leading a Michael Jackson dance at Capulet's party.

*Eric Minton  
April 27, 2010*

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