

# Limelight



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DEMO AWARDS**  
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and Juliet' at  
Shakespeare  
festival*

*Tragedy  
in the park*



THEATER REVIEW

# ‘Romeo and Juliet’ has romance, humor, sorrow and really great sword fighting

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 Special to Tallahassee Democrat  
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Shakespeare’s timeless tragedy of love, loss and miscommunication, “Romeo and Juliet,” established the archetypal star-crossed lovers, who have inspired five centuries of couples in plays, movies and more.

Southern Shakespeare Festival takes up the challenge of the classic story this weekend with four outdoor performances complementing two days of Renaissance Faire fun in Cascades Park.

The Capulet and Montague families of Verona are avowed enemies. The scene is set when an argument escalates to sword fighting between the servants of the feuding families.

Romeo, son of Lord Montague, has been listless and sullen. His cousin Benvolio, after a bit of prodding, learns that an unrequited love for Rosaline, a member of the Capulet family, is the reason for Romeo’s mood.

Meanwhile Juliet’s parents are planning her betrothal to Count Paris. When her mother tries to share



Melanie Applegate as Juliet and Renee O’Connor as the Nurse in Southern Shakespeare Festival’s “Romeo and Juliet.” BOB O’LARY

the exciting news, Juliet — just 13 — remarks that marriage “is an honor that I dream not of.”

In an attempt to see the object of his affection, Romeo — along with Benvolio and their friend Mercutio — disguises himself and attends a ball at Lord Capulet’s manor. There he meets Juliet for the first time, and sets the show’s conflict in motion.

Director Michael Richey’s production is beautiful in its simplicity, allowing the vivid characters dressed in luscious period costumes to carry the show.

Juliet’s progression through attraction, love and commitment is played convincingly by winsome Tallahassee actress Melanie Applegate, who is just 15. The demure Juliet seems at first completely overshadowed by her Nurse, played with great physical comedy and bawdy presence by special guest artist Renee O’Connor. The Nurse is a memorable performance; O’Connor’s fans from her years playing Gabrielle in the TV cult hit “Xena: Warrior Princess” won’t be disappointed.

In his first professional performance, Miles Muir — O’Connor’s 16-year-old son — does a sterling job conveying the raw emotion of Romeo. His joy and sorrow come through, breathing life into the character.

The stage combat is eye-catching and skilled, but smaller moments establish the intimacy and authenticity of the relationships and truth to the characters’ ages: When Romeo jokes with his friends on their way to the ball. His and Juliet’s earnest young ardor. Flirtatiousness in the balcony scene.

Noteworthy in this production, both Romeo and Juliet are played by teens. This authenticity adds a wistful sweetness to their overflowing love and affection.

Triple-cast Matthew Thompson nearly steals the show, playing Mercutio with sharp wit, bringing clarity to sometimes obscure Elizabethan double entendres and innuendo. His becomes the voice of reality, clearing the haze of romance and drama to identify those truly at fault when tragedy strikes.

During combat scenes you can hear the blades slice through the air, and metal clash against metal. New York fight choreographer and FSU alum Jason Paul Tate was brought in to add this realism and drama to these scenes — and it shows.

A small chamber orchestra provides atmosphere and depth. A single violin carried by the breeze lends weight to particularly emotional monologues.

Cascades Park is a gorgeous venue and the amphitheater’s sound system is loud and clear all the way to the back. Seating is first come, first served, so arrive early for the best seats.

And don’t forget to bring bug spray and sunglasses to maximize your enjoyment — both laughter and sweet sorrow — of this delightful Tallahassee cultural tradition.