

**THE  
ACTING  
COMPANY**

**Kent Gash**  
Artistic Director

**Erik Schroeder**  
Managing Director

**Devin Brain**  
Producing Director

# Romeo and Juliet

Written by *William Shakespeare*  
Directed by *Leah C. Gardiner*



by Myxolydia Tyler and Kate Pitt

**STUDENT GUIDE 2022-23**

## Artistic Director's Note

By Kent Gash



Kirsten Childs' new version of **The Three Musketeers** and Leah Gardiner's **Romeo and Juliet** both engage the unstoppable essential vitality of loving hearts and the soul of youth. Sometimes careless, sometimes reckless, always exhilarating. The lives in these plays are lived at a kind of warp speed that is thrilling! There are moments in life when we feel invincible and throw caution to the winds. Actors, playwrights, and all of us who make theater throw caution to the winds as the lights dim and we dare to imagine, create, and embody a story to share with you, our audiences.

In William Shakespeare and Alexandre Dumas, we have two genius storytellers taking us on unforgettable journeys. If we're lucky, as D'Artagnan, the Musketeers, Romeo, Constance, and Juliet are, we experience this invincibility aligned with love. Romantic love, love of fraternity, love of ideals, and love of those who are like-minded or who have shared lived experiences, and more importantly, we are Montague or Capulet and we come to love those who are different from us. As we mature this sense of being invincible can lead to some of life's most satisfying and unexpected adventures. These adventures help to forge our identities and our beliefs. In a truly fulfilled life, they enrich and uplift us and we, in turn, enrich and uplift the lives of others.

These classic stories unleashed by this effervescent company of actors are reclaimed to enthrall audiences anew. In every human heart lies courage, loyalty, honor, faith, commitment, and an invincible endless capacity to love. Love flagrantly, with abandon and with joy! As we return to the theater and live performances, THE ACTING COMPANY happily invites you to enjoy these classic, romantic adventures!

WELCOME TO THE ACTING COMPANY! WELCOME TO THE THEATER!

Kent Gash is the Founding Director of The New Studio at New York University and the Artistic Director of The Acting Company.

# The Acting Company

## SINCE 1972

The Acting Company develops actors by touring professional theater across America.

Founded in 1972 by John Houseman and Margot Harley with the first graduating class of the Drama Division of The Juilliard School, The Company has launched the careers of some 400 actors, including Kevin Kline, Patti LuPone, Mary Lou Rosato, Keith David, Rainn Wilson, Lorraine Toussaint, Frances Conroy, Harriet Harris, Lisa Banes, Jeffrey Wright, Hamish Linklater, Jesse L. Martin, Roslyn Ruff, Jimonn Cole, Kelley Curran, among many others, while bringing sophisticated theater to hundreds of communities from coast to coast.

Among many accolades, The Acting Company won the 2003 Tony Award for Excellence in the Theater, and recently won the 2019 Audelco Award for Best Play for its production of Nambi E. Kelley's **Native Son** directed by Seret Scott.

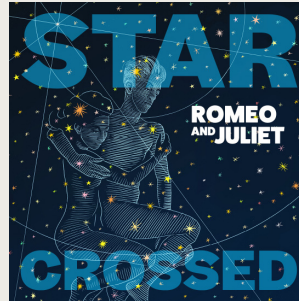
The Acting Company has been seen by over 4 million people in 48 States, 10 foreign countries, on and Off-Broadway, and at leading resident theaters including the Guthrie, the Kennedy Center and New York City Center.

New works commissioned by The Acting Company include plays by William Finn, Marcus Gardley, Rebecca Gilman, John Guare, Beth Henley, Tony Kushner, Lynn Nottage, Meg Miroshnik, Ntozake Shange, Maria Irene Fornés, Spalding Gray, Marsha Norman, and Charles Smith.

## 2022-23 NATIONAL REPERTORY TOUR

The Acting Company tours two productions each season that feature the same actors in a form called rotating repertory. These two productions are designed to be in conversation with each other.

### THIS SEASON:



By William Shakespeare  
Directed by Leah C. Gardiner



By Kirsten Childs  
Adapted from the novel by  
Alexandre Dumas  
Directed by Kent Gash

These two productions uphold our mission to reinvigorate the classics of the canon. They present vibrantly diverse perspectives even as we expand the definition of "classic" for audiences around the country.



# Romeo and Juliet: *Families and Feuds*

## Capulets

### **JULIET (TORÉE ALEXANDRE)**

The only daughter of Lady and Lord Capulet. She is thirteen years old and has been sheltered for most of her life by her parents but grows up quickly when she falls in love with Romeo.



### **LADY CAPULET (EUNICE WOODS)**

Juliet's mother and Lord Capulet's wife. She gave birth to Juliet at a very young age and has relied on the Nurse to raise her daughter. She is a fierce supporter of her husband and eager to see her daughter marry into her proper station.



### **LORD CAPULET (WILLIAM WATKINS)**

Juliet's father and Lady Capulet's husband. He loves his daughter but hasn't had much time to get to know her. He demands respect from the women in his life and he will make certain that if they cross him they understand that behavior is unacceptable.



### **NURSE (ZOE ANASTASSIOU)**

Juliet's guardian. She has raised Juliet and devoted her life to the Capulets. She is Juliet's confidant and doesn't shy away from sharing her views about life, love, and men with those around her.



### **TYBALT (DARIUS DEON)**

A Capulet cousin. Tybalt knows how to charm but can flip out at the drop of a dime. He despises the Montagues.



## Montagues

### **ROMEO (CHRISTOPHER THEN)**

The only son of Lady Montague. An extremely devoted, passionate, charming, idealistic, smart, sensitive man. He behaves impulsively at times, showing an immature side. He has never been one to fight but will do so if needed.



### **LADY MONTAGUE (CARO ZELLER)**

Romeo's mother. A passionate and loving woman who centers her life around her son.



### **BENVOLIO (SAM ENCARNACION)**

A Montague cousin. He is Romeo's best friend, confidant in his way of thinking, and a compassionate person who wishes for peace and love.



## Others

### **PRINCE (TY HAWTHORNE)**

Ruler of Verona. He is concerned about all things political and will do everything he can to keep peace. He is Mercutio's kinsman and has a commanding presence.



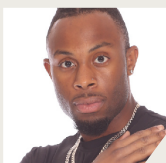
### **FRIAR (EDWIN BROWN, III)**

A religious man. He is thoughtful, kind, loving, and committed to preserving the environment and mankind. He wants to bring peace and goes outside of the box in his efforts.



### **MERCUTIO (TRAVIS RAEBURN)**

Romeo's friend. He is charismatic and charming, overflowing with imagination and wit. He is the Prince's kinsman and loves to play on words.



### **PARIS (MAX ANTONIO GONZALEZ)**

Juliet's suitor. Wealthy and gracious, Paris is the Prince's kinsman and a potential husband for Juliet.





## Families of *Verona*

The Montagues and Capulets - known as Montecchi and Cappellini - were real political factions in medieval Italy. The Montecchi took their name from a castle built on a small hill or "monticulus" in Latin, and the Cappellini from their distinctive hats or "capello" in Italian. Their names are first associated with each other in Dante's **Divine Comedy** and the earliest version of Romeo and Juliet's love story dates from the 15th century.

While Romeo and Juliet are fictional characters, feuding political factions and families in Medieval and Renaissance Italy were very real. Duels were a defining feature of aristocratic Italian life and fencing manuals describing moves like the "passado" (a forward thrust where the back foot passes the front) and the "punto reverso" (a backhanded thrust), both mentioned in **Romeo and Juliet**, were available to young men learning to defend themselves and attack others.

Powerful families like the Medici, Albizzi, and Pazzi families struggled for power and wealth and sometimes resorted to assassination to advance themselves, killing each other in homes, churches, and streets. Families and their feuds were often closely associated with the independent cities where they lived. When Romeo flees to Mantua from Verona, he is temporarily free from the "ancient grudge" plaguing his city, though Lady Capulet does have a plan to seek vengeance from afar.

Family feuds in America today are more likely to be found on TV than in the streets. However, conflicts between people with different family, political, and religious beliefs have been present from the founding of the nation. Families were split by the Revolutionary and Civil Wars - Benjamin Franklin's son spied for the British and John Wilkes Booth's brothers were Unionists - and rural feuds between families like the Hatfields and McCoys continued into the late 19th century. Though the "ancient grudge" that motivates the Capulets and the Montagues to hate each other is never specified, street gangs, mafia families, and violent political groups still exist and find reasons to hate each other in America and around the world.



## Plot Synopsis

**ACT I:** In the town of Verona, an age-old vendetta between two families, the Capulets and the Montages, springs to new and violent life. After a public brawl, the Prince of the city decrees that any further bloodshed will be punished by death. Romeo, a Montague, is lovesick, and his friends convince him to join them in sneaking into a Capulet party. Meanwhile, Juliet, a Capulet, is encouraged to marry a young nobleman named Paris. In the midst of the ball, Romeo and Juliet meet and instantly fall in love.

**ACT II:** After the party ends, Romeo sneaks into the Capulet's garden and climbs to Juliet's balcony. The couple confess their love and marry the following day.

**ACT III:** Tybalt, the tempestuous cousin of Juliet, challenges Romeo to a duel over his intrusion at the Capulet's party. Romeo refuses to fight, but his best friend Mercutio agrees and is killed when Romeo tries to break up the brawl. Enraged at the death of his friend, Romeo kills Tybalt. The Prince banishes Romeo on pain of death.

**ACT IV:** Romeo and Juliet share a single night together before Romeo flees the city. Juliet's grieving father decrees that she will marry Paris within a week. Desperate to escape this second marriage, Juliet goes to the Friar and agrees to fake her death until Romeo can return and take her away from the city.

**ACT V:** Romeo believes that Juliet is truly dead and returns to Verona to die by her side. Romeo confronts Paris at Juliet's tomb and kills him before drinking poison and dying next to Juliet. Juliet wakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with his dagger. After the bodies are discovered, Romeo and Juliet's parents vow to honor their children's memories and end their feud.

## Our Romeo and Juliet

Shakespeare's **Romeo and Juliet** is a classic story that has been reimagined a thousand times over because it addresses enduring themes and emotions. Why? **Romeo and Juliet** is a story about many themes that we as a society still deal with today. Its characters struggle with love, hatred, loss, expectations, parents, family feuds, and much more. These challenges persist across cultures and resonate with young people today as much as they did in Shakespeare's day.

The Acting Company's adaptation of **Romeo and Juliet** was created through a collaborative process of cutting the full text of Shakespeare's play into a shorter version. The prologue of **Romeo and Juliet** tells us that the play will be "the two hours traffic of our stage." However, Shakespeare plays in performance run at about 900 lines per hour and the full text of **Romeo and Juliet** has 3,174 lines. This works out to about three and a half hours of stage time. In order to keep the prologue's promise, individual lines as well as whole characters and scenes must be cut. There are some lines in **Romeo and Juliet** that are rarely heard onstage, like Romeo's description of the Apothecary's shop with its stuffed alligator and "ill-shaped fishes" hanging on the walls.

This production of **Romeo and Juliet** features some lines in Spanish. Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, known for his richly-textured love poetry, translated the play in 1964 for graduates of the University of Chile to perform. Some of the characters in this production are Spanish-speaking and speak Neruda's words both to each other and to characters who speak only English.



# What is a Classic?



A classic is an established story that has endured through time and is remembered, referenced, and adapted by people from diverse times, places and cultures.

Although a “classic” story is often thought of as the same as an “old” story, The Acting Company produces plays that are “in dialogue with the world as it exists right now,” according to Artistic Director Kent Gash. In an Acting Company production, classic texts are often adapted to mirror the world of today. The Acting Company adapts classics that necessitate a precision of language and physicality and require actors who can breathe and understand every nuance of the meaning of classic words while creating specific characters relevant to our current human experience.

**LEGACY OF ADAPTATION:** *Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare’s most popular plays. It has been adapted and performed countless times in different forms. In the 19th and 20th centuries, *Romeo and Juliet* was adapted into new forms including opera, dance, and film. A musical theater adaptation, *West Side Story*, debuted on Broadway in 1957 and set Shakespeare’s story among teenage street gangs in New York City. Popular films directed by Franco Zeffirelli in 1968 and Baz Luhrmann in 1996 brought Shakespeare’s play to movie theaters, and 21st century film adaptations like *Romeo Must Die*, a martial arts action film, and *Warm Bodies*, a zombie romance, continue to explore Shakespeare’s play in new contexts.

Each adaptation finds its own way into Shakespeare’s play, engaging with a “classic” story in a contemporary way that allows new audiences to connect with the characters. The scene where Romeo and Juliet pledge their hearts to each other is powerful in every adaptation whether they are holding onto a stone balcony, metal fire escape, or concrete pool edge.



Romeo and Juliet, 1968 (Zeffirelli)



Romeo + Juliet, 1996 (Luhrmann)



West Side Story, 2021

# The Playwright

The Myth and Legend of William Shakespeare

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (PLAYWRIGHT)

William Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet, and actor. He lived over four hundred years ago and many records of his life have been lost or were never kept. However, there are some facts we do know about him. William Shakespeare was born in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. When he was eighteen years old, he married Anne Hathaway and had three children with her, a daughter named Susanna and twins named Hamnet and Judith. By 1592, Shakespeare was working in the London theater scene.

Shakespeare was a founding member of an acting company named the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He wrote new plays for this company, often adapting existing stories, and produced on average two new plays per year for nearly twenty years. In 1603 after years of popular productions, his acting company became known as The King's Men when King James I gave them his patronage. In total, Shakespeare's surviving writing includes around 38 plays – some in collaboration with other playwrights – 154 sonnets, and 2 long poems. William Shakespeare died at the age of 52 in the same town where he was born. There are no surviving manuscripts in his hand, however some of his writing was published during his lifetime and 36 of his plays were published in a collected volume called the First Folio after his death.



## SHAKESPEARE AS ADAPTER (THIEF)

Most of Shakespeare's plays are adaptations of existing plots. While the language is usually his own, Shakespeare often based his plays on other plays, histories, poems, and stories that already existed. One of Shakespeare's main sources for **Romeo and Juliet** was a long poem called **The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet** by an English writer and translator named Arthur Brooke. Brooke in turn based his story on several earlier Italian sources.

There are specific similarities between Brooke's poem and Shakespeare's play as well as a number of significant differences. Both play and poem open with a 14-line sonnet summarizing the entire story. However, Shakespeare's play unfolds over five hot summer days – Romeo and Juliet meet on Sunday night and are dead by Thursday morning – while Brooke's poem unfolds over nine months and the lovers meet at a Christmas party. Brooke's Juliet is barely sixteen, while Shakespeare's Juliet is thirteen. Brooke expands the story in places where Shakespeare stays silent, telling us what happens to the Nurse and Friar after the lovers' deaths (she is banished and he becomes a hermit), and Shakespeare develops characters that Brooke only mentions in passing. Benvolio does not appear at all in Brooke's poem and Mercutio appears once as a party guest with very cold hands.

Some of Shakespeare's plays like **Love's Labor's Lost**, **The Merry Wives of Windsor**, and **A Midsummer Night's Dream** do not have major sources that we know about. **Romeo and Juliet** however, is as much stolen as invented. Shakespeare acted as both adapter and thief in its creation, stealing old stories and transforming them into a new play.

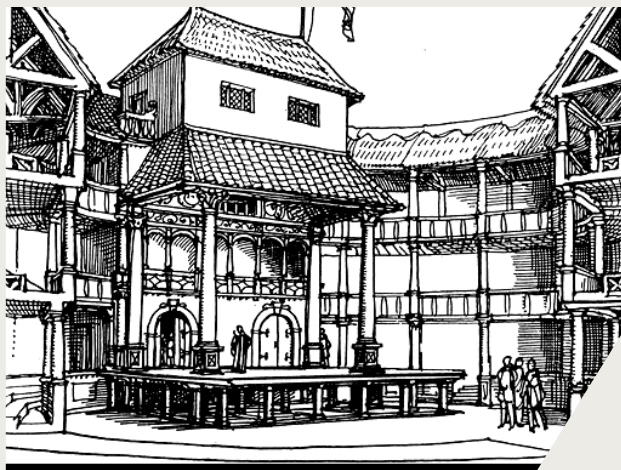


# The World and the Stage

## LONDON

Shakespeare's London was the largest city in England when he wrote **Romeo and Juliet**. Over 100,000 people crowded around the banks of the River Thames and Shakespeare was one of thousands of people who traveled to the city from the English countryside or abroad. London was the seat of government, where Parliament met and Queen Elizabeth I lived during the cooler months when the city stench and plague levels were less intense. The economy of London flourished during Shakespeare's lifetime and international visitors were a common sight.

Elizabethan London was not always a safe place and street fights like the ones in **Romeo and Juliet** did occur. In the 1590s when the play was written, Londoners rioted over food shortages and one of Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, Ben Jonson, killed a man in a duel. Swords over a yard in length were supposed to be broken at the city gates and not allowed in, however there were no limits on who could carry one.



## THE GLOBE

Visitors and residents who wanted amusement could attend the theater as well as other activities including animal baiting, fencing demonstrations, and concerts. These events often took place outside the legal limits of the City of London. In the suburbs, entertainers could avoid city government bans on performance that were meant to limit the spread of plague and raucous behavior. The theaters where **Romeo and Juliet** was likely first performed, creatively called "The Theatre" and "The Curtain", were both built outside city limits in the northern suburbs of London.

The Theatre was eventually dismantled and used to help build the Globe Theater on the south bank of London. The Curtain was the home of Shakespeare's acting company The Lord Chamberlain's Men until they moved to the Globe. Excavations at The Curtain have found broken ceramic bird whistles that may have been used for sound effects in **Romeo and Juliet** like the lark that tells Romeo it is morning.

## TODAY

Shakespeare's plays are performed all over the world and have been translated into over 75 languages. They are presented indoors and outdoors, in tiny storefront theaters and in Broadway houses, in parking lots, parks, schools, and more.

# Verse: *What Is It?*

Why does Shakespeare Use It?



## WHAT IS VERSE AND WHY DOES SHAKESPEARE USE IT?

"Verse" is another way of saying "poetry." Poetry is a style of writing that expresses feelings, ideas, and experiences using language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm.

## WHY DO WRITERS USE POETIC LANGUAGE TO TELL STORIES?

Poetic language is a tool that is recognized as having the ability to show intense emotions. A lot of times in a play if a character is feeling an emotion intensely they either speak in poetry or sing. Verse is a literary device that immediately tells the audience that what the character is feeling is beyond basic sentences.

Within poetry there are many different ways to write to show the depth of feeling. In Shakespeare's time the popular poetic device was using rhyming at the end of a line or phrase. This was called rhyming couplets. In **Romeo and Juliet** he uses rhythmic speech called iambic pentameter.

## WHAT IS IAMBIC PENTAMETER?

"Iambic pentameter" is a fancy way to talk about a specific type of rhythm. An iamb can be made up of one word with two syllables or two different words. The word iamb comes from the Greek iampos and Latin iambus which describe a short syllable followed by long syllables.

## An example of an iambic meter:

/ \_ / \_ / \_  
The bird has flown a way.

We speak a lot in this rhythm. It is also called the rhythm of our heart beat: "da-Dum." It makes sense that Shakespeare would use this form to convey emotion because it is so connected to our hearts. Hip hop music has rapping that also uses this meter as well.

## Check out the chorus of Lupe Fiasco's "Kick Push":

/ \_ / / \_ \_ / \_ \_  
And so he kick, push, kick, push  
/ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_  
Kick, push, kick, push, coast  
/ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_  
So come and skate with me  
/ / \_ / \_ / \_ / \_ / \_  
Just a rebel looking for a place to be

Iambic rhythm is all through this chorus. The song is about his love for skateboarding. Again the heart is connected in this hip hop song. This adaptation of **Romeo and Juliet** connects hip hop with Shakespeare's language because they are interchangeable. The Acting Company's adaptation connects the rhythms of hip hop culture to Shakespeare's language, letting it feel more modern while keeping the rhythmic form of iambic pentameter. Finally pentameter is a way of saying that there are five /\_ or da-dum heart beats in a phrase. Pentameter is "Penta-" is a prefix meaning five.

## So our earlier sentence:

/ \_ / \_ / \_ / \_ / \_  
The bird has flown a way too far to see  
Is now in iambic pentameter because there are five heart beats in this phrase.

Iambic pentameter feels like five heartbeats: da-DUM, unstressed syllable-STRESSED syllable in one phrase or line.

# Rhetorical Analysis: *Prose & Verse*

## **FRIAR:**

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-marked love,  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,  
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage.

- Prologue, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, Scene 1

## **VERSE:**

Much of *Romeo and Juliet* is written in verse or language that has a rhythmic pattern to it. Remember that iambic pentameter is five da-Dums to a line or phrase where in a two syllable word or group of words one is unstressed, and the second one is stressed. Iambic pentameter lines that are irregular are clues for actors.

## **PROSE:**

Some of the characters in Shakespeare speak in prose rather than verse. Prose is language that does not have a rhythmic pattern. Verse or iambic pentameter rhythm is often spoken by high status characters i.e. princes, kings, or any main character of the story. Prose is often, but not always, spoken by non-noble characters or characters of lower status i.e. servants, slaves, and non-nobles. This is not always the rule. Hamlet is a Prince who sometimes speaks in prose, and the shepherds in *As You Like It* speak verse when they speak of love. Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* is the Prince's cousin and speaks in both verse and prose. He speaks the Queen Mab speech in verse, but

## Prose

*Written or spoken language  
in its ordinary form, without  
metrical structure*

## Verse

*Writing arranged with a  
metrical rhythm, typically  
having a rhyme*

## **MERCUTIO**

Alas, poor Romeo, he is already dead, stabbed with a white wench's black eye, run through the ear with a love-song, the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt shaft. And is he a man to encounter Tybalt?

## **BENVOLIO**

Why, what is Tybalt?

## **MERCUTIO**

More than prince of cats, I can tell you. O, he is the courageous captain of compliments. He fights as you sing prick-song, keeps time, distance, and proportion; rests me his minim rest, one, two, and the third in your bosom: the very butcher of a silk button, a duellist, a duellist!

- *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 4

# Bringing a Story to the *Stage*

One of the joys of the theater is every production is new and different. Even with the oldest plays each new group of artists brings them to life in their own way. Each company interprets the play, decides what it means to them and why it needs to be brought to life for this audience.

For our production, **director Leah C. Gardiner** said this:

Romeo and Juliet speaks to the present moment in the United States and in the world because we find ourselves at a time where there is significant divisiveness in our culture. As long as there's human conflict and as long as there are people who don't like each other, there will be a need to tell this story of love triumphing through difficulty, through disagreement, and through chaos. In our production of **Romeo and Juliet**, there will be young people who reflect many people in the audience. Young audiences will see people who look like them, who don't feel too far removed from their own age group, and hopefully that will be a way for them to begin to access what the story is actually doing.

With that in mind she gathered a company of actors, designers, technicians, and artisans to build a **Romeo and Juliet** for today.

These are a few of those people.

## **ARTISTIC TEAM (SOME OF THEM)**

Scenic Design by **Edward E. Haynes, Jr.**

Lighting Design by **Dawn Chiang**

Sound and Music by **Lindsay Jones**

Costumes by **Lex Liang**

Fight Direction by **J. David Brimmer**

Choreography by **Adesola Osakalumi**

Voice and Speech Coaching by **Xavier Clark**

Intimacy Coordination by **Ann James**

Stage Management by **Melissa Richter**

Assistant Directing by **Kate Pitt**

## **A VILLAGE**

Over 100 people worked to create our production of **Romeo and Juliet**, and its partner production **The Three Musketeers**. They rehearsed for 10 weeks, but they started planning and designing months before rehearsal began.

Each of these artists lent not only their skill but their ideas to the production. Lead by the director, this production is a true collaboration, bringing together artists from a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and cultures to create something new.

Producing a play takes a village, and when one is producing Shakespeare it takes more than a village. These plays are challenging, and in order to reach our audience they must be both cherished and challenged.

The artists on this page, and the actors listed earlier, were the ones doing that work.



# The People *Behind* the Scenes



## **THE PLAYWRIGHT**

A "wright" is a type of artisan who makes things that people can use. For example, a wheelwright makes wheels. A playwright makes plays and usually completes a draft of the script before rehearsals begin.

## **THE DIRECTOR**

After reading the playwright's script, the director decides on an overall vision for the production and decides which designers to hire to support their ideas. The director meets with the creative team to assemble a unified look for the sets, costumes, lighting, and other elements. The director oversees the actors in rehearsal with the help of the stage manager.

## **THE ACTORS**

The actors perform the play and draw on their own experiences and understanding of life to create believable characters. Actors usually audition for their parts after the play is written and the director is chosen. Actors must memorize their lines and attend many rehearsals before opening night.

## **THE STAGE MANAGERS**

The stage managers facilitate communication across departments, organize rehearsals, and call technical cues during performances as well as maintain the artistic intentions of a production after opening. They are usually hired around the same time as the designers and actors.

## **DESIGNERS (SETS, PROPS, SOUND, LIGHTS, AND COSTUMES)**

All theaters need an environment created on stage for the play to take place and the designers help create that world in collaboration with the director. The set can be a literal world, with many objects ("props") and lots of furniture or it can be a suggestion of reality with minimal actual components. Music and sound effects can make the theatrical experience more real or more fantastical. The lights add to the environment of the play and enhance the mood that the other designers have created. The costume designer and costume staff work within the vision of the director for each character. They choose colors and styles to help the audience better understand the characters and often do historical research to make the world of the play come to life. For The Acting Company touring productions, the set must be easy to assemble and disassemble and the sound and lighting design must be able to be recreated in each venue.

# Q&A with *Lex Liang*

## **Q: HOW DID YOU APPROACH CONCEPTUALIZING THE COSTUMES? DID YOU HAVE TALKS WITH THE DIRECTOR?**

A: The approach to this show was like most, starting with conversations with Leah, our director, and absorbing all the information and all of the ideas that she had. After that download, I'm able to mentally sketch the world that she wanted to create and the characters that inhabit that world. Doing a contemporary version of **Romeo and Juliet** with dance and movement (created by Adesola, our wonderful choreographer) driving the action presented its own unique challenges, since we needed to create a clear visual vocabulary to identify each character and group onstage, but also allow the actors to perform the various dance moves safely and comfortably, while navigating our jungle gym of a set. What I enjoyed most about Leah's concept and approach was that she was clear that Juliet and Romeo had to have something in common—a love of specific types of music and dance that connected them beyond plain teenage lust. It really gave them an additional dimension that was fun to translate into their characters' clothing.

## **Q: WHAT WAS THE MOST DISTINCT THING THAT STUCK OUT WHILE RESEARCHING THIS PERIOD BEFORE CREATING THE COSTUMES?**

A: I didn't actually research the period so much (since our concept was contemporary, modern dress) as research different contemporary fashions and styles of dress that made sense with the characters our actors were portraying. It's always a fun challenge doing a contemporary show, since there really are no specific rules as to the way you put an outfit together. We wanted to create looks that the audience can connect with, but also, looks that allow the actors to appropriately portray their characters and do all the choreography (while also making a clean, clear, engaging stage picture).

## **Q: WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE COSTUME TO CREATE AND WHY?**

A: I truly enjoyed putting the ball looks together. They're very fun - a little fashion, a little costume, a lot of color and movement.



# Your *Romeo and Juliet*

## ACTIVITY

Once you have seen The Acting Company's **Romeo and Juliet**, you get a chance to Imagine your OWN **Romeo and Juliet**.

Our **Romeo and Juliet** is set in the United States and filled with contemporary characters skateboarding, breakdancing, and rock music. But what would your **Romeo and Juliet** look like? Sound like? Where is it set? Who are the actors?

When you read a play, that is part of the magic: the words on the page are the prompt for you to imagine what it would all look like onstage.

## THE PEOPLE

The key to any production is the cast, they are the heart and soul of your show. When you close your eyes, can you see what Romeo looks like to you? How about Juliet? Do they look like you?

Go to the front of the guide and look at the cast list. For each role find a picture online of an actor or historical figure that you would choose to play each role. With that you can create your **Romeo and Juliet** facebook.

## THE SET

Now, you have a cast, but where are they? Shakespeare's play takes place in Verona, Italy during the Renaissance, but for your production it can take place anywhere: Canada, the Moon, the bottom of the ocean, or your block. Think about this play, about these families, what do you think would help an audience see it and understand the story?

Find three images that represent the world of your **Romeo and Juliet**.

## THE SOUND

What does your play sound like? Are there harps and drums, horns and flutes of Shakespeare's theater? Are there beats and bass like The Acting Company's production? Or the pop music of Baz Luhrman's film?

Pick three songs from any artist that you think represent the sound of your **Romeo and Juliet**.

## THE CLOTHES

You've already picked the actors, but what are they wearing? What makes the Montagues different from the Capulets? Are they rich or poor? Do they live today or a thousand years ago? Are they carrying swords or machine guns?

Find four images of people in clothes that you think represent your production. Be sure to find one for the Capulets and one for the Montagues.

*Think when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;  
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings*

- Henry V, Prologue



### PARENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Contains adult themes, stylized violence, and adult situations (drinking, teen suicide, murder). Created for mature audiences.

### MORE RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE

[www.theactingcompany.org](http://www.theactingcompany.org)



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