

# Youth Theater's 'Romeo and Juliet' Merits Attention, Encouragement

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*Courant Theater Critic*

In "Romeo and Juliet," Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers are ardently in-love teenagers, and it makes for a provocative evening in the theater to see them actually played by adolescents. The Youth Theatre Unlimited production of this romantic perennial is hardly a flawless presentation, but there are enough elements of distinguished dramatic accomplishment to merit attention and encouragement.

Clay Stevenson has directed with aggressive, exuberant sweep, reveling in the excitement of the crowd scenes (the sword-fighting is remarkably adept) as well as coaching his actors to draw out each point of passion, tenderness and tragedy. Apart

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## STAGE REVIEW

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from a needlessly pretentious and arty staging of the prologue, Stevenson has found a flowing tempo that suits the pulses of his mostly young cast.

Tyron Leggett's Romeo, despite a tendency to rush lines, is winningly emotional, providing a nice contrast to Lisa Petruzzi's inwardly intense Juliet. Petruzzi's admirable British inflection sometimes flies eastward into a middle-European slur, whereas Billy Morrissette's Mercutio is always perfectly elocuted, even in the difficult Queen Mab speech. Morrissette, a vivacious actor, overplays much of the part, but enthusiasm is preferable to reticence.

Among several adults who as-

sume older roles, Marsha Hogan (the Nurse) stands out as a model of comic-tragic virtuosity. Dennis Meyers' Friar Laurence emerges uncomfortably Paul Lynde-esque, while Deborah Reynolds plays Lady Capulet as a Greenwich PTA mother, far removed from a centuries-old Verona sensitivity. Jim Mays's sloppy Lord Capulet is thoroughly inadequate.

Though Kenneth Steen's musical score is movingly atmospheric, Linda Glass's depressingly symmetrical set drains the presentation of visual interest. The color-efficient graphics work of Janet Abel (poster and program), while not part of the physical production, is stunningly stark.

*"Romeo and Juliet" ends after the performance Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at the Avery Theatre, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. Call 523-4553.*