

Why can't we all just get along?

# The Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Melody Brooks

New Perspectives Theatre Company ([newperspectivestheatre.org](http://newperspectivestheatre.org))

Washington Square Methodist Church

135 West 4th St. (730-2030)

Equity showcase (closes Nov. 23)

Review by David Mackler

Director Melody Brooks used the entire space of the Washington Square Methodist Church for her staging of *Romeo and Juliet*, a choice that highlighted certain aspects of the play but proved a hindrance to others. With action, entrances, and exits happening all around the audience, and with quite a lot of dialog spoken directly to audience members (as if a response in iambic pentameter was expected), there was a definite sense of being in the middle of the turmoil that is fair Verona. It's a way of looking at *Romeo and Juliet* that isn't usually seen. This Verona is a ferment of angers, jealousies, rivalries, and horny young men -- no chance for a sex joke (and Shakespeare filled the text with lots of them) was missed.

And then there are these two kids caught up in a passion they can't control. But the sense of ferment was so powerfully wrought that when the play concentrated on delayed messages, misunderstood pretense, and overwrought emotion, it seemed like a diminishment. What's happening in the society was more interesting than the plight of the titular characters.

**Erwin Falcon** and **DeAnna Gonzales** played Romeo and Juliet as headstrong, overwhelmed teenagers, as recognizably modern in their willful actions as they were faithful to the text. Their passion was typically adolescent - where the play at passion can be more passionate than the actual passion itself. But what about Lord and Lady Capulet -- their concern/anger/missteps/justifications/despair had more of a character arc, and the performances of **Patrick Turner** and **Joan Valentina** were shaded and nuanced in ways that overshadowed the kids. Benvolio (**Natalie Lebert**) had a humanity that shone out, and Mercutio (**Jason Howard**) and Tybalt (**E. Calvin Ahn**), emblematic of the social unrest, kept the sense of life in Verona front and center. **Kathy Gail MacGowan's** Nurse, as obsessed with breasts and pregnancy as the boys were with erections (maybe it was hormonal -- the nurse was pregnant herself) made her first appearance into something of a musical production number. And the whole production was very physical. No one stood and declaimed; rather, speeches were delivered on the run -- to, around, and through the audience. Attention had to follow sounds, and if it felt like there was someone behind you, well, there was.

But while the impetuosity and impulsiveness of Romeo hiding in an aisle, and Juliet's compulsive to- and fro-ing on the balcony contributed to the tumult, it was their story that slowed down the proceedings. The romance was secondary; the Tragedie of human inhumanity was at the forefront. Mercutio and Tybalt's fight (very well staged by fight director Ahn) was more important than what set it off, and Mercutio's death was more of an issue than who he is.

So here it's Lord and Lady Capulet who make a better case for how societal pressure affects individuals, because they're the ones who have to clean it up at the same time they deal with their grief. If the problems of a couple of kids don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world, the New Perspectives production seems to say, it's the crazy world that's the problem. But it would have been nice to have a romantic couple to root for as well, even though you know going in that the world is stacked against them.

Also with **Darren Ryan**, **David Ellis**, **Kenneth Wayne**, **Nadhege Alexandré**, x, and **Sandra Parris** as an unusual, but surprisingly creditable Friar Laurence. Production design by **Meganne George**, lighting design by **Amy C. Harper**.