Matthew Bourne's

ROMEO AND JULIET

Saturday 8th June 2019 @ 2.30

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for Matthew Bourne's much anticipated new adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, produced by his 'New Adventures' company, designed by Lez Brotherston, lighting by Paule Constable and sound by Paul Groothuis. The new orchestrations of the Prokofiev score are by Terry Davis and played live by the New Adventures orchestra.

I am Veryan your describer for Act one, with my colleague, Wendy describing Act two. The show runs for about two hours with a twenty-minute interval.

The director, Sir Matthew Bourne, with his own inimitable style of choreography and storytelling, has re-imagined Shakespeare's timeless tragedy of forbidden love and repressed teenage emotions and in so doing created a passionate and contemporary version of the legendry tale of Romeo and Juliet. This is a production bursting with youthful vitality and includes in its cast some of the South West's brightest young dance talent, who have joined the New Adventures Company for this production. The classic themes of passion, coupled with violence and death are portrayed with great sensitivity and vibrant energy from this talented cast.

In this quirky and in some ways somewhat startling production, the tale is set in the near future, in The Verona Institute, an institution where a company of young people, male and female are housed, confined in tight security in what could be seen as a detentions centre, a mental health hospital or even a prison.

In this adaptation, Montague is a senator, who, along with his wife, deposit their unruly son, Romeo, into the care of the institution. Here he meets another inmate, Juliet from the house of Capulet, and so the love story begins. Other unexpected changes from the original story include the casting of Tybalt as the loathsome and aggressive jailer / security guard who has designs on Juliet. In addition, Mercutio and Balthasar are portrayed as being in a relationship along with their friend, Benvolio. Nurse is portrayed as the institutes' resident Reverend, a kindly woman in charge of the young people's well being and pastoral care.

THE SET

The story, as I've already said, is set some time in the near future in the Verona Institute, a tight security detention centre-like place crossed with a prison or mental hospital for young people, and the clever set portrays this bleak and clinical place with breath-taking simplicity. At the back of the stage, facing the audience is a gently curved wall tiled in utilitarian shiny white tiles. In the centre of the wall is a prison-style door with an opaque glass panel and a loudspeaker above. Either side of the central door are two wide archways leading into the boys area on the left and the girls accommodation on the right, both entrances are, at times, enclosed by prison-style double gates made from white iron bars. The segregation is made plain by the words 'boys' and 'girls' picked out in small tiles above the appropriate archways. There are more wall-mounted loudspeakers to the side of these entrances. Extending out from either end of the curving wall are iron staircases - these lead to a wide balcony that runs the full length of the wall. This is edged with intricate iron safety railings. There is another, unseen staircase, that leads from the back of the balcony to unseen rooms below. On either side of the arched entrances are metal rungs set into the wall - these are used to great effect by the dancers as an alternative means of ascending or descending the balcony. In the background and enclosing the Verona Institute is a very high, metal framed, wire mesh security fence - this has four lockable entrances, two on either side and four emergency lights that flash orange when activated. Superimposed in big black letters against the background are the words, Verona Institute.

In one particularly inventive scene, the action moves from the boys' dormitory with it's rows of iron-framed beds covered by grey blankets, to the girls' bedroom, by the boys seamlessly swapping places with the girls. This is achieved by the boys rolling off the beds to hide beneath, whilst simultaneously being replaced by the girls - before swapping back again.

This set remains throughout the production with different venues indicated by a change in the lighting or the addition of pieces of furniture. For some scenes, a large circular, seemingly tile-patterned 'ceiling' is lowered along with five industrial style grey-metal lights. When the Reverend arranges a get-together dance for the inmates, a disco ball drops down from the ceiling. The furniture is minimal and consists of little more than a few iron framed beds, a polished steel desk and a few utilitarian stacking chairs. There is also a mortuary-style autopsy table. This wide marble slab has a headrest at the top and a drain at the foot.

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

The opening scene portrays the ending. In the centre of the otherwise empty stage, lying on a mortuary table, their bodies entwined in death, are Romeo and Juliet.

As a nurse and orderly, wheel away the autopsy table, the white-clad inmates of the institution assemble. These sad youngsters, male and female, are all dressed in the same long loose fitting white tops with slim white trousers and white gym shoes.

We then meet the venomous jailer come security guard, Tybalt. He is tall and muscular with very short hair and beard. He is dressed in black trousers, a white shirt with epaulets, black tie and shoes and a black baseball cap. Around his waist is a leather belt holding a gun holster, truncheon and a pair of handcuffs. Later his uniform shirt is replaced by a black Tee shirt, making him seem even more menacing. He is a complex character, with undisclosed weaknesses, who is totally infatuated by Juliet and pursues her with a violent and aggressive determination. Next we meet a nurse and an orderly, both wearing white medical tunics and trousers, the nurse with a matching cap. The orderly has a stethoscope and both carry clipboards and push polished chrome drugs trolleys as they review their charges prescriptions and dole out drugs.

Juliet's presence amongst the inmates becomes apparent when she is singled out by Tybalt. She is tall, slim and very pretty with long sandy coloured hair plaited back from her face before hanging down her back in a ponytail. She, like the other inmates, is dressed all in white.

Finally, Romeo arrives at the institute. He is escorted by his parents, the conventionally dressed, Senator and Mrs Montague. The senator wears a dark navy suit with shirt, tie and polished shoes, whilst his wife is dressed in a blue two-piece blue with high heels. They are received by Governor Escalus, who is dressed in a dark grey suit. Romeo is a tall, good-looking youth with rather unruly fair hair, who, like his parents, is also formally dressed. He wears dark trousers with a smart blazer over a shirt and tie and lace-up brown suede shoes - soon to be changed to the all white garb of his fellow inmates.

Next we are introduced to the sympathetic Reverend Bernadette Laurence who is in charge of the inmates' well being. She has dark hair framing a kindly face and is dressed in black trousers and top with a dog collar, covered by a long green cardigan.

With Romeo's arrival, we get to know three of his fellow inmates, Mercutio, Balthasar and Benvolio. In this adaptation a new slant is placed on the relationship between these three friends as is becomes ever more apparent that Mercutio and Balthasar are in a relationship. Mercutio is tall and dark with short hair and a slight beard, whilst Balthasar, is of similar height and build only with sandy hair and no beard. Benvolio, shorted than his friends, also has dark hair.

Throughout, complex choreography is used to convey the dramatic changes in mood, from passionate to terrified to oppressed to the almost robotic movements of those who've been medically drugged

The costume and scene changes will be describe as they take place.

The show contains violence, scenes of a sexual nature, a gunshot, moderate strobe lighting and is recommended for age 14 upwards.

When the audience enter the auditorium the stage is obscured by a fine black silk curtain, which, unbeknownst to the audience is red at the top. As the auditorium lights go down and the show begins, the curtain will flutter and fall giving the appearance of guttering flames - then disappear.

CAST and CREDITS

Romeo - Andy Monaghan - Joao Carolino

Juliet - Seren Williams - Bryony Wood

Tybalt - Danny Reubens

Mercutio - Ben Brown

Balthasar - Asher Rosenheim

Benvolio - Joao Carolino

Reverend Bernadette Laurence, Mrs Montague and Nurse - Madelaine Brennan

Senator Montague, Guard and Orderly - Matt Pretty

Frenchie - Jana Baldovino, Dorcas - Bryony Wood, Governor Escalus, Magdalen - Catrin Thomas, Lavinia - Natasha Chu, Morgan - Gaby Conn, Edmund - Louis Fukuhara, Sebastian - Stephen Murray, Fabian - Benjamin Derham.

The Plymouth Young Cast

Faith - Maea Morgan. Martha - Jessica Tarrant, Bridget - Ella Roberts, Griffin - Jamel Maarfi, Ambrose - James Knott