

Romeo and Juliet – through rainbow-coloured glasses

SHAKESPEARE'S R&J

At the Beaumont Studios, 316 W. Fifth,
to Nov. 18
Tickets \$10 to \$20, call 604-341-9706

BY PETER BIRNIE
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As a publicity stunt, MD Theatre Co-op has invited Prime Minister Stephen Harper to see *Shakespeare's R&J*. That's rather unlikely, despite the fact this is a superb little piece of theatre, because Joe Calarco's illuminating interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*

dares to explore the tragedy through a rainbow-coloured lens.

Gay theatre often shouts its intentions, but not this beauty. Calarco crafts a version of *R&J* set in a Catholic boys' school, and from word one it's a tight weaving of rich Elizabethan language and the fears of repressed young men. Lined up in school uniforms, they chant Latin text and spout vagaries about proper marital behaviour before secreting themselves with a battered copy of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Young actors Omari Newton, Jason Emanuel, Josh Drebit and

Daryl King then present an utterly compelling interpretation of what happens in fair Verona, acted with a maturity worthy of any Shakespearean stage. But they're also playing the boys themselves, excited at the intense drama of the fighting and feuding between Capulet and Montague and portraying the play's women with the awkward mincing of a teenager.

And there's something else going on, a budding chemistry between our Romeo (Emanuel) and Juliet (King). The celebrated balcony scene freaks out their friends, who

try to cut short any hint of homosexuality and prevent a kiss. Too late — Juliet has fallen for "the god of my idolatry."

The first act flies by, with the boys ending scenes abruptly and excitedly shouting out what's next: "Act 3! Scene 2! Capulet's orchard!"

Director Jack Paterson choreographs his cast carefully in a very small space, placing everyone exactly where they should be to milk a scene for maximum effect. He also finds endless ways for them to play with the piece's only prop, a red tablecloth used as a dagger or ring

or simply as a bloody link between lovers or haters.

Best of all, Paterson shapes the performances to fit together so well that while each actor could stand alone on any stage from Bard on the Beach to Stratford, this is also an amazing ensemble.

Kudos to King, a recent Studio 58 grad, for not only stepping in at the last minute when another actor cancelled but for doing so with flawless professionalism. *Shakespeare's R&J* truly soars with love's light wings.

Sun Theatre Critic

pbirnie@png.canwest.com