

**Adventures in Non-Traditional Approaches to Classical Text:
Directing William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet***

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies
(Theatre and Film)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

August 2010

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ABSTRACT

Adventures in Non-Traditional Approaches to Classical Text: Directing William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* examines the preparation, pre-production and rehearsal process behind staging *Romeo and Juliet* in the round that the Telus Studio Theatre, January 21-30, 2010.

As outlined in the following pages, my core objective was to explore and apply principles of *Le Jeu*, a physical and game-based approach to theatre as taught by Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier, to a classical piece of text. Elements of the production and rehearsal process were also to include Bouffon, Clown and French Melodrama. In addition, my aim was to experiment with gender-role reversal in the traditionally patriarchal society outlined in the text. In the rehearsal hall my focus was on giving the actor the freedom to dream, play and experiment beyond the confines of traditional approaches to text. In performance this production was framed as a company of grotesques performing the greatest love story of all time in a live cabaret setting.

This paper includes biographical information on the playwright, a directorial analysis of the script, a journal chronicling the entire production process from thesis proposal submission through to the run of the show and a short reflection on the process concluding with final thoughts on the production.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank you all

I thank you, honest gentlemen; good night.

- Lord Capulet *Romeo and Juliet* Act I, scene 5

Many thanks to the entire cast and crew for your fearlessness, sense of fun and adventure. An extra big thanks you to Carmen, Conor, Mishelle, Patrick, Ana and Nick H. for bringing my imagination to life. Steph can never be thanked enough for her dedication and going above and beyond the call of duty, always with a beautiful smile, in even the darkest hour.

Thank you to Jay Henrickson and Keith Smith for keeping the fire burning, to Craig Holzschuh for reminding me that Verona is a dangerous place, to Stephen Heatley and Stephen Malloy, to Max Reimer, Brian Cochrane, Patrick Gauthier and especially to Neil Freeman for not only providing the First Folio text but also for generously taking me under your Shakespearean wing.

And to Sarah Rodgers, a million thank yous for absolutely everything.

For Philippe Gaulier who taught me the beauty and pleasure of taking risks.

And for the Leger, McGee and Di Gaetano families: thank you for your love and support.

CHAPTER ONE

Biography: A Brief Account of the Life of the Playwright

THE EARLY YEARS

Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere [sic] was baptized at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon, on April 26, 1564. The parish registry contains the earliest record of the first son, the third of eight children, born to John and Mary Shakespeare. Given that during the time, baptism customarily took place three days after birth, it is possible that the infant was actually born on April 24, however, with no concrete evidence of the exact date of nativity, April 23, has been widely accepted as the birthday of William Shakespeare.

While little is known of Shakespeare's formal education, much can be deduced from his father's position in Stratford as a dignitary. Despite his illiteracy and occupation as a glover, John Shakespeare's stature as a member of town council gives reason to believe that his children began their education at an early age. From perhaps as young as five years old, William would have attended an Elizabethan infants school before going on to the highly regarded King's New School of Stratford-upon-Avon. Studies at the time included a broad range of subjects including Latin, Greek literature, theology and grammar, all of which would ultimately show their influence later in Shakespeare's work as a playwright.

Recorded visits to Stratford from a variety of theatre groups suggest that in addition to being granted the privilege of a good education, William's theatrical imagination was sparked at an early age. Stratford was host to numerous productions by an array of traveling troupes in the 1570's, most notably the Earl of Leicester's Men headed by James Burbage, builder of London's first performance house, The Theatre. The troupes likely performed in the assembly room of the King's New School thereby allowing young William to develop an appetite for the theatre.

In addition, dramatic inspiration struck in 1575, when Queen Elizabeth paid a visit to Kenilworth Castle, a short distance from Stratford. At the age of eleven, the impressionable young William is said to have witnessed the Royal procession and recreated the event in a number of his works. The grand display included a water-pageant where a singing actor costumed as the Greek poet Arion was said to have been riding on the back of a dolphin. The dolphin, likely a decorated boat, encased musicians within its belly who played an accompaniment to the actor's song. The fact that both Orion in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Captain in *Twelfth Night* make allusions to this event supports the notion that William was influenced by the majestic the festivities at Kenilworth.

Due to his father's experience with increasing financial difficulties, William was unable to complete his formal education. Upon leaving school prematurely, it is likely he took to working in an attempt to help support his family. The precise number of years William was educated is therefore unknown and it is theorized that upon leaving school, he apprenticed as a butcher in his father's shop.

At the age of 18, on November 27, 1582, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway from Shottery, a woman eight years his senior. On May 26, 1583, approximately six months after the wedding took place, Anne gave birth to Susanna, the first of Shakespeare's three children. By February 2, 1585, the Shakespeare family was complete with twins Judith and Hamnet. Hamnet Shakespeare died at the age of eleven leaving Susanna and Judith as William Shakespeare's only offspring. The 1670 death Susanna's only daughter Elizabeth marked the end of William Shakespeare's direct line.

THE LOST YEARS

Little evidence exists and much speculation has been created around Shakespeare's activities after the 1585 birth of the twins and until 1592 when he began to gain

notoriety in the London theatre. Scholars have termed this period the Lost Years and the era is rife with speculation regarding Shakespeare's dealings and whereabouts.

Theories abound that Shakespeare was a heavy drinker, particularly during the lost years, and can be traced to a single letter from an anonymous traveler published in the pages of a 1762 magazine. The story recounts a tale the traveler was told while lodging at Stratford's White Lion Inn. After a night's escapade with one too many pints of ale, Shakespeare, it was reported, slept it off under a certain crab apple tree that later dubbed "Shakespeare's Canopy." Through generations, this story was embroidered with embellishments, none of which are founded on any tangible grounds beyond the fact that a tree once existed in the famed location though the rotted arbour was eventually removed sometime in the nineteenth century.

Shakespeare the Deer-slayer is an extremely popular and much debated explanation for a portion of his lost years. It is thought that Shakespeare, having poached a deer from one Sir Thomas Lucy, fled to London in order to avoid prosecution. Over time, this legend claimed that the poet stole the buck to celebrate his wedding day, that he had frequently been caught stealing not only venison but rabbits as the result of falling into bad company and that while hiding the deer in a near by barn, he had also seduced the barn keeper's daughter. Others painted Shakespeare not as a thief but an admired hero championing the rights of free forestry, and therefore incurring the wrath of a powerful lord. The tale ends with accounts of Shakespeare having been whipped, held in the stocks and imprisoned in the very barn in which he, trespassing, attempted to store the stolen deer. Another version asserts that the episode ended with a frightened William Shakespeare taking his exodus from Stratford after the enraged Sir Thomas merely made threats of the aforementioned punishments. This legend and its variations have been the subject of much scholarly research giving way to plausible theories that characters and plot points in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2* were born from Shakespeare's desire to settle some sort of old score with Sir Thomas Lucy.

Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's first biographer, suggests that, once in London, the Bard worked at the Red Bull playhouse, employed as what can essentially be summed up as an Elizabethan valet. Waiting at the door of the Red Bull and holding the horses of audience members during performances, a young man quickly became known as the swiftest and most careful of waiters. His efficiency and care quickly earned him the patrons' trust and he became frequently asked for by name, "Will. Shakespear". Being entrusted with more horses than he could hold onto, Shakespeare is said to have hired a group of boys to wait under his supervision. This team of waiters promptly earned the title "Shakespear's Boys" and Shakespeare is said to have garnered a pretty wage as the result of his entrepreneurial endeavour.

Of course, there also are copious accounts of Shakespeare having remained in the country during the lost years, though speculation around his exact location varies. With a variety of his plays demonstrating Shakespeare's comprehensive understanding of the law, it has been theorized that he was at one time employed in the office of a county attorney. Another possibility circulates around his having worked as a rural schoolmaster a private tutor. This theory is given considerable weight based on his early plays *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors* each demonstrating the playwright's thorough knowledge of pedagogues, schoolbooks and philosophers. Similarly, Shakespeare is speculated to have spent these years as a soldier, sailor, printer, barber, surgeon, and physician, among others. With all of that on his plate, Shakespeare must have been very busy. No wonder he fled to London!

Perhaps the most intriguing of the suppositions that abound during the lost years however is that which proposes that Shakespeare was a member of a theatre troupe before eventually becoming a partner the famous Lord Chamberlain's Men. Speculation circulates around two theories. The first premise places Shakespeare some hundred miles from Stratford working as a player with the Houghtons of Lea Hall in 1583. The second stems from a 1587 visit to Stratford by the Queen's Men, the most widely respected theatrical troupe of the time. While the precise date of the

company's arrival is unknown, records indicate that on June 13, one of the group's actors was killed while attempting to assault his fellow cast member. Had the troupe arrived in Stratford shortly after this event, they would have been one player short, giving the company cause to recruit a new member, possibly a novice William Shakespeare.

Many of the aforementioned theories circulating around the lost years have of course been rejected with as much fervor as they were created. The notion that Shakespeare was a heavy drinker was dismissed as mere nonsense almost as soon as the theory surfaced in the 1700's just as the notion of Shakespeare as a butcher has been debunked on the knowledge that John Shakespeare was a wool gatherer and glover, not a butcher at all. Though a good deal of writing around Shakespeare's lost years focuses on the deer-poacher legend, the theory is often dismissed as simple country gossip that has been embellished beyond the point of distinguishing inflated hearsay from true events.

While Shakespeare's proposed career as a horse-man could have had influence with respect to his rapid rise in status with the London theatre circles, it has been counted as fiction on the basis that the Red Bull was not erected until 1604, well after Shakespeare had established his theatrical career. It is worth mentioning that Shakespeare has also been hypothesized to have worked as a prompter in the theatre but that too is based on ungrounded speculation.

The rural accounts of Shakespeare's lost years also bear little weight and even less proof than those theories that place him in London. If Shakespeare had been a county law clerk, his name or signature would exist in county documents and records of the time. Likewise, while the name William Shakespeare is recorded 1605 list of soldiers in a village near Stratford, the area had a fare share of Shakespeares and William Shakespeare the soldier is likely another man bearing the same name. Shakespeare the poet was already in London in the middle of a successful theatre career by 1605 so it is likely he would enlist as a rural soldier. The notion that he was

a teacher or tutor is perhaps the most plausible and certainly the least easily dismissed of the theories. Although he did not have a university education, teachers in rural areas did not require a degree or advanced instruction to be considered qualified.

With respect to his alleged early theatrical career, the suggestion that Shakespeare was employed as a player at Lea Hall in 1583 implies that the Bard, a recent husband and soon-to-be-father would have been working some hundred miles from his new family in Stratford. Regardless, this event occurs far too early to account for the seven-year span in question. The 1587 record of the Queen's men in Stratford can also be counted dubious since the dates vaguely refer to the entire span of time between December 1586 and December 1587.

Nevertheless, the case remains, Shakespeare must have been active in London as a player and writer before 1592. Robert Greene's publication of *Groats-worth of Wit* in March 1592 refers to Shakespeare as an "upstart crow" and a "Tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide." The latter quote is a pun on "Tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide," a line from *Henry VI Part 3*. Greene's allusion proves that Shakespeare was already an established member of the London theatre community by 1592 and that *Henry VI Part 1* and *Henry VI Part 2* would have already been written and performed given that the third installment was produced in March. For this to be so, Shakespeare's days in London and the theatre would have to have begun long before Greene's critique, possibly even as early as the 1587 visit to Stratford by the Queen's Men, despite the lack of proof.

In addition to the trilogy of *Henry VI*, Shakespeare is thought to have penned a number of other plays from the time before 1592 and leading up to the 1594 inception of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The exact dates that the works were written remain unknown but the plays in question include *Titus Andronicus*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III*, *King John* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In examining the model on

which the Globe Theatre based its season years later, whereby the Lord Chamberlain's Men took to traveling to rural areas during the summer months in order to avoid the heat in the crowded city of London, it is reasonable to believe that earlier troupes set the mode. In this way, it is possible that the Queen's Men followed did indeed land in Stratford sometime during the summer of 1587, perhaps shortly after June 13.

LONDON AND THE THEATRE

Shakespeare's early plays were initially performed at London's original playhouse, The Theatre, as well as at the Curtain, both located in Shoreditch, north of the river Thames. When the theatres were closed by the plague in 1593 and 1594, Shakespeare turned to writing narrative poetry, specifically *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, which were published during this time. When the playhouses were reopened and troupe was initiated the Lord Chamberlain's Men by patron Lord Hunsdon, Shakespeare began to write his plays exclusively for the company in which he was now part owner. By 1597 the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed regularly at Court exclusively giving all six Royal Command performances and Shakespeare, who was now dividing his time between London and Stratford, was beginning to earn considerable money and notoriety. After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the Lord Chamberlain's Men were renamed the King's Men in honour of their new patron, the newly ascended King James I.

THE GLOBE, THE PLAYERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

When James Burbage, the builder of The Theatre, died in 1597, he left the building to his son Richard – an actor and one of Shakespeare's partners in the Lord Chamberlain's Men. While the company was fortunate to have a theatre in which to play, the structure itself was built on land whose lease was set to expire the next year. When the landlord, refused to renegotiate the terms of the lease, Burbage and several others dismantled The Theatre during the frigid night of December 28, 1598, possibly

sliding the timbers across the frozen Thames. They reassembled the structure south of the river, just two hundred metres from rival Philip Henslowe's theatre The Rose. On February 21, 1599, an agreement was signed with the landowner of the new location. Richard and Cuthbert Burbage carried half of the lease, the other half was conveyed to company members Pope, Phillips, Heminges, Kempe and Shakespeare. Already a successful writer, actor and company shareholder, Shakespeare was now part owner of a theatre – The Globe.

The Globe ran a season of plays from late August until Christmas, at which time the Lord Chamberlain's Men would sometimes be invited to perform at court as part of the seasonal festivities. From January until the beginning of Lent in February, performances recommenced at the Globe, and they continued to do so again from the period after Lent until the start of summer. The company left London no later than July, touring rural areas through until August. Performances at the Globe began at 2pm in the winter and 4pm in the summer for the obvious reason that daylight was required for visibility.

The could audience pay one penny to stand in the pit, the most boisterous area of the theatre, located in the open-air yard at the base of the thrust stage. For additional sums, spectators could sit, covered, in the first and second gallery, situated on the second and third levels of the theatre. Notables could observe and be observed in the Lord's Box, the most prestigious and expensive seating positioned above and behind the stage.

Since there were no lights to dim or curtains to raise at the Globe, it was necessary to employ strategies to alert the audience when a performance was about to begin. Although a flag was hoisted, it is unlikely that this device was sufficient enough to attract the attention of 2000 to 3000 rowdy individuals. It is partially for this reason that Shakespeare took to beginning his works with prologues or long orations. The Chorus in *Henry V*, the Prologue at the start of *Romeo and Juliet* and Orlando's speech to Adam that marks the beginning of *As You Like It* all serve as examples of

Shakespeare's attempt to inform the patrons that the show was beginning.

As Shakespeare now had a specific theatre for which could compose his works, the structure and nature of the Globe acted as a significant influence and as such was often referenced in the plays. The inscription on the Globe's sign, *Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem* ("The Whole World moves the Actor") is alluded to by Jacques' famous speech "All the world's a stage" in *As You Like It*, while the Chorus' description of the "wooden O" in *Henry V* is refers to the physical orientation of the Globe theatre as a round or octagonal structure. Likewise, the balcony that often housed musicians was used for numerous purposes including Juliet's famous balcony.

Though the Globe could accommodate thousands of spectators, the nature of the space was intimate affording ample opportunity for the players to interact with the audience. It is possible to consider that the number of soliloquies and asides in Shakespeare's plays were intended for direct address and subsequently required improvisation when met with unpredictable responses from the animated crowd. Whether the audience reaction took the form of simple booing, laughter and cheering or something requiring spontaneous actor response, Shakespeare's later writing may have been influenced by improvisations. As his works evolved, it is possible that they were enriched by unplanned for responses during earlier performances just as the pageantry of that single day at Kenilworth so many years earlier worked its way into so many works.

Sometimes considered dull on the page, there is an implied visual element that is essential to Shakespeare's plays, one that exists as a reminder that Shakespeare was primarily writing for the purpose of theatrical performance and not for academic analysis. The excess of blood in *Titus Andronicus*, the play within a play in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the overall fantastical nature of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* each serve as reminders that Shakespeare's writing was intended to be brought to life by actors for a live audience.

Being attached to a single company, the one with which he remained for the rest of his career, Shakespeare had the advantage of writing not only for a specific playing space but for a particular group of actors as well. As such, he was able to customize his writing to make best use of the strengths each individual member of the troupe. As the Bard seemingly took precautions not to have his plays published he could ensure that his works were not immediately copied, sold and performed by whomever pleased.

Plays developed between 1588 and 1594 typically included five men and up to six younger apprentices. Each script included five archetypical men written for one of the five key members of the troupe: two comedians, two young men and one amusing dignitary of advanced age.

The comic roles included a low comedian or clown and a high comedian or “fat fool” (Baldwin, 235). Often the receiver of blows and victim of pranks, the clown is exemplified by such characters as Dromio of Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors*, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*. This character would have been written for William Kemp and later for his successor Robert Armin. The high comedian, usually played by Thomas Pope, is typified by Parolles in *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Twelfth Night*'s Sir Toby Belch and Falstaff.

Of the young men, one was usually characterized as a worthy figure, stately or regal, mature or of indeterminate age such as the King of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost* and was possibly played by George Bryan. Augustine Phillips would have played the other young male lead, the fickle lover as characterized by Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

The role of the old dignitary was normally written for John Heminges, though Shakespeare himself is thought to have played such roles as *Macbeth*'s King Duncan and the Ghost of Hamlet's father.

When Richard Burbage began to establish himself as a leading man, and two apprentices, Sly and Cundull, matured into strong actors, the five-character structure evolved. Shakespeare now had eight company members from whom he could draw inspiration, with Burbage, an unequivocal lead player originating the title roles. Richard III, Hamlet, Othello, Prince Hal, Macbeth, Bertram, Antony, Cymbelline or Posthumus, Ford, Timon, Pericles, Coriolanus, Leontes, King Lear and Prospero were all developed for Burbage with the accompanying roles being tailored to the other players. Lead characters that in earlier texts that are described as having chestnut hair, little beard, arched brow and of heroic physique, were written as such to match Burbage's own physical characteristics. As the actor aged, new lead characters began to be match his description. They were often handsome men who were showing slight signs of aging, such as Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The players performed in repertory at a turnover rate so frequent that each play would see little over 24-hours of rehearsal. This three-day period was just enough time for the actors to learn their lines, cues, stage business and precious little else. Each player received a script that contained his line and the preceding cue line. The prompter may or may not have possessed the only copy of the entire play. The psychological analysis laboured over by present day actors would have been unthinkable to Shakespeare's men who would have had no time to question motivation, action or intent. Though the players could rely on Shakespeare having written roles to suit their particular strengths, with barely any indication of when their cue line was about to be spoken, performers had little choice but to truly listen, respond, improvise and exist in the moment making for a very lively event.

A minimal rehearsal period also meant that designing and constructing elaborate sets was not possible, and perhaps not even thought of at all. The stage was often completely bare. From time to time, one or two specific items might be carried on and off stage if essential. However, Shakespeare's plays were intended to appeal to the imagination of the audience with actors frequently existing as the only stage adornments for patrons to feast their eyes on. As such, it was common for the

spectators to accept conventions that required the suspension of disbelief. Shakespeare audience would understand that certain characters were visible or audible only to them and not to the other characters on stage. With the audience's imagination primed, the magic of theatre could occur in the middle of the day with only the words that Shakespeare had so carefully crafted for his actors.

THE BLACKFRIAR'S THEATRE

In 1608 Shakespeare was in the financial position to become part owner in a second theatre, the Blackfriar's indoor theatre. Like the Theatre, Richard Burbage also inherited the Blackfriar's on the event of his father's death but leased it to a children's theatre company for a number of years before endeavoring to use it as a second playing space for the King's Men. The Blackfriar's was located on the grounds of a former monastery and, having the advantage of being completely indoors, was an ideal space for the players to perform in the cold winter months.

Now part owner of two theatres, Shakespeare had the advantage of writing pieces for an entirely different space and audience base. With the Blackfriar's able to accommodate only 600 people, tickets were sold at a higher ticket price to an upper class audience base. It is for this theatre that Shakespeare premiered *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* and *Cymbeline*, all known as romances or tragic-comedies. The indoor space was the first of its kind in that it allowed the illusion of theatre to be enhanced through the new ability to create lighting effects. Shakespeare now had an added element to work with as lighting could be let in or shut out by shuttered windows as well as emitted by candles in low-hung candelabras. The technology of theatre lighting was revolutionary and was reflected in Shakespeare's writing that now suggested experimentation with the effects of light and shadow.

THE LATER YEARS

On June 29, 1613, the Globe theatre burned to the ground when the thatch caught fire during a performance of *All is True* otherwise known as *Henry VIII*. The theatre was rebuilt a year later but Shakespeare had already begun to wind down his activities in London in favour of spending more time in Stratford. He owned several properties now and financially secure, was writing less and less. Many have considered Prospero's final words in *The Tempest* to be Shakespeare's own farewell to the stage. Given that, after it was penned sometime around 1610, he wrote little else on his own. His last few plays were collaborations, as was the fashion of the time, and were perhaps written with John Fletcher who followed the Bard as playwright for the King's Men. Shakespeare's collaborative efforts include such works as *Pericles Prince of Tyre*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the aforementioned *All is True*, and the long lost work *Cardenio*. It was thought that Charles Hamilton at the British Museum Library had recovered *Cardenio* in 1995 and now Professor Brean Hammond of Nottingham University in England, claims to have found the missing text, though at the time of this biography, the jury is still out.

On April 23, 1616 William Shakespeare died of unconfirmed causes. Three days later he was interred near the north wall of Holy Trinity Church, inside the very Parish in which he was baptized exactly 52 years earlier. Above his grave, a slab bears no name, only the following epitaph:

*Good friend for Jesus' sake forbear,
To digg the dust enclosed heare:
Bleste be y man y spares thes stones,
And curst be he y moves my bones. [sic]*

Possibly composed by Shakespeare himself, the inscription bears a warning to anyone who might dig up his decayed body in time to come, a common practice used in order to make room for the newly deceased. Bones from dug up graves were thrown into a bone repository called a charnel house, which, as Schoenberg points out is most famously referenced by Juliet in her plea to Friar Lawrence: "Or hide me

nightly in a charnel-house,/O'er-cover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,/With reeky shanks and yellow chapless skulls" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act IV, scene 1, l. 81-83). Perhaps this is the very same place Shakespeare had in mind when penning *Romeo and Juliet* in London so many years before, and Juliet's vivid description inspired by Shakespeare's own terror of the place. Given that the decaying plaque was replaced and reports indicate that no one has ever moved his bones, the epitaph was evidently effective, and the Stratford site remains a mecca for those who celebrate the life of William Shakespeare.

SPECULATION ABOUT AUTHORSHIP

Since his death, endless speculation has revolved around the issue of the true authorship of Shakespeare's writing. Several to all of his works have been attributed to a number of his contemporaries including Christopher Marlowe, Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford.

The most recent conjecture is based on an argument that William Shakespeare's works were actually penned by an Italian-born Jewish woman named Amelia Bassano Lanier. While there is little scholarly evidence to support this, John Hudson of *The Dark Lady Players in London* makes this argument on the grounds that a number of references and allusions in the Canon to hundreds of musical, Hebrew, Italian, feminist references and Jewish allegories could not possibly have come from anyone but Lanier, based on her upbringing, position as a poet and long time affair with Lord Hunsdon the Lord Chamberlain. Hudson goes on to argue that Lanier's involvement is further proved by the number of Shakespeare's characters whose monikers are based on variations of the names Amelia and Bassano. Hudson's theory does not appear to be based on any physical evidence and as such, bears little weight with scholars; it is worth mentioning at the very least as a novel and an inventive way to promote an upstart theatre company.

Regardless of the allegations, theories and speculations, the publication of the First Folio of 1623 bears unequivocal support for Shakespeare's authorship by his company members as well as by his fellow playwright Ben Johnson.

CHAPTER TWO

Directorial Analysis and Pre-production

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

“Beautiful things begin in the land of the bad.”

- Philippe Gaulier

Work on bouffons draws on an instinct for play which can be adapted for different situations.

- Jacques Lecoq

INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE PLAY

My initial response to the play was in 1991 in Miss Magnolie’s grade 11 English classes at Archbishop Denis O’Connor Catholic High School in Ajax, Ontario. I remember thinking - *at last! We get to study something about a girl!* After a year with *The Merchant of Venice* (where the study focused mainly around Shylock and Antonio with Portia’s impact upon the action of the play shamefully under-examined), and the following year with *Julius Caesar* (with yet another overlooked Portia), *Romeo and Juliet* appealed to my girlish sensibilities. Funnily enough, now I am drawn to the relationships between the men – Mercutio, Romeo and Benvolio; Paris and Capulet; the impact of the Prince; Friar Lawrence; Tybalt and his silent cronies; even Sampson and Gregory.

The play’s second major impact on my 16-year old brain at the time was the accessibility of the story and text. I wondered why this was not the first Shakespearean play our teenage minds had encountered. Indeed, there was something for everyone – fighting, romance, Catholicism (at Catholic school this was a big deal) not to mention that the story mainly focused around young people rather than staunch old senators.

Now, *slightly* older, in selecting a thesis production, being familiar with the student acting pool from whom I will cast, accessibility and youth are major factors in my

decision to direct this play. In reading and re-reading *Romeo and Juliet*, the simplicity of the story combined with complexity of Shakespeare's language leads to endless possibility. With evocative imagery, strong relationships, danger and above all, love, the script is rife with language that aches to be spoken aloud, to be echoed in a room full of people all hanging on to hear the next word... and the next.

The comic potential within such a tragic show also appeals to my background in clown, Bouffon and physical comedy. What is funny and why? When do events cease to be comic? Indeed, if Juliet were to wake up just two minutes earlier, the entire show would be considered a comedy – we would perhaps laugh at her “Farewell” speech in Act IV, tittering while she describes the ghost of Tybalt and the possibility of waking among rotting corpses. Where, in the midst of this tragedy, is the comedy? How much is too much? How much can still relate to audiences today? What, if anything, outside of the text, can be imagined and invented?

Initial directorial vision includes: actors on aerial silks (Juliet's balcony, bed and tomb are possibilities here); a live roving band; simple beauty juxtaposed with high physical comedy; and above all, a physical element that is both fantastical and appropriate to the text. It is essential that each addition is seamlessly integrated with the text in a way that makes it seem essential to the action of the play; that nothing comes off as “the director's idea.”

TYPE OR GENRE OF PLAY

Given that this play is Shakespearean, it is naturally a language play. A classic. A tragedy, yes, but I will focus on the notion that *Romeo and Juliet* could have been a comedy had Juliet woken up just two minutes earlier. This play is a comedy that goes very, very awry and ends tragically.

When dealing with a Shakespearean text, poetry, prose, word play, meter and rhythm all come into play. In using the first folio as our main script source, long-spellings, capitals, line length and heartbeat must also be given careful consideration.

Shakespeare's first folio offers many clues into the hearts, minds and intentions of each character. This is a gift - one that will be instrumental in unpacking the events of the lovers' ill-fated journey.

However, given the dark, cabaret element that will inform the performance style, it is important to me to spend a minimal amount of time at the table. The actors are armed with tools that enable them to deduce the clues that Shakespeare has provided in the folio and as such they are fully capable of doing thorough preparation for their roles before rehearsals begin. This being the case, I want to spend a maximum of two or three days at the table, focusing less on history or the genre of the original text and more on the basic action that propels the story.

STYLE

The style of this particular production will fuse physical styles of Bouffon, clown and ensemble work with Shakespeare's text in a setting reminiscent of a twisted, European cabaret. Actors will interact with the audience in order to fully explore and experience theatre as living, breathing art form.

Drawing from exercises developed and inspired by Philippe Gaulier and Jacques Lecoq, the production will focus on the spirit of Bouffon – the secret behind the eyes, a sense of play and mischief and the notion that the performers on stage have locked the real actors in the dressing room. At any moment someone could yell, "Hey you kids, get off that stage!" This is the danger that exists in Bouffon and why the actors must be charming and sensitive at all times, despite their bold appearance. While Bouffon is also considered to be theatre of parody, the satirical nature will be less prevalent than the aforementioned elements of the approach.

This play is presentational in nature. The challenge will lie in actors and the production being subtle, true and engaging in all moments while at the same time filling out a physical presence that is extreme, heightened and possibly alienating. There is danger in coming off as too "out there," pushing too hard and putting the audience off.

The opposite effect is desired – drawing the audience into the world of the play so deeply that the non-naturalistic nature is not distracting but rather integral to the story.

In addition to the above, there is room for drawing from the traditions of French Melodrama and good, old-fashioned classic cinema.

SPACE

The playing space is the Telus Studio Theatre, configurable space that opened as part of the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts in 1997 (originally named the BC Tel Studio). Side bar – I worked as a bar tender there during the inaugural season. Seating capacity will be approximately 180.

When set in the round, the Telus is extremely suitable for both Shakespearean productions (as it has the possibility of mirroring The Globe Theatre) as well as for the style of this particular production. While tall, the space is enclosed and intimate. The actors and audience have little choice but to acknowledge one another as there is little divide between the stage and the seating. This intimacy offers much possibility with respect to a mutual exchange between performers and spectators (particularly with those patrons sitting on ground-level seats). In the upper levels of the theatre, interaction is also possible due to access to passageways throughout each tower. Action can happen not only in and in front of but also in and behind the audience.

Challenges lie in the fact that the space is very sensitive to sound. A foot shuffling, a whisper, a door closing – any sound that is made anywhere in the space echoes boldly and can be distracting. The floor picks up the slightest footstep, the metal towers clang and bang at the most delicate, accidental tap of the hand or toe, and the doors crash and bang when opened and closed.

Lighting also provides a challenge as, with the audience so close to the action, creating well lit, isolated acting areas is nearly impossible without blinding or at least lighting some of the spectators.

Sightlines are an issue. My intention is to have action occur throughout the entire theatre, rather than just on the stage floor. This means that some audience members will miss out on what is happening. The uppermost tiers also face the reality of obscured views and diminished sound quality. In considering using one of the Telus towers for Juliet's balcony, the band pit and the Apothecary's house suggests the possibility that up to sixteen seats will miss out on major action. In a 180+ seat house, this is a significant number.

The Chan Centre rules are particular and strict. With so much climbable hardware, it is easy to view the Telus as an actor's jungle gym. However, there are specific rules regarding what the actors may climb and what they must not touch. In addition, I would like to have fire spinning in the show as part of the entertainment at the Capulets' party. This desire is challenged by Chan Centre's fire regulations and the effect I want to create could prove costly.

The size of the house is a blessing with respect to intimacy but also limiting to the playing space. A minimum of 180 seats must be available. Each box in each tower holds 4 chairs signifying up to 12 seats in each of the 11 towers that will be used. The remainder of the seats must be placed on the floor thereby limiting the already tight main acting space. This is especially troublesome when considering the extreme fights that must take place and the limitations imposed on the size of weaponry (an épée or saber will be far too long and will limit the actors' range of movement in relation to audience safety). With the necessity of having two rows on the floor, this also causes further potential sightline problems for those audience members who sit in the second row, as it is not elevated.

AUDIENCE

Given that the production is taking place as part of the UBC season, it can be assumed that the majority of the audience will be comprised of students, faculty, alumni, as well as friends and family of the cast and crew. The fact that the production is *Romeo and Juliet*, implies that the show will be a draw for Shakespeare lovers and

educators. Based on this basic information, it can be supposed that the audience will be young or young at heart. My hope is that the show also draws Artistic Directors from Vancouver as well as those visiting for the international PUSH Festival (which runs at the same time as *Romeo and Juliet*).

It can be thought that seventy-five percent of the audience will be intimate with the script and twenty-five percent will have never seen or read the play before. Some will know the story inside and out and some will be experiencing the story for the first time. Most of the audience will never have witnessed the style or aesthetic I am going to employ so there will be a sense of newness for everyone. It is therefore important that the story is told clearly and that the aesthetic is integrated seamlessly. When an audience comes to a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, whether or not they have ever seen it, there are certain expectations of love, poetry, romance, difficult language, poufy pants and tights, flowers and the like. I will attempt to address the connotations and clichés that the audience carries in with them both by giving respect to the preconceived notions but by also turning them around.

Ideally when the audience leaves the theatre, regardless of their familiarity with the play, they will feel as though have experienced *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time.

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES OF PRODUCTION

a. Budget

- \$10,000 for props, costumes, set, sound, lighting and all other incendiaries.

b. Rehearsal Space

- Rehearsals will mainly take place in the Telus Studio Theatre. This is fortunate given the site-specific nature of the play and the challenges of the performance space. Time can be spent trying things out exactly where they will take place and problem solving can happen in the moment rather than waiting for later

in the rehearsal process. Actors will have time to become accustomed to the quirks of the playing space.

- Table work, music rehearsals and fight rehearsals will take place in Hut M17 (BC Binning) Room 128, simultaneously while I work on scene work in the Telus.
- We are fortunate to have approximately 200 hours of rehearsal time before technical rehearsals. With 22 actors, 25 scenes, complex movement sequences, heightened language, live music and up to 20 transitions to choreograph, this is time that will not be wasted. This time will be spread over seven weeks with a ten-day break at Christmas. It is my hope that this time away mid-process allows the acting work to sink in and solidify as the actors rest and that my imagination can be enriched and fortified.

c. Idiosyncrasies of Performance Space

- Flexible configuration, tall space with 3 tiers of seating in 12 towers. Each tower level seats 4 audience members and is ample enough to allow for action to take place in, around and behind the seating. The height of the towers gives possibilities for acting on multiple levels, creation of stage pictures and movement to be seen from various angles. The in-the-round configuration provides audience the opportunity to observe each patron's individual reaction thereby reinforcing the notion that the production is a live experience.
- Sound is an issue here – voices can be lost and the floor is hollow. Each factor can contribute to either a strong echo, when actors step too loudly or a muffled quiet, when actors do not use their vocal instrument efficiently. Additionally, sound rings and vibrates through the metal posts of the towers. A

remedy will be provided at the top of the show through significant sound created through physical action in the form of fight choreography as well as chaotic yelling.

- Entrance and exit possibilities are numerous – actors can emerge from backstage, front of house and back stairwells. A trap room is also available for entrances from and exits to below the stage. Additional possibilities for emergence from behind the audience will be explored.
- High catwalks and walkways behind the audience provide the possibility for overhead action.
- I would like to use these idiosyncrasies to their fullest advantage rather than viewing them as a hindrance.

d. Actors

- The cast is comprised of 22 student actors - mainly those in their final and intermediate year of the BFA Acting program though some students are in the BA program. 3 of the actors have worked in this particular theatre and only 3 have worked in the round. I anticipate this to be the biggest challenge with working with student actors. Language should be less of an issue as all major players have received training in approaches to acting Shakespearean text.

e. Length of Rehearsal Period

- November 30, 2009 - January 20, 2010 with a break from December 23-January 1.
- November 30 - December 4 will be a series of five 4-hour sessions. They will be informal, intimate meetings with the key players to go over text without the pressures of feeling they

have to perform for the rest of the cast or have all of the right answers. This is an exploratory period for the lead actors.

- December 6 - December 22 will be a “full-time” rehearsal period – six days a week for eight hours a day. This should allow ample time for significant initial exploration and blocking.
- December 23 – January 1 will be time off for all involved in observance of the holiday season. This period will also allow time for me to reflect on the project and process, hopefully upon returning to rehearsals, I will have a revelation, or at least fresh eyes after being immersed in the piece for so long.
- January 2 - January 14 will be a “part-time” rehearsal period. Four 4-hour evenings a week and one 8-hour weekend day. This will be the finessing period – details are tightened up, transitions built and music added.
- January 16 - January 20 – tech and dress rehearsals.

f. Amount of Rehearsal Time

- *Before tech:*
 - 17 – 8 hour days (6.5 hours incl. breaks)
 - 16 – 4 hour nights (3.75 hours incl. breaks)
 - Gross hours – 200 hours
 - Net hours (breaks included) – 166.5 hours

- *Tech and dress:*
 - 2 – 12 hour days (9.3 hours incl. breaks) and 3 – 4 hour nights (no or minimal breaks)
 - Gross hours – 36 hours
 - Net hours – 30.5 hours
- *Total Gross rehearsal hours (not incl. breaks) – 236 hours*
- *Total Net rehearsal hours (breaks incl.) – 196.5 hours*

g. Length of Run

- Ten performances (plus one open dress and one preview)
- Run time goal is 2 hours with a 15-minute intermission

PERIOD

Romeo and Juliet was written as a contemporary piece in Shakespeare's era (circa 1597 or so). Taking full advantage of the fact that his texts are so open to reinvention and experimentation, this production will take place in a fictional, non-specific era that is reminiscent of, but not limited to, European cabaret. The look of the show will be loosely based on the suggestion that players perhaps hail from a time between but not limited to 1880-1930, Europe. The Bouffon influence will be the key factor in avoiding the limitations of a specific label with respect to exact time and place, thereby creating a blend between the aforementioned loose time period and an other-worldliness. The playing style will indicate that the show is indeed live, taking place in a 2010 world. The feel should ideally be that the acting company is a comprised of a group of mischievous escapees who have come to the theatre, locked the "real" actors in the dressing room (the ones who were going to put on the traditional version of the play), and have taken the production into their own hands.

EMPHATIC ELEMENT

The most important element in this production should be relationships. Relationships between households, lovers, family, friends and enemies are what drive and destroy the main characters. In addition, we will be working with the key word “ensemble” in mind. In ensemble work, strong relationships between the actors are as essential as those between the characters. Acting partners with a sense of complicité will in turn make their character relationships rich and full, regardless of how the text and story indicate how the characters know and relate to one another in the world of the play.

THEME OR IDEA OF THE PLAY

Romeo and Juliet is a play about passionate lovers who will face any danger and go to every extent to unite with one another.

The production is about a group of grotesques who band together to put on the greatest love story of all time.

ACTION OF THE PLAY

The major events of *Romeo and Juliet* play out as follows:

STASIS

At the beginning of the play, Capulet and Montague households have had a long-standing feud that shows no sign of coming to an end. Despite the Prince’s decree that anyone caught fighting on Verona’s streets will be put to death, the enemy houses cannot and will not make peace. Romeo, who is in love with Rosaline, is melancholy over the fact that she does not return his affections. Despite the strong influence of his friends, he cannot let his love for Rosaline go. Meanwhile, the noble County Paris has made an offer to the Capulets to wed their only daughter, Juliet.

Barely fourteen years old, Juliet has yet to dream of marriage let alone feel any stirrings of love for a man she has never met.

INTRUSION

The inciting incident in *Romeo and Juliet* occurs when the title characters meet for the first time at a masquerade party at the Capulet household. It is love at first sight.

MAJOR CRISIS

The plot's major crisis occurs when the newly wedded Romeo is banished from Verona for killing his wife Juliet's cousin Tybalt.

CLIMAX

The major climax occurs in the vault of the Capulets when Romeo, believing that Juliet is dead, kills himself mere moments before she awakes.

NEW STASIS

At the end of the play, a new stasis sees the Capulets and Montagues resolve their feud upon the revelation of their children's love and suicide. A new peace in Verona is achieved.

DRAMATIC METAPHOR

Romeo and Juliet is like a narrowing pool of light. Broad, bright and expansive at first, it's size decreases until only a pinprick remains, and it too disappears leaving only a gloomy darkness.

MOOD

I want the mood of the play to be comic and lively in the first half, looming but hopeful in the second. The feeling should be that anything could happen at any moment. I would like to establish a light quality off the top, to resolve the audience of the notion

that a Shakespearean play has to be boring and serious, the audience well behaved. Shakespeare wrote a good deal of comedy into this piece for a reason and I would like to give the audience permission to laugh. A light hearted beginning, without compromising the sense of real danger between the two houses, can allow the tragic moments to have greater impact thereby taking the audience on a greater emotional journey. Some scenes, particularly in the second half of the play, will naturally have a great sense of darkness but it will be important to the journey of the characters to emphasize the light so that the ending can be heartbreaking. Despite the fact that everyone knows what happens to the ill-fated lovers before they even enter the theatre, the audience should come away having experienced some element of surprise. The greatest goal and compliment will be for audience members to express that they truly believed that Romeo and Juliet were going to get together in the end.

CHARACTERS

1. Romeo

<i>Qualities</i>	Young, passionate, impulsive, loyal
<i>Metaphor</i>	Like an eight-month-old puppy – one who is almost a grown dog, but hasn't quite figured out how his paws work yet
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Baptiste in <i>Les Enfants du Paradis</i>
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Fits and starts followed by long exhales/A young tenor
<i>Major Desire</i>	Love, at any cost
<i>Main Action</i>	Risking, then sacrificing, life and limb to be with his one true love

2. Juliet

<i>Qualities</i>	Young, impressionable, a quick learner, true to her impulses, strong, soft, defiant, brave
<i>Metaphor</i>	She is like a star – shimmering and beautiful but a powerful, combustible force
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Audrey Hepburn
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Soft but strong/A choir of well-intentioned sirens
<i>Major Desire</i>	To be with Romeo
<i>Main Action</i>	Chooses love over family loyalty

3. Lady Capulet

A note on Lady Capulet in this production:

In the interest of my own long-time frustration with the lack of roles for women in Classical theatre, Lady Capulet will take on a more significant presence than in Shakespeare's original text. By switching some of the major scenes and speeches originally given to Capulet, Lady Capulet will take on the role of the head of the Capulet household. While I do not subscribe to the practice of cross casting, it is my hope to seamlessly integrate the switch through a series of careful edits so that Capulet and Lady Capulet have clearly defined roles, motives and relationships. Some of Lady Capulet's original scenes and speeches will remain hers while others will go to Capulet (and vice versa). Herein, when referring to Lady Capulet and Capulet, I will be referring to the characters as they will be portrayed in this production and not how they are traditionally played.

<i>Qualities</i>	Imposing, commanding, strong, terrifying, sensual, flirtatious, social climber, classic villain
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<i>Metaphor</i>	She is like a hurricane, a tumultuous force of nature
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Cruella De Vil meets Queen Elizabeth I
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	An active volcano/ <i>Verdi's Tuba Mirum</i>
<i>Major Desire</i>	To surpass the Montagues in social stature
<i>Main Action</i>	Threatens to disown her daughter if Juliet does not marry Paris

4. Capulet

<i>Qualities</i>	Bumbling, optimistic, awkward, nervous, jovial, compassionate, questionable sexuality
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like bumble bee in a field of wasp-inhabited daisies
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Peter Sellers
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Vibratory/A nervous viola
<i>Major Desire</i>	For the women in his life to be happy so that he can have peace
<i>Main Action</i>	Bows to Lady Capulet's authority in Juliet's hour of need

5. Mercutio

<i>Qualities</i>	Wild, unpredictable, spoiled, tormented, mercurial
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like a fireworks competition in an alley
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Johnny Depp

<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Energetic/A jazz trumpet
<i>Major Desire</i>	Meaningful connection with Romeo
<i>Main Action</i>	Curses the Capulet and Montague houses moments before dying

6. Tybalt

<i>Qualities</i>	Hotheaded, combative, loyal
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like a highly trained guard dog.
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Jet Li
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Fast/Sharp
<i>Major Desire</i>	Revenge for Romeo's gate crashing
<i>Main Action</i>	Kills Mercutio

7. Paris

<i>Qualities</i>	Entitled, charming, well-educated, a bore, handsome
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like an Arabian horse
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	The Duke in <i>Moulin Rouge</i>
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Sustained hovering/Droning
<i>Major Desire</i>	To marry into a reputable household
<i>Main Action</i>	Asks the Capulets for Juliet's hand

8. Benvolio

<i>Qualities</i>	Loyal friend, peacekeeper, benevolent, young, classic sidekick
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like a younger sibling who wants to play with the older kids and can keep up
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Robin (from the classic <i>Batman</i> series)
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Ups and downs/Chirpy violin
<i>Major Desire</i>	To uphold the peace
<i>Main Action</i>	Convinces Romeo to crash the Capulets' party

9. Friar Lawrence/Sister Lawrence

A note on Lawrence:

In this production, a woman will play the role of Friar Lawrence. The text will be amended as necessary and herein, the character will be referred to as *Sister Lawrence*. For elaboration and reasoning, please refer to the note on *Lady Capulet*. Sister Lawrence will be mystical and druidic in nature.

<i>Qualities</i>	Mystical, mature, wise, open-minded, good-humoured
<i>Metaphor</i>	She is like a timeless shaman
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Cate Blanchett
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Calm and deliberate/Chanting Bowl
<i>Major Desire</i>	For peace in Verona
<i>Main Action</i>	Covertly marries Romeo and Juliet

10. Nurse

<i>Qualities</i>	Compassionate, honest, reactive, comic, vain
<i>Metaphor</i>	She is like a mother hen
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Elizabeth Taylor
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Fast and frantic/Cello
<i>Major Desire</i>	Juliet's happiness
<i>Main Action</i>	Acts as a go-between to enable Romeo and Juliet's clandestine marriage

11. Lady Montague

A note on the Montagues:

As with the Capulets, Lady Montague and Montague will have their text adjusted to facilitate the possibility that the ladies are the heads of the household in this production, and that the feud is fuelled by their deep-seeded hatred for one another.

<i>Qualities</i>	Forceful, loving, strong-willed, stoic
<i>Metaphor</i>	She is like an ancient statue
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Queen Victoria, American Gothic
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Efficient and Gliding/Alto
<i>Major Desire</i>	For Romeo to live
<i>Main Action</i>	Implores the Prince to let Romeo live

12. Montague

<i>Qualities</i>	Calm, family man, rational, charming
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like an efficient banker
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Mr. Peanut meets American Gothic
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Languid/Baritone
<i>Major Desire</i>	A settled household
<i>Main Action</i>	Implores Benvolio to uncover the root of Romeo's misery

13. Chorus

<i>Qualities</i>	Emcee, omniscient, mischievous, androgynous, sensual
<i>Metaphor</i>	She is like a charming maitre d' who just happens to also be a Siamese cat
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Joel Grey, Tori Amos
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Sassy/Accordion
<i>Major Desire</i>	For the audience to remain intrigued
<i>Main Action</i>	Welcomes the audience at the start of the show, guides them through the show and sells Romeo the poison that will be his downfall in the tomb

14. Prince

<i>Qualities</i>	Commanding, authoritative, evolved, regal
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like a giant red stoplight
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Judi Dench, Morgan Freeman
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Booming Bass/Kettle Drum
<i>Major Desire</i>	Peace in Verona
<i>Main Action</i>	Banishes Romeo from Verona

15. Peter

<i>Qualities</i>	Young, eager
<i>Metaphor</i>	He is like a fly on a wall
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	The Little Rascals
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Speedy/Penny Whistle
<i>Major Desire</i>	The Nurse's approval
<i>Main Action</i>	Invites Romeo to the Capulet party

16. Ensemble

A note about the Ensemble:

This production will use six actors to fill the multiple roles of citizens, servants, members of Sister Lawrence's order and the band. Along with the rest of the cast, they will work as an ensemble, often appearing as a unit, though each will develop individual traits.

<i>Qualities</i>	Mischievous, intriguing, dangerous, funny
<i>Metaphor</i>	They are like a pack of hungry, curious dogs
<i>Celebrity/Literary Inspiration</i>	Kit Kat Club girls/Columbia & Magenta
<i>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</i>	Skittering/Frantic strings – Kronos Quartet
<i>Major Desire</i>	To interact with the audience
<i>Main Action</i>	As a group: set transitions and audience interaction

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

Romeo and Juliet is divided into five acts and also has two prologues. Each act contains its own series of scenes with each act containing anywhere from three to six scenes. The structure of the play allows for an intermission to be placed at the end of Act III, scene i. After a series of highly charged events take place in rapid succession (fighting that culminates in the death of Mercutio followed immediately by a second fight that results in the slaying of Tybalt and ultimately, Romeo's banishment from Verona) there is a significant shift in the play. Between III, i and III, ii lays a natural divide where tone changes from comedy to impending tragedy. Also, this is the shift where the audience goes from mainly following Romeo's thoughts and actions to following those of Juliet. Lastly, this point is where the action stops taking place in the Verona street, instead favouring Juliet's bedroom as a key setting (thereby suggesting that events go from public to private spaces and moments). An intermission will serve a practical purpose here, providing time for a significant set change as well as an opportunity for the audience to breathe and ask themselves "what happens next?"

The Prologue serves as an introduction to the story and is structured as a sonnet. It sets the tone of the play by describing for the audience the given circumstances and the events that will unfold, the approximate length of the play and entreats the audience to be patient. Interestingly, the Prologue gives away the ending even before the play has begun.

Act I serves to set up the given circumstances of the play. It deals with the exposition of the play (the Capulet and Montague feud, Romeo's unrequited love, Paris' suit for Juliet's hand) and introduces most of the major characters. The end of the act also sees the inciting incident for the rest of the action that will unfold – the lovers meeting. This act is very public, taking place mainly in communal spaces.

The second Prologue, another sonnet, recounts the events that have passed in I, v, reiterates the notion of forbidden love and opens the door for the action that follows in the early scenes of Act II. After this, the convention of Prologue and the character of Chorus disappear raising the question *where does the Chorus go?*

Act II is comprised of the aforementioned second Prologue and six scenes. This act contains a great deal of significant action, including the infamous *balcony scene* where the forbidden lovers exchange words of love and devise a vague plan regarding their next meeting. This act also introduces Sister Lawrence who marries the lovers in the final scene of the act. The Nurse's complicity in the plot is established.

The five scenes of the third act see the aforementioned actions and natural division of the script. From III, ii onward, the scenes shift between three private locales – Juliet's bedroom, Sister Lawrence's Cell and a room in the Capulet house. A series of significant events unfold that increase the tension and heighten the stakes for the main characters. Juliet learns that Tybalt has been slain by Romeo's hand while Romeo learns of his banishment. Sister Lawrence and the Nurse further entwine themselves in dangerous dealings by helping the lovers to spend one secret night of passion together before Romeo flees (presumably the two lovers lose their virginity). Stake-raising increases in III, iv when Romeo leaves for Mantua, Juliet learns that she is slated to marry Paris in just two short days, Lady Capulet threatens to disown her daughter for disobedience and Juliet feels betrayed when the Nurse counsels her to comply with her mother's demands.

Act IV begins with a dark shadow followed by a glimmer of hope: Paris' exchange with Juliet at Sister Lawrence's cell is followed by the introduction of a mystical sleeping potion and the Sister's promise to send letters to Romeo. This act is comprised of five scenes, two of which, comic in nature, serve to balance out the act's dark tone. Notably, the end of the act is not where Juliet is found and presumed dead (where most productions move onto the events in Act V), but where Peter shares a clownish exchange with the musicians. At the start of this scene v shift, Peter reminded that "tis no time to play now," before delivering an essentially bad joke. Perhaps this exists to distract the audience from the notion that all will end badly, or at least to remind them that Juliet is not really dead and the show is not yet a tragedy.

The final act is comprised of three scenes and, moving the action away from the main locales in the previous two acts, introduces two new grim, private settings. The act

begins with Romeo (who has been absent since III, iv) in Mantua. Upon hearing Balthazar(a)'s news, Romeo buys poison intending to kill himself at Juliet's grave. Meanwhile Sister Lawrence learns that her letter has not reached Mantua, in spite of which, she chooses to believe that there is still hope for the situation. The final scene and climax of the play take place in the Capulet monument. It is here that Romeo is succeeds in his mission to finally spend eternity with his one true love. Believing Juliet to be dead, he drinks the poison and when Juliet wakes to find her him dead, she too takes her own life. The play finishes with a lengthy denouement where all is explained in detail and the feud is ended once and for all. The final words of the play, spoken by the Prince, are reminiscent of the Chorus' Prologues but structurally different – the Prince speaks only six lines so the play does not end with a sonnet as it began. Perhaps this is indicative of the evolution of the play's structure.

With respect to this production, as previously mentioned, there will be cuts and line reassignments both for brevity and in the interest of experimentation. Though they are traditionally cut in other productions, it is my intention to keep the comic scenes in the second half of the play in tact (for reasons previously mentioned). This may mean that other text will have to be sacrificed. I will start with text that is tediously repetitious and/or areas that contain references irrelevant or confusing to modern audiences. For example, I will cut a significant portion of V, iii after the lovers have died.

I will break the play down further into French scenes for rehearsal purposes. Many scenes are long and can be broken up based on the major action that occurs in each. This action is usually linked to key entrances and exits so a French scene breakdown will allow the play to be rehearsed in bite-sized pieces using only the actors who are relevant to the action and allowing me to be efficient with time.

DIRECTORIAL APPROACH

My directorial approach will be rooted in relationships between characters as well as actors. Working from the basis that the actors are members of an ensemble, I will

begin with a series of exercises designed to build complicity among the members of the company. Only when actors can truly connect can they work together to make real discoveries in a play. We will work with the notion that theatre is a game and as such, the actors can *play*, have fun, experiment to create real, live and exciting moments on stage. When actors play, when they make-believe, the room becomes electric and the product, alive. This approach is inspired by *Le Jeu* (The Game), a term coined by Jacques Lecoq and taught to me by Philippe Gaulier. It will serve as the entire foundation of the production – when an actor is sensitive to the presence of his/her friends, both on stage and in the audience, theatre happens.

Along these lines, I will work with the philosophy of *doing* rather than *saying*. Much time is wasted talking with an actor about what s/he would like to do or should do rather than having her/him just do it. I don't find this to be productive in my directing or acting process. I would like to get the actors on their feet as soon as possible in the interest of trying as many things out as time allows. When the actors are stuck, we will play games (some pre-existing and some created on the spot) until we find something that gets us on the right track.

When working with actors, I am very instinctual and visual. It is one thing to plan and prepare six-weeks worth of rehearsal exercises, each designed around a scholarly understanding of the text. It is another to dream around specific actors when they are on their feet in a specific situation. I am prepared for most of my preparations to fly out the window when faced with the impulses of 22 different actors. While my preparation will focus around approaches to rehearsal and to understanding as much of *Romeo and Juliet* as possible before rehearsals begin, it is extremely important to enter into the rehearsal period with a mind that is free of expectation and rife with imagination.

DESIGN WORDS/VISUAL APPROACH

When communicating with designers, my emphasis is and has been on flexibility. I want a malleable space in which the actors can play and clothes that they can play in.

I have been specific with respect to the aforementioned time period and style, providing as many images and descriptive words as possible. My aim is to inspire and guide the process but it is not my desire to prescribe a design and have it delivered to meet my precise specifications. Leave the designing up to the experts! My hope is that by having an open structure for creation around clear, specific objectives for texture and feel, the team will have ample information and creative freedom to dream up suitable, exciting designs that I never would have imagined myself.

Costumes will be mainly pulled from pre-existing stock at the UBC costume department. The concept for the production design has revolved around this since *Romeo and Juliet* was confirmed in January 2009. With such a large cast, the budget will not afford built pieces for every single member of the ensemble. With this in mind, I have started with the images of sepia photographs and old-time carnivals. Qualities include: rust, dust, tarnish, worn threadbare satin with tea-stained poplin. I am hoping for a look that sends familiar garments and silhouettes into the realm of the grotesque. For men I dream of simple, sleeveless cotton shirts, pants that are slightly ill fitting and accessories such as top hats, waistcoats, suspenders and newsboy caps for the men. For the women, I am less specific but certainly something that suggests a complimentary era to the men, diminished grandeur and sexuality. Make-up will be extremely stylized and grotesque as well. The faces, like the costumes, will be exaggerated representations of the familiar. Together, they should send the production into the realm I am aiming for.

The set should be a playground for the actors – climbable and with varied levels. It may be reminiscent of but not precisely dictate an old cabaret or music hall. Dusty, rusty and worn, it should show signs of aged grandeur. Like the costumes, it could evoke the feeling of a sepia photograph or a broken down carnival. It must be malleable, transformable, having the ability to be easily, gracefully and quickly shifted to create and recreate several different settings. Set pieces must therefore be light and elegant while at the same time sturdy. Also important to this in-the-round set is

that all major playing areas are visible from all angles – none of the action can be obstructed.

Lighting should, of course, compliment the aforementioned designs. It should be bright enough that the actors can be seen while adding to the magic of the show. Lighting must avoid, as much as possible, the default wash. I am very interested in isolated zones of light and defining tight spaces for specific settings (Sister Lawrence's cell, for example). In addition, I would like to experiment with practical lighting by employing hand held period-appropriate flash lights as the sole lighting source for certain scenes.

Sound will be done entirely live. Music will be played by a minimum of three actors, but perhaps more (depending on the musical talents of the ensemble). In keeping with the twisted cabaret feel, I would like the sound to be evocative of The Tiger Lillies, but to have it's own feel and flavour (I do not wish to copy the band). An accordion and piano are musts for this show. The band should be able to rove so other hand held instruments are essential. Strings are ideal – the more the better. I have no interest in big brass instruments but would consider a flute if no other option were available. Since sound effects are minimal (birds and crickets), they will be created live by the ensemble during the performance.

AUDIENCE ORIENTATION

Because the theatre lends itself to many possibilities with respect to audience configuration, I have chosen to set the audience in the round. Eleven towers with three levels each will provide a view of the action from all angles including directly above. In the interest of creating a focal point to anchor the action one tower will be left out (proper round would consist of twelve towers). Each tower allows for one row of seating (10-12 seats per tower). Additional audience members will be seated in chairs on the floor. Floor seating will be comprised of two rows.

As mentioned, this in-the-round orientation allows for multiple views of the action, surround sound and seamless audience-actor integration. Action will take place in

front of, behind, within and above the audience. Aisles will be created to enable entrances to be placed in four equidistant directions on the floor between as well as in key areas above the stage (actors might jump from above onto the ground level playing space). The lobby and emergency exit doors will also be employed in order to allow actors to make entrances on upper tiers in the hopes of surprising and delighting the audience.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS

Special problems lie within living up to the reputation of the play. *Romeo and Juliet* is accompanied by certain expectations and connotations. It is so famous and so overdone that just attempting to produce it is seen as a cliché. Why do yet another production? Sickeningly sweet images of young lovers in Elizabethan dress, romance, moonlight and the accompanying flowery language are enough to turn people off just at the mention of a single character in the title. The question: how to get people in the door? And once they are there, how to live up to the reputation of such a famous play?

The balcony scene alone serves as a prime example of this problem as it is one of the most famous scenes in the history of theatre. It is the scene with which everyone is perhaps the most familiar, knowing every word. This makes it difficult not only to stage but also to edit. As previously stated, cuts must be made in this production and this scene, being very long, is no exception. What should be cut to serve the needs of the production while being sensitive to an audience that is likely to notice the slightest word out of place?

Along with the balcony scene come other challenges. Often, once the balcony scene has been performed, the rest of the act lags. So much focus goes into the preparation and anticipation of this famous scene that the rest of the act falls by the wayside. I have often found myself thinking “well, the best part is over,” and then waiting impatiently for Mercutio’s death – the next high point in the play. Likewise, in the final scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, once the lovers are dead, there seems little point

in continuing with the ten to fifteen minutes that follow. Is the action following the lovers' death essential to the action of the play? Why does each scene exist? What function does each scene serve? What is the essential action in the less famous scenes?

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES

Environmental facts

- Geographical location
 - The action takes place in Verona, Italy. The locations revolve around a city street, rooms inside and outside of the Capulet house including a hall, a bedroom and an unspecified room, the Capulet garden which is comprised of or is near an orchard and is below Juliet's bedroom balcony, the Capulet's tomb, a room in a monastery (in this production an unspecified druid-like cloister) and the monastery (cloister) garden.
 - There is a secondary geographical location in Mantua, Italy. Action in Mantua takes place on a street and in or in front of an apothecary's house.
 - The Prologue can be located in Verona or in the actual theatre as the exact location is unspecified.
- Date
 - The play begins "a fortnight and odd days" before "Lammastide" (two and a half weeks before August 1), however the precise year is not indicated. *Romeo and Juliet* was written roughly around 1597. Without any other specified year, it can be inferred that Shakespeare intended the play to be set in his modern day.
 - This particular production will set the play in an intentionally vague location and era that is reminiscent of but not specific to the 1880's to 1930's. The attempt will be to create an ahistoric, universal world, an unspecific era a cabaret-style setting. The setting will be familiar, suggestive but not precisely identifiable.

- The play takes place over the course of six days in July. The season is summer.
- Economic Environment
 - By Peter's description of "the great rich Capulet," the number of servants employed by the Capulet household and the fact that Paris, kinsman to the Prince, is courting Juliet, it can be surmised that the Capulets possess some degree of wealth. Since the Chorus describes both households as being "alike in dignity," it can be further deduced that the Montagues are of similar means as their rivals.
- Political Environment
 - At the time that *Romeo and Juliet* is written, Verona is considered to reside within the independent state of Venice.
 - In the script, the Prince requests the Capulets come along with him to "hear our father's pleasure in this case." It can be inferred that Shakespeare's Verona, or Venice, is ruled by a king, though he does not surface in the play (or in history books).
 - The families therefore, though rich, would not be aristocratic, but the opportunity for Juliet to marry into the nobility would set the Capulets above the Montagues in stature.
 - The expediency with which (Lady) Capulet agrees to marry Juliet to the Prince's nephew Paris, could therefore be interpreted as a means for advancement (thereby surpassing the Montagues on the political, economic and social ladder).
 - This hasty agreement could also be a product of political pressure. With the Prince's displeasure with the constant brawling in Verona's streets, the Capulets could view the marriage as a way to ease tensions or that they are obliged to fulfill the Prince's demand. Whether or not the proposal is an opportunity for social, political or economic advancement, refusing the Prince's request could not bode well for the house of Capulet.

- Social Environment
 - Sixteenth century Italy is a patriarchal society. As such, Shakespeare has written Capulet and Montague as the rulers of their respective households who chiefly fuel the ancient grudge.
 - In this production, I propose to switch the societal values to those of matriarchy. In the society of this production, the mothers will be the heads of household and therefore the play's chief rivals.
 - A society where two powerful leaders of Italian households harbour bad blood could imply an Elizabethan era mafia war. Verona is in a state of social unrest with all citizens taking sides and involving themselves in violent brawls
- Religious Environment
 - In 1597 Italy, Papacy still reigns despite conflicts with Papal rule earlier in the century. As such, citizens are mainly orthodox Roman Catholic, though not religious fanatics.
 - The text is rife with Catholic references and each household relies on Friar Lawrence as their chief counsel.
 - In this production a woman will take on the role of Friar Lawrence. The character will be referred to as Sister Lawrence and an unspecific environment will be created to match the world of the production. References to Catholicism and Christianity will be altered to suggest a druid/pagan-based belief system. In this way I hope to combat any criticism that will deem the entire premise of the play implausible based on the fact that a woman is not able to legally perform a marriage ceremony in the Catholic church.

Previous Action

- The Montague and Capulet households have been at odds for a long time though the feud has remained dormant until late. A new uprising has begun and the feud has escalated into public brawls. Verona's citizens have taken sides.

- Romeo has fallen in love with Rosaline and, upon discovering that she will not love him back, has become melancholy. He has kept this situation a secret from his friends and family, choosing to spend time alone in the darkness of his room, walking late at night or hiding in the forest.
- The Montagues and Benvolio have witnessed Romeo acting strangely but do not know the reason. The Montagues have attempted to discover out the cause for his sadness both through friends and asking Romeo directly.
- Capulet has made preparations for a masquerade party and has drawn up an extensive guest list.
- All of the Capulet children have died except for Juliet.
- The Nurse has long ago buried her husband and daughter (who was the same age as Juliet).

Polar Attitudes of Principal Characters, both in the Beginning and the Ending

Juliet

- At the top of the play she is a young girl who has not yet dreamed of marriage.
- By the end she has become a woman who is willing to kill herself to be united with her husband.
- Youth to maturity.

Romeo

- At the start of the play he is melancholy with unrequited love. He does not believe that there is another woman in the world who can make him forget Rosaline.
- By the end he focuses only on Juliet. Determined to be eternally united with his one true love and wife, he resolves to kill himself so as to join her in the afterlife.
- Boyhood to manhood.

Nurse

- At the top of the play she is merry and robust. She is full of stories of young Juliet and expressed her hope and love for the girl's bright future.
- By the end she is devastated at having found Juliet dead. She experiences the blackest day that she has ever seen.
- Buoyant to deflated.

Sister Lawrence

- At the top of the play she is optimistic, hopeful of aiding Verona in a time when peace is called for. She is also mystical, ethereal and in tune with nature.
- By the end she is distraught at the amount of damage her well-intentioned actions have caused. She is terrified. A simple woman who has made a grave error.
- Enchanting to guilt-stricken.

Lady Capulet (in this gender-swapped production)

- At the top of the play she is enraged at the possibility that her enemy is challenging her. Ready for a fight, she is prepared for a vicious battle.
- By the end she is destabilized by the events that have come to pass and all that she has heard and seen. Sad but calm, she initiates peace.
- Ferocious to enlightened.

Capulet

- At the top of the play he makes a desperate but failed attempt to keep the peace by restraining his wife in her call to battle.
- By the end he is shocked and anguished but also obtains the peace he begged for at the beginning. He offers to entomb Romeo beside Juliet.
- Bumbling to composed.

Mercutio

- At the top of the play he is in a party-going mood. Good-humoured, witty and uplifting, he tries to motivate Romeo to be the same way.
- By the end he curses Romeo for being responsible for his slaughter.
- Free-spirited to vengeful.

Choice of Words

- Shakespeare's words are full of multiple meanings. Some, being rich in imagery, are extremely evocative, enriching the action, while others allude to out of date references that are irrelevant today, lost upon modern audiences. Volumes have been devoted to the choice and exactness of each and every Shakespearean word. As such, it is impossible to select merely few key words to touch upon without writing another entire volume. Suffice it to say, the playwright has chosen each and every word carefully and as such, due attention will be given. The *Choice of Images* section below will touch upon key references to repeated or significant image-related words.
- The First Folio script is full of words that are made up of long spellings and capital letters. The company will consider these devices as Shakespeare's clues to the actor with respect to where to place focus and weight.
- Names are interesting to note as some appear to have been chosen based on the quality to which they allude. Although *Romeo and Juliet* is set in Verona, the characters names originate from other parts of Italy as well as other parts of Europe altogether. Italian surnames were developed based on fairly general principles and were characterized by derivatives coined from given names.
 - Capulet – a name that hails from the region of Sicily. The surname Capulet is derived from the Italian word “capo” - a name for a person who is very determined, or headstrong.
 - Montague – French for “Pointed Hill,” relates to the Anglo Saxon William the Conqueror. It is curious as to why Shakespeare would have chosen this for the name of the Capulet's' rival. Could it be linked to political

struggles between northern Italy and France in the early sixteenth century?

- The Prince is called Escalus and even though his name is never referred to in the text, Shakespeare has clearly given the Prince this name for a particular reason. Latin for scales or “the ladder,” Escalus is the character of moral authority and highest status in Verona.
- Juliet - The name Juliet is of Latin origin and originally meant “youthful, Jove's child.” The diminutive suffix “et” or “ette” in French, means small, or cute.
- Romeo - Italian form of the late Latin name *Romaeus* meaning "a pilgrim to Rome."
- Mercutio – god of Mercury who was quick and swift-witted.
- Benvolio – The name is possibly derived from the Latin or Italian for "good" (*buono*, *bene*) and "to wish, desire" (*volere*). The Italian expression "*volere bene*" literally translates as "to love, to feel affection for." _Hence the meaning *affectionate* or *benevolent*.
- Tybalt – A name of Germanic origin derived from the name Theobald meaning brave or bold. Tybalt shares the same name as the character Tibert/Tybalt the "Prince of Cats" in Reynard the Fox, a point of mockery in the play. Mercutio repeatedly calls Tybalt "Prince of Cats" referring not only to Reynard but also perhaps to the Italian word “cazzo” (pronounced CAT-so) meaning "penis".
- Paris – The name is of Greek origin and related to Paris of Homer’s Iliad. Perhaps this name has been chosen to highlight a contrast of character traits between Shakespeare’s Paris and Homer’s character? Or is the name chosen based on the famous city in France in order to suggest that Paris is a foreigner? When compared with the origin of Romeo’s name, Shakespeare highlights again the political tensions between Italy and France.
- Friar Lawrence – Literally means *Man of Laurentum* or "belonging to the city of Laurentum in ancient Italy." Saint Lawrence was a 3rd century

martyr who hailed from Rome. It is believed that he was roasted alive because he refused to hand over the church's treasure (he had provided it to the deprived and the sick). The name "Laurence" indicates loyalty, courageousness, duty, honour and dignity.

Choice of Images

- *Romeo and Juliet* is full of conflicting imagery and has been referred to as a play of opposites. This is most apparent in the frequent references to "light" and "dark" that are represented both in repeated language and suggested visuals: sun and moon, day and night, night's candle, bright angel, dark lowering hills, lamp, numerous references to fire and torches, the final scene, taking place in the darkened vault of the Capulets' monument is in direct contrast to the start of the play, mid-day on the hot Verona street.
- Stars as images to represent fate: The lovers are described as "star crossed;" before entering the Capulets' party, Romeo fears "some consequence yet hanging in the stars" and later, upon learning the news of Juliet's death chooses to defy the stars and their influence.
- Flowers: Capulet entices Paris to attend the party by making reference to "fresh female buds;" Paris is compared to a flower by Lady Capulet; a rose, the most beautiful of flowers, is used by Juliet as a way to describe Romeo; Juliet compares her affection for Romeo as a "bud of love" that will "prove a beautiful flower" in a short time; Sister Lawrence speaks of the immense power contained plants, herbs and particularly in a simple "weak flower;" presumably the potion she administers to Juliet later in the play can be linked to one of these powerful flowers and likewise the Apothecary's poison can be linked to floral imagery as well; when Juliet learns that Romeo has slain Tybalt she compares him to a "serpent hid with a flowering face;" Paris calls Juliet a "sweet flower" and strews her "bridal bed" (death bed) with flowers.
- Bird imagery: dove; falconer's voice; nyas (young hawk); wonton's bird; "I would I were thy bird;" goose; nightingale; lark; ladybird; ravenous dove feathered raven.

- Death: The Prologue makes reference to “fatal loins;” Romeo claims he lives dead in reference to his unrequited love to Rosaline; Capulet makes reference to the earth having swallowed up all of his children; in the Queen Mab speech there is reference to “cutting foreign throats;” “forfeit of untimely death;” the second Prologue makes reference in “Old Desire doth in his death bed lie;” repeated references to poison, burying, graves, blood, bones, heaven, tombs and Death himself.

Structure of Lines and Speeches

- Shakespeare’s First Folio will be employed as our text for this production. As Shakespeare arguably wrote the folio text for the actor, significant structural differences exist in the lines in this text and in those set down in the modern texts, which have been edited for the reader. The points below are in reference to the First Folio text.
- There is a sharp distinction between when characters employ verse and when they speak in prose. Iambic pentameter verse is, of course, common in Shakespeare’s writing. However, *Romeo and Juliet* is said to be the first play where prose is used in combination with poetry, so the shifts between the two can be considered to hold significance.
- The clowns, servants and other characters of lower social status commonly employ prose, just as those of higher standing more often speak poetry. Mercutio however, speaks almost entirely in prose (most notably in the F1 version of the Queen Mab speech). Choice of prose in this case can shed light on particular traits and attitudes of the character. He either feels no need to employ formality (he is comfortable with his friends and they follow suit), or he rebels against his noble upbringing. Both are possible. Scenes that take place in Verona’s streets are also often spoken mainly in prose (Sampson, Gregory, Abram and Verona’s citizens at the top of the play), thereby giving weight to contrasting poetry when characters in these spaces employ verse. Tybalt, however, speaks only in verse, perhaps as a signifier that when he enters, the situation becomes heightened. Additionally, another noteworthy switch can be

found in I, iii. The Nurse's long, comic speech about young Juliet is completely in prose (again, First Folio) but she quickly switches to verse when the formal discussion about Paris' suit begins. She also uses prose when addressing Romeo in II, iv and again when she is being coy with Juliet in II, v.

- In general, prose more or less disappears in the second half of the play, only popping up in IV, v when, after Juliet's faux death, Peter the clown exchanges a comic moment with the musicians.
- Within the poetic verses, rhyming couplets are used frequently. These are placed not only at the end of scenes to give them a strong finish but also throughout scenes and soliloquies (most notably in early moments with Sister Lawrence). Rhyming couplets, like prose, pop up mostly in the first half of the play when the tone is lighter.
- Sonnets are used in both Prologues as well as in I, v when the lovers first meet (their exchange is a 14-line sonnet).

TONE

This production will be a dark and twisted approach to a timeless classic.

DRAMATIC ACTION

Titles of the Units and Major Action

PROLOGUE Location: *The Theatre*

a) *Initiating the Audience*

- The Chorus welcomes the audience with the story of Romeo and Juliet in 14 lines, describes the forthcoming action and events.

I, i Location: *A Street in Verona*

a) *Colliers, Collars and other Mis-understandings*

- Two servants of the house of Capulet debate the war between the Montagues and the Capulets.
- Gregory misunderstands Sampson's words to have different meanings than Sampson intends.

b) *Thumb biting*

- Two people of the House of Montague approach.
- Sampson bites his/her thumb at the Montagues to insult them.
- The people from each household egg the other to initiate a brawl.
- A fight breaks out.
- Benvolio tries to keep the peace.

c) *The Fiery Tybalt*

- Tybalt enters and challenges Benvolio to a duel.
- All six people battle.

d) *All Hell Breaks Loose*

- Verona Citizens join in on the fight by cheering, yelling and physically fighting.
- (Lady) Capulet and (Lady) Montague believe the other is goading them into a fight. Their respective spouses make failed attempts at restraining them.

e) The Prince

- The Prince commands everyone to stop.
- He decrees that anyone caught fighting will be put to death.
- He orders the Capulets to come along with him. They comply.

f) Montague's Charm

- Montague implores Benvolio to reveal who began the quarrel.
- Benvolio blames Tybalt and the four others.
- Lady Montague seeks out Romeo.
- Montague and Lady Montague persuade Benvolio to find out why Romeo is so aloof. Benvolio complies.

g) Romeo's Heartache

- Benvolio implores Romeo to confide what is the matter.
- Romeo confesses that he is in love with Rosaline, who does not reciprocate.
- Benvolio encourages Romeo to consider other loves.

I, ii Location: *Another Street in Verona*

a) Paris' Proposition

- Paris requests that the Capulets provide an answer to his offer to become a suitor for Juliet.
- Capulet suggests that Juliet should have a say in the matter.
- Capulet invites Paris to a party that is happening that evening.

b) Peter's Dilemma

- Capulet gives a list of party invitees to Peter.
- Peter cannot read the names on the list.
- Peter asks Romeo for help. Romeo complies.

c) Invitation to the Party

- Rosaline is on the list. Romeo asks for details about the party.
- Peter reveals that the party is at Capulet's and offers an invitation to Romeo and Benvolio to join in if they are not Montagues.
- Benvolio convinces Romeo to go to the party.

I, iii Location: *A Room at the Capulet House*

a) Nursie's Little Girl

- Lady Capulet demands that the Nurse call Juliet in.
- Juliet joins them.
- The Nurse reminisces about Juliet as an infant.

b) Proposing the Marriage Proposal

- Lady Capulet shares the news that Paris has offered to marry Juliet.
- Juliet does not dream to be married. She offers to consider Paris but makes no promises.
- The guests arrive at the party.

I, iv Location: *Outside the Capulet House*

a) Romeo Doubts Again

- Romeo expresses doubts about attending the Capulets' party.
- Mercutio and Benvolio attempt to draw him out of his funk.

b) Mercutio's Dream

- Mercutio recounts an elaborate, evocative and disturbing dream.

c) Foreshadowing

- Romeo agrees to go to the party and senses destiny in the air.

I, v Location: *Inside the Capulet House*

a) Rushing Around

- The servants bicker while making the final arrangements before the masquerade party begins.

b) Welcome Gentlemen!

- The guests arrive and the Capulets welcome them.

c) Love at First Sight

- Romeo spots Juliet and inquires about her identity to a servant who does not recognize her.
- Romeo falls in love.

d) Tybalt's Fury

- Tybalt spots Romeo and is making preparations for a fight.
- He is stopped by Lady Capulet, who demands Tybalt leave Romeo alone so as not to spoil the party.
- Tybalt complies but secretly vows revenge.

e) First Words, First Kiss

- Romeo steals Juliet away from the main action of the party.
- They playfully debate and experience their first (and second) kiss.

f) Identities Revealed

- The party begins to break up and Juliet is called away before she and Romeo learn one another's names.
- Romeo discovers from the Nurse that Juliet is a Capulet.
- As Romeo and the other guests leave, Juliet coyly asks the Nurse to find out her mystery man's identity.
- Juliet learns that the man's name is Romeo Montague – her only enemy – but it is too late as she is already in love.

PROLOGUE II Location: *The Theatre*

Desires and Dilemmas

- The Chorus recounts the previous action and circumstances going on to explain that Passion will allow for the lovers to meet again.

II, i Location: *The Capulet Garden*

a) Boys will be Boys

- Romeo steals away into the Capulet yard. Upon sensing his friends' approach, he hides.

- Mercutio and Benvolio have followed Romeo but now cannot find him. They try to conjure him out of hiding and, upon failing, decide to go home to bed.

II, ii THE BALCONY SCENE

Location: *The Capulet Garden and Juliet's Balcony*

a) Decision, Indecision and Discovery

- Romeo emerges as a light in an upper window in the Capulet house comes on.
- He sees Juliet and debates whether or not he should initiate contact.
- Juliet, believing she is alone, reasons why she is right to be in love with Romeo.
- Upon hearing her words of love, Romeo comes out of hiding and accepts her invitation.

b) Vows of Love, the Lovers Alone

- Romeo and Juliet exchange vows of love, despite the dangerous circumstances that face them.
- Juliet wrestles with the suddenness of the situation.
- Romeo works to convince her that his intentions are true.

c) A Promise to Meet

- The Nurse interrupts by calling for Juliet from within. Juliet goes in for a moment then returns.
- Juliet offers a plan to Romeo that will secure their next encounter and he accepts.
- Juliet and Romeo say goodnight and Juliet returns inside.

d) The Second Coming

- Juliet returns yet again and calls for Romeo.
- They establish details for the next day's plan.

e) One Last Goodnight

- The lovers joyfully share one final goodnight in anticipation of their next meeting.
- Romeo decides to go to see Sister Lawrence.

II, iii *Sister Lawrence's Cloister Garden*

a) Flower Power

- Sister Lawrence muses on the mystical properties of plants.

b) Romeo's Elation

- Romeo shares the news of his newfound love.

c) A Simple Request

- Romeo entreats Sister Lawrence to marry him to Juliet in secret.
- Sister Lawrence protests and chides Romeo for being so impulsive.

d) A Simple Solution

- Sister Lawrence concedes to Romeo's request on the grounds that the alliance could mend the rift between the two families.

II, iv *Location: A Street in Verona*

a) Speculation and Gossip

- Mercutio and Benvolio speculate as to Romeo's whereabouts.
- They discuss the contents of a letter Tybalt has sent to Romeo.
- Mercutio gives a belittling account of Tybalt's qualities.

b) Witty Repartée

- Romeo arrives and the three boys engage in a battle of wits.
- Mercutio celebrates Romeo for being his joyful self again.

c) The Nurse Fuels the Fun

- The Nurse interrupts and inquires as to the whereabouts and identity of Romeo.

d) Mercutio's Serenade

- Mercutio torments the Nurse with a song and insults.
- Benvolio and Mercutio go to the Montague house, leaving Romeo alone with the Nurse and Peter.
- The Nurse berates Peter for not defending her honour.

e) The Most Dangerous Threat

- The Nurse threatens Romeo, lest he have ill intentions.

f) The Bargain and the Plan

- Romeo insists that his intentions are honourable and entreats the Nurse to have Juliet meet him at Sister Lawrence's cell for a marriage ceremony.
- The Nurse agrees.

II, v Location: *A Room at the Capulet House*

a) The Longest Day!

- Juliet laments her three-hour wait and muses on the efficiency of the elderly.
- The Nurse arrives with Peter and Juliet demands he leave.
- Juliet entreats the Nurse to share the news of Romeo.

b) Nursies's Aches and Pains

- The Nurse stalls and delays sharing the news as Juliet coaxes, prods, pleads and demands.

c) The Plan Revealed

- The Nurse reveals Romeo's plan.
- Juliet goes to meet Romeo.

II, vi Location: *The Cloister Garden*

a) Precaution

- Romeo eagerly anticipates Juliet's arrival.
- Sister Lawrence warns Romeo about being too eager.

b) The Bride Before the Wedding

- Juliet arrives and the lovers share a loving exchange of loving words (possibly more).
- Sister Lawrence separates them and leads them away to the wedding ceremony.

III, i Location: *A Street in Verona*

a) Mercutio Picks a Fight

- Benvolio pleads with Mercutio to get out of the streets due to the heat and the proximity of Capulets.
- Mercutio calls Benvolio out as being someone who picks fights.

b) Tybalt's Quest

- Tybalt arrives looking for Romeo.
- Mercutio goads Tybalt and the two share a tense exchange.

c) Romeo: Part of the Family

- Romeo arrives and Tybalt challenges him to a duel.
- Romeo refuses and Tybalt insults him further.

d) The Fight: Mercutio vs. Tybalt

- Mercutio steps in and challenges Tybalt to a fight.
- When Romeo steps in between them, Tybalt stabs Mercutio.

e) Mercutio Slain – A Plague on Both Your Houses

- Mercutio is mortally wounded.
- He covers the fact that he is hurt, downplaying the severity of the injury.
- He curses the houses of both the Capulets and the Montagues.
- Benvolio takes Mercutio into a house, during which time, Romeo reflects on the events that have just transpired.
- Benvolio returns with the news that Mercutio is dead.

f) Romeo's Revenge: Romeo vs. Tybalt

- Tybalt returns and Romeo, furious at the injustice and loss of his friend, fights and kills Tybalt.

g) Tybalt Slain

- Benvolio urges Romeo to flee before anyone can catch him.
- Romeo escapes.

h) The Citizens Aroused

- The Capulets, Montagues and other citizens discover Tybalt's dead body.
- The Prince demands a recount of the events, which Benvolio delivers.
- The Capulets demand Romeo's death and the Montagues make a case for him to be spared.

g) The Prince's Final Word

- The Prince decrees that Romeo is banished from Verona.

INTERMISSION

III, ii Location: *Juliet's Bedroom*

a) Anticipation

- Juliet waits eagerly for nightfall and muses on lovemaking.

b) Horrifying News

- The Nurse arrives with news of a death.
- Juliet fears that Romeo has been slain.
- The Nurse reveals that Romeo has slain Tybalt and is now banished from Verona.

c) Romeo's Defense, Juliet's Debate

- Juliet wrestles with the news and weighs the implications of her husband, both lover and enemy, killing her cousin.

d) Some Comfort

- Juliet decides that she will have to die rather than lose her virginity to anyone other than Romeo.
- The Nurse reveals that she knows where Romeo is hiding and offers to fetch him.
- Juliet asks the Nurse to give a ring to Romeo.

III, iii Location: *Sister Lawrence's Cell*

a) In Hiding

- Sister Lawrence uncovers Romeo from his place of hiding in her cell.

b) Banish-ed

- Romeo discovers and reacts to the news that he is banished.
- Sister Lawrence attempts to console and talk sense into Romeo.
- Romeo rails against his punishment.

c) A Surprise Visitor

- Sister Lawrence, startled by a knock at the door, begs Romeo to hide. Romeo refuses.
- Sister Lawrence answers the door and lets the Nurse into the cell.
- The Nurse reveals that Juliet is in the same state as Romeo.

d) Pep Talk

- Sister Lawrence encourages Romeo to go see Juliet one last time before he departs for Mantua.
- The Nurse marvels at the Sister's wisdom.

III, iv Location: *The Capulet Hall*

a) Paris' Displeasure

- The Capulets beg excuse for Juliet's refusal to see Paris, who has come to woo.

b) A Bargain

- Lady Capulet offers that Paris may wed Juliet on Wednesday.
- Capulet begs for more time and suggests Thursday.
- Paris accepts the offer of Thursday.

III, v Location: *Juliet's Bedroom*

*Create non-verbal Sex Ballet as pre-action – beautiful and sensual movement piece suggesting a night of beauty and passion! Scripted action to follow.

a) Pillow Talk

- Juliet implores the now departing Romeo to stay.
- The lovers debate the time of day.
- Romeo decides to stay despite the dangers that face him.

b) Pre-Coitus Interruptus

- The Nurse warns that Capulet is on his way to Juliet's bedroom.
- The lovers hastily and reluctantly say goodbye.

c) A Premonition

- Juliet has a premonition of Romeo's death. Romeo comforts her, before fleeing.

d) Words of Comfort and Joyful News

- Capulet consoles the weeping Juliet believing her tears are for the death of her cousin Tybalt.
- Capulet cheers Juliet up with the promise of joyful tidings and reveals that Paris will wed Juliet on Thursday morning.
- Juliet refuses to wed Paris and entreats Capulet to give Lady Capulet thanks for going to the trouble of setting up the wedding.

e) The Wrath of Lady Capulet

- Lady Capulet mistakes Juliet's tears for grieving and offers comfort.
- Juliet denies her mother's offer of a bridegroom.
- Upon learning the news that Juliet will not wed Paris, a furious Lady Capulet shames her daughter.

- Capulet and the Nurse attempt to allay Lady Capulet's rage and come to the defense of Juliet.
- Lady Capulet gives her daughter an ultimatum.

f) Denied by Daddy

- Juliet begs her father to help her and he denies her.

g) The Nurse's Advice

- Juliet implores the Nurse to comfort her.
- The Nurse encourages Juliet to accept Paris' offer.

h) Juliet Alone

- Juliet decides to visit Sister Lawrence for counsel and vows that if all else fails, she will commit suicide.

IV, i Location: *Sister Lawrence's Cell*

a) Paris Makes Arrangements

- Paris arranges the details of the wedding with Sister Lawrence.
- He defends the hasty nature of the marriage date.

b) Wooing the Won

- When Juliet arrives at the cell, Paris woos her.
- Juliet evades his advances .
- Sister Lawrence encourages Paris to leave her alone with Juliet.

c) Juliet's Dilemma

- Juliet threatens to kill herself if Sister Lawrence does not come up with a plan to stop the marriage.

d) Sister's Solution

- Sister Lawrence concocts a risky plan and an elated Juliet rushes home with a mysterious potion.

IV, ii Location: *The Capulet Hall*

a) Preparations

- Capulet and the servants continue with the wedding preparations.

b) Dismissal and Demand

- Lady Capulet dismisses them and demands to see Juliet.
- The Nurse reveals that Juliet has gone to see Sister Lawrence.

c) Reformed Daughter

- Juliet returns, asks for her mother's forgiveness and vows to be obedient.

d) A Change of Plans

- Lady Capulet changes the wedding date from Thursday to Wednesday.
- Capulet protests but Lady Capulet is determined to have her way.

IV, iii Location: *Juliet's Bedroom*

a) Goodnight and Goodbye

- Juliet bids Capulet and the Nurse goodnight.

b) A Case of the *What If's*

- Juliet experiences doubts and fears about taking Sister Lawrence's mysterious elixir.
- She resolves to drink the potion.

IV, iv Location: *The Capulet Hall*

a) Party Planning Committee – Up All Night

- Members of the household hurry to put the finishing touches on the wedding preparations.
- Lady Capulet eagerly anticipates Paris' arrival and orders the Nurse to go and wake Juliet.

IV, v Location: *Juliet's Bedroom*

a) Rise and Shine

- The Nurse attempts to rouse Juliet.

b) The Discovery

- The Nurse believes Juliet to be dead and calls for assistance.
- Capulet and then Lady Capulet come to investigate.
- They discover Juliet and grieve.

c) The Bride Groom Arrives

- Sister Lawrence, Paris and the Musicians arrive to collect Juliet.
- Lady Capulet breaks the news of Juliet's death.

d) Mourning

- Paris joins the family in their excessive display of grief.

e) Shame and Scolding

- Sister Lawrence puts a stop to the laments and scolds everyone for being selfish.
- The mourners cease their display of emotion and go in to prepare Juliet for a funeral.

f) A Joke and A Song

- As the musicians prepare to leave, Peter implores them to play a song.
- When they refuse, Peter tricks them into hearing his bad joke.
- The musicians decide to take advantage of the grieving family in order to obtain a free meal.

V, I Location: *A Street in Mantua, Outside an Apothecary's House*

a) Romeo in Mantua

- Alone in Mantua, Romeo recollects a happy dream he has just had.

b) Balthazar(a)'s News

- Balthazara arrives from Verona reporting that Juliet has died.

c) Romeo Grows Up

- Romeo decides to go to Juliet's grave where he will kill himself.
- He devises a means by which to take his own life.

d) The Apothecary

- Romeo calls on a nearby Apothecary to sell him a fast-acting poison.
- The Apothecary refuses then concedes.
- Romeo sets off to Juliet's grave.

V, ii Location: *Sister Lawrence's Cell*

a) A Failed Attempt

- Brother John arrives with news that he was unable to deliver Sister Lawrence's letter to Romeo.

b) A New Plan

- Sister Lawrence creates a new plan and sets off for the Capulets' tomb, lest Juliet awake all alone.

V, iii Location: *The Capulet Tomb*

*The analysis of V, iii is based on the cuts used in the production and therefore omits some of the action in Shakespeare's original text.

a) Paris Pays Homage

- Paris pays homage to Juliet at her grave with flowers and poetic words.

b) An Intruder

- Romeo arrives at the grave and Paris hides.
- Paris discovers the identity of the intruder and tries to arrest Romeo.
- Romeo does not recognize Paris.
- Romeo begs his challenger to run away lest Romeo harm the man out of desperation.

c) The Death of Paris

- Romeo and Paris fight and Paris is killed.
- Romeo discovers that he has killed his best friend's cousin.

d) Romeo and Juliet

- Romeo approaches the sleeping Juliet and declares words of love.
- Romeo discovers Tybalt's corpse and vows to make amends.
- Romeo grieves the death of Juliet and vows to join her.

e) One Last Kiss

- Romeo drinks the poison and kisses Juliet one last time before dying.
- Juliet wakes and, upon realizing her true love is dead, ends her own life.

f) Sister Lawrence Too Late

- Sister Lawrence arrives seconds too late.
- The Capulets, Montagues and citizens arrive to discover the dead lovers.

g) Revealed and Resolved

- The Prince demands an explanation.
- Sister Lawrence confesses her part in what has transpired.
- The Capulets and Montagues resolve their conflict.
- A new day dawns.

CHAPTER THREE

Production Journal

NOVEMBER 2008-NOVEMBER 2009: FROM PROPOSALS TO PREPARATION

November 2008 - Proposals

I submit three proposals for my thesis production. Each presents its specific challenges and rewards. Each is unique in style. Commonality includes that each is a classic from a different genre, country and era. In order of preference they are:

- *Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht in the Frederic Wood Theatre
- *The Threesome* by Eugene Labiche in the Frederic Wood Theatre
- *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare in the Telus Studio Theatre

I want to explore approaches of *Le Jeu* as taught by Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier as they pertain to classic texts. Each of these plays will allow me to do so in a different way. *Threepenny Opera* presents the most possibility for me to experience working with an ensemble as well as exploring the possibility of live music within the theatre. I am drawn to musical theatre as well as classics and this provides the opportunity to try my hand at both. The implied aesthetic appeals to me as well. I know little about Brecht at this point so there is an added challenge and bonus here.

My preference is to work in the Frederic Wood Theatre. Its size, age and features appeal to me. The opportunity to work with a fly gallery, revolve and a trap room present many exciting possibilities. The Telus is my last choice as it is an intimate, studio theatre and I feel that it is more akin to the types of houses I have worked in the past (granted, the Telus is much taller). I have proposed *Romeo and Juliet* for that space as I feel that the Telus is a great space for Shakespeare but mostly because I don't imagine that my third choice will be selected.

December 2008-January 2009 – Selection

I have changed my thesis proposal order. While *Threepenny* in the Freddy remains at the top of the list, I have found myself dreaming around *Romeo and Juliet*. Inspired by my interest in aerial silks, I lay awake several nights over the Christmas holidays imagining red silks being used as a balcony, a bed, blood ribbons and the possibility of related circus and carnival imagery. I believe that a strong candidate for *Juliet* exists within the BFA acting pool and I have had a complete change of heart towards the possibility of directing *Romeo and Juliet* in the Telus as my thesis production.

Mindy Parfitt, my co-MFA in Directing candidate, and I have met with Stephen Heatley to discuss the issue that Mindy has proposed three musical theatre projects and I have only proposed one. In addition exists the possibility that the thesis production budget is being severely affected by University Endowment funding cuts and that our shows may receive as little as one third the usual allotment.

Having anticipated the first potential problem, I am quick to offer to do *Romeo and Juliet* in the Telus if I can have aerial silks. Stephen tells me that I would not be able to have full period dress, as the budget will not allow for many period costumes to be built. This is not a problem - I have no interest in replicating Elizabethan England anywhere in my production - Zeffirelli did a good enough job of that in the 1960's.

I would like to work with a large cast - to build upon the work I did last term in *The Trojan Women* and continue to explore working with ensemble and chorus. With a reduced budget, costumes will have to be pulled. I will have to construct some kind of concept around things I know can be easily found in stock. I hope that some of what aesthetically appealed to me in *Threepenny* can be drawn upon in this production.

Words I am meditating on right now are Circus, Bouffon, Vaudeville (European kind), and Clown. I need a stellar costume designer - I hope that I can entice Carmen Alatorre (and not just because we share the same birthday).

February 2009 – Initial Plans

I am reading different versions of the text. I will use the first folio with a modern text such as either the Riverside or Arden as a back up. I make a list of who is in which scene so that I can create a doubling chart. This play has over 30 characters so some doubling will be necessary. I make charts to figure out the minimum number of actors and who can potentially double as what.

March 2009 – The Team

I begin a six-week session as teaching assistant to Neil Freeman for the BFA intermediate class' section on acting Shakespeare. It is a wonderful refresher and I am rediscovering ways of looking at the text.

As fate would have it, Carmen and I run into each other while crossing the street and decide to have an impromptu coffee at Bean Around the World at Main and Broadway. She's on board if the Theatre Department will support it. I will send her images I found of Bouffon make up and The Yard Dogs Road Show for early costume inspiration.

The rest of the design team will consist of Ana Luisa Espinosa Vaca for set (this will be her MFA in Design Thesis production as well) and Conor Moore for lighting. I worked with both Ana and Conor on *The Trojan Women* so I am confident in their strengths and will try to articulate as well as I can in the areas where we have had disconnects in the past. I do not know who the sound designer will be but my hope is that it will be Patrick Pennefather or someone who is equally skilled at composition.

Sarah Rodgers has been confirmed as my thesis advisor. I am thrilled at the prospect of working with her. After being her teaching assistant earlier this term, I requested her as my advisor due to her methodical approach to research and analysis, her background in physical approaches to theatre (including aerial silks), her overall

theatre background (not unlike mine) and her infectious, positive energy. I have felt completely empowered working with her as an assistant and have also grown as an artist in the process. I am very excited!

April 2009 – Preliminary Set Design Meetings

Ana and I meet in the Telus Studio Theatre. We are each overwhelmed by the possibilities this configurable space offers. I decide that the show will be done in the round - it is a rare gift and challenge. The round has frightened me in the past but the idea has started to grow on me over the past few months. Best of all, the round offers the possibility for a live, shared experience with the audience surrounding the action. The Telus also offers the added bonus that the action can happen around, in and over top of the audience. This space is so tall! There are so many things to climb! So many places to hide!

Ana thinks aloud, uncensored. Some of her musings do not seem to have any correlation with the text. I prefer to quietly examine and mull to possibilities asking myself "why?" "when?" or "how?" before offering suggestions. I arrange to visit the space on my own later so that I can take everything in and think quietly and methodically.

A few days later Ana and I meet for coffee on the patio of The Pendulum in the Student Union Building. She shows me some images of past ballets of Romeo and Juliet. One particular image screams out at me and I am excited by the possibilities it poses. I don't know whom the drawing is by or where it is from. I later describe it as cross between an open backed bookshelf and a giant staircase. I love it. Ana tells me she will work over the summer on the design with that image as a base. She also shows me a checkered floor pattern - rustic and subtle - it resonates with both of us. Its spirit will be incorporated into the set design, perhaps as our floor.

I meet with Sarah for brunch at Crave on Main St. I have begun to doubt my initial impulse to use silks for the balcony scene and party. The simple logistics of

manipulating them as well as getting Juliet on and off stage seem beyond my imagination at this point. Sarah further informs me of how difficult it would be for an actor to do text while effectively using silks. They take a long time to learn and are suited to a certain body type. Combined with Shakespearean text, I worry that casting possibilities for Juliet could be severely limited. It is far more important to me to have a quality performance with strong handling of the text than a flashy effect.

July 2009 – Continued Preparation with a Summer Tan

I am in Ottawa just having finished directing the premiere of a clown show: *Inclement Weather* for Mi Casa Theatre.

E-mails begin to arrive from actors curious about audition material. I compile a list of monologues - 7 for women and 7 for men - and send them out asking the actors to choose 2 each for the general auditions that will be held in the fall. Callbacks will consist of scenes that I assign based on what I see in the generals. I am certain that men will play Benvolio and Mercutio but I offer women the opportunity to read for Benvolio and change my mind. I will cast women in male roles but only if I can justify the gender switch. The Prince, for example, will likely be a woman - a twisted Queen Elizabeth figure adapted to fit the time and setting of this production. I will see what I can do to beef up the roles of Lady Capulet and Lady Montague. With the Prince becoming the Princess, it is possible that the women of the houses fuel the Capulet-Montague feud. I will explore this possibility.

I begin initial edits to the text, being sure to keep portions that are frequently edited out for length. I am particularly interested in keeping the role of Peter (or Clown) in tact. This is traditionally a smaller role but I think it could be a great part for a comic actor - perhaps a young girl or female actor dressed as a school boy but this will depend on what presents itself in the audition. Chorus will be an emcee type figure who guides the audience through the story. Ideally the actor will play instruments. I am inspired by the Tiger Lillies - their work on the live stage show *Shock-Headed Peter* in particular. I hope someone in the cast can play the accordion!

Carmen is secured as costume designer and Patrick will indeed design sound. Nick Harrison has agreed to help with Fight Direction. I am extremely excited about this artistic team!

August 2009 – Set Up for Disappointment

I return to Vancouver and am Assistant Director to Neil Freeman on *As You Like It* for First Impressions Theatre. The idea of assisting on a full-length Shakespeare production before heading into directing my own helps to ease my mind and quell any fears that I have bitten off more than I can chew with a show as iconic as *Romeo and Juliet*.

I have a welcome back meeting with Sarah at Crave. We discuss potential casting options but ultimately I don't want to set my heart on anyone until after the auditions. I would love to be surprised. We talk about the Vaudeville feel I want to infuse into the show. She raises the question "why not have scenes that come out of Vaudeville routines? I entertain this thought and do some extensive research into Vaudeville show structure and acts. However, I don't feel in my heart that this is the right thing for the show. This is not "Vaudeville does *Romeo and Juliet*." What is it then? I am having a difficult time articulating myself. I see it in my head but am still looking for the words to describe it.

In preparation for set-design meetings, Sarah suggests that I go through my script and compose a scene-by-scene break down highlighting ideas of where each scene will take place in the space and what is required for each - levels etc. I leave the meeting inspired and immediately begin brown paper planning. I purchase a huge roll of butcher paper and a package of 14 different coloured markers. Before long my apartment walls are covered in big reams of brown paper with scribbles, doodles, ideas, possibilities, names and lists. Much wine is being consumed.

I send an e-mail out to the BFA actors to inquire about special talents that can be employed in the show. I am pleasantly surprised to find out about extreme musical talent (including accordion), acrobatics and one actor even does tricks with fire.

I meet with Conor to discuss lighting. I share that I would like the show to play with isolated light (rather than a general wash) and that I would like to experiment with the idea of having sources of light generated by actors in some scenes. We agree that, without a set design, there is not much to talk about at this point.

Ana and I meet at The Boulevard for coffee for the first time since April. The design is nothing like the image she showed me at our last meeting. In addition, the balcony and Friar Lawrence's cell have been left out of the design. I make it clear that this set design does not reflect our previous conversations or my vision of the production. I communicate that all of the transitions must be done in full light by the actors - no blackouts with stage crew in black fumbling around to set up a four-poster bed with a rococo canopy. A fruitless ninety minutes pass while I watch Ana attempt to create a new design on the fly on her computer. It is becoming evident that the image I have been meditating on all summer will not work in the round. We both leave feeling disheartened and arrange to meet again in a few days. At home I open another bottle of wine and tear off some more brown paper from my roll.

The second meeting is Sunday afternoon at my apartment. This time Ana brings a miniature model of a new proposed set but no drawings. She has attempted to incorporate the original image by constructing a series of platforms. We agree that they do not capture the spirit of what I am hoping for nor do they work in the space. I show her some of my brown paper plans and suggest a solution that includes an enormous wrought iron gate that can be climbed by the actors along with some sort of rolling platform that can be used in a variety of ways. We end the meeting in agreement that gate is a good direction to go. I feel better but in a few hours I am dissatisfied again. I spent so long dreaming around the original image that this one seems like a huge compromise and a band-aid solution. I am not confident with

designing the set myself and hoped that Ana's design would better reflect the enormous amount of details, images and information I have provided. I start to doubt my thesis choice. *Oh God! Why didn't I just go with Threepenny?*

A few days after my second meeting with Ana, I am struggling over where the balcony can go in the round configuration of the theatre. As it needs to be visible to all audience members, the solution would seem to be that it should be in or near the centre of the space. However, Juliet must be able to enter and exit out of view, not to mention that the piece itself must appear and disappear quickly. An obvious solution would be to use one of the towers already in place in the Telus, however, it's employment will have severe impact on sightlines for some seats in the house. For one of the most famous scenes in the history of the theatre, it is unacceptable to have an obstructed view!

In general, I think that the entire set in general needs to be able to come and go. It should be comprised of a series of simple pieces that can be assembled and disassembled by actors

Friday September 4, 2009 – Bare Bones

I find myself worrying about things I have no control over rather than finding solutions based on the assets I have. Budget and set are key. My tendency to want to solve problems for other people is getting in the way of solving my own directorial issues. Twice now I have met with Ana about the set and twice I have felt temporary satisfaction. The problem remains – what to do with the balcony. When that is solved, perhaps the entire puzzle will come together.

I am stuck between two processes – one that says I should go all out with devising, collaborating, creating everything with a company of actors, and the other that wants a nice tidy, clean show.

I continue my brown paper planning. There is an ever-growing sea of large pieces of

butcher paper are all around me – on the floor, tables, walls. I look around to find multi-coloured scribbles that outline things like:

- Circus Acts, Music Hall, and Vaudeville Program research and lists
- Balcony definitions and various solutions
- Core values of the production – how will people describe it?
- Elements I want in the show
- Imagery
- Who is involved – design and production team, acting pool

Tuesday September 8, 2009 – Costume Designs

Carmen and I meet at my apartment to discuss costuming. As I open a bottle of red, she shows me early sketches and they are exactly along the lines of what I am hoping for. We discuss characters that have not yet been sketched and make minor adjustments to the current sketches.

I tend to worry about budget and on imposing too much work on the costume department (I find I do this with set as well). Carmen encourages me to express ideals and not focus on the money. This is very freeing and I am happy to speak and dream without restriction. Carmen takes copious notes. I am thrilled to work with her.

We generally tend to know what the other is thinking without having to speak many words. Where we don't quite understand the other, we ask and answer questions in exquisite detail and ultimately defer to the other's vision and expertise. This meeting is extremely productive and we both leave excited and inspired.

Tuesday September 15, 2009

Mindy and I meet with Stephen Heatley to set audition dates. I have reached a realization that much of what I would like to try with this show is now dependent on casting. This echoes back to *The Trojan Women*. I have done script analysis but now I need to see people on their feet. Dream around actors. I construct and post audition notices for mid-October. The general auditions will be built around the idea

of "Ensemble." I prefer to see the actors working together as a group rather than coming in one by one and delivering speeches to a spot on the back wall.

Wednesday September 16, 2009 – Assistant Teaching Again

I begin another session assisting Neil Freeman as he teaches Shakespeare to the new crop of Intermediate BFA Acting students. I struggle not to dream around the production while the students work on their text in class and I recall having this same feeling last term.

Ana and I meet in the lounge of her residence building. She has just discovered that the wrought iron gate will encounter severe budget limitations. I share an idea I have been mulling over where the balcony scene is comprised of the human ensemble. I am caught between feeling responsible to her, as this design is her thesis project but more and more am leaning towards little to no set. I don't know how she will take this idea but when Ana expresses her excitement, I am relieved. The cast working as an ensemble is the most important element to this production right now.

Sunday September 20 – Edits Round One

I complete the first draft edits. Some cuts and adjustments will depend on how casting goes. This is particularly the case with my idea to switch the roles of Lord and Lady Capulet. I do not want to make this decision if a strong Lady Capulet does not exist within the acting company. I read the script out loud in my apartment for timing.

Monday September 21, 2009 - Inspiration

On the bus, I sit across from a very young couple all the way from Cambie St. to UBC. At first they annoy me – so young and clueless, unaware. She so young and delicate but also womanly in spirit, he the opposite – manly in appearance but boyish in face and spirit. He tenderly kisses her. Every time he touches her, his fingertips are alive with every sensation. She barely reacts but is equally aware of his touch. His senses are alive as he touches not sexually but sensually, not to possess but to feel the softness – touching as lightly as possible – barely conscious of the beauty of

his actions. This is Romeo and Juliet. She has the backbone, she is strong, she teaches him, everything he does is for her, to be near her, to touch her, his heart leaning towards her, every motion from his heart. She is locked in her core – grounded as much as her age will let her be – but soft, touchable. He is magnetized to her, but not clamped down. A magnet that attracts soft pins – they barely touch but they solidly cling. His soft lips on her skin. Every kiss chosen, experienced, deliberate - not automatic. Wow, I am a poet today.

Neil suggests I cast Friar Lawrence as a woman. This is the second time I have heard this suggestion. Initially I am opposed to the idea but that feeling begins to wane. At this point I want a yin and yang type of balance between the Friar and the Nurse. However, the idea of casting a woman in such a significant role appeals to me; the Friar drives the second half of the play and I don't know if anyone in the male casting pool is ready for the role. I like the irreverence that is implied by a woman performing marriage rites but it also leaves a gaping hole in logic – in the Catholic Church, the marriage would not be lawful. A nun cannot perform a marriage ceremony. Does it matter? Does it change the play? How can I make it work? What's the balance between stretching and compromising my vision?

Indeed, I want to see strong women in significant roles in this play. I am still looking at ways to transfer some text from Capulet and Montague to their wives. What if the ladies drive the feud? I use Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films as inspiration in so far as in those films, men could easily portray the majority of the characters, the audience would never question it nor would it necessarily be regarded as such a significant and memorable story. However, the fact that the characters are women makes the movie a hit – powerful and relentless female hired killers make for interesting characters.

I pick through the text, reviewing cuts, revising and looking at the possibilities for the Friar to be played by a woman if need be. While I don't want to force the idea, I am slowly opening up to it. The Friar is an expert on plants, herbs, potions and remedies – who else in history is like that? Wiccans and pagans certainly have associations

with this kind of work but the idea that a catholic monk is dabbling in manipulating nature is already strongly chilling.

My focus on this work has me procrastinating my research paper. I resist the idea of compiling a biography of the playwright. Who needs another publication on the life and times of Shakespeare? Indeed, this production is less about the script and more about the experimentation with approach, vision and technique.

October 2009 – Casting and Meetings

The month is a whirlwind.

I hold four sets of group auditions and see forty people over the course of one day. I am overwhelmed by the outstanding level of female talent and disheartened by the fact that none of the men stand out as a potential Romeo. One actor recites both of his monologues with his back to the audition panel, another actor awkwardly delivers the entire balcony speech directly to Mindy and her newborn baby as they return quietly from a bathroom break. One actor does the same speech while slowly reaching his hand down the front of his pants and pretending to masturbate. I have not seen a single Romeo and I am very nervous. I compile a callback list and hope for the best..

My main contender for Romeo, Intermediate BFA Acting candidate Jameson Parker, also completely fails at the general auditions. He expressed to me late in the term last year that he would be very interested in playing Romeo. This surprised me as I saw him as more of a Mercutio type. I had begun to warm to the possibility but then his general audition is one of the worst I see over the course of the day. I approach him the following day to give him feedback about his work letting him know that if I did not know him, I would never consider calling him back based on his audition. Having believed he did an outstanding job, he is completely shocked and heartbroken. I leave him with encouragement that I know he has it in him to do much better.

After the callbacks, I assemble a cast list. Jameson has shown significant improvement and as such, I cast him as Romeo. Intermediate BFA Acting candidate Meaghan (Megs) Chenosky will play Juliet. I have found an extremely strong, beautiful and inventive actor to play Lady Capulet - one who can certainly handle the switch of the text - MariaLuisa Alvarez. She played Hecuba in *The Trojan Women* last year and I am excited to create this new character for and with her. I have decided to go with a man for Friar Lawrence. Andy Cohen is chosen after much deliberation back and forth between going with him or Barbara Kozicki as a female Sister Lawrence. Andy has brought a lovable quality with the balance between authoritative and comic and his physical size also works for the role.

There is some tension at the casting committee meeting. The final year BFA students need to be cast in significant roles and there is some doubt as to whether or not Mindy and I have suitable done so. I agree to amend casting slightly but there is a long delay on posting the respective cast lists. I am anxious and nervous. When can I start meeting with my cast? I am eager to get started and for them to have enough time to adequately prepare for what I worry will be a short rehearsal process.

I share the cast list with Carmen and a few nights later she arrives at my apartment with fabric samples. I have left colour up to her with the directive that everything should be faded and aged as in a sepia or black and white photograph. She has requested permission to use pastel colours. I implicitly trust Carmen and oblige her request. She shows me a series of fabric samples with a proposed colour palate for each family. The Capulets will be faded grey and lavender while the Montagues will be musty cream and sage. Her sketches are more complete now. Some are altered. She also brings a miniature mock up of Juliet's first dress. I love it!

We discuss the character sketches one by one. Most of them are bang on. We will go with a base costume for each of the ensemble members. I show Carmen a photo of myself disguised as a schoolboy - a character I created at Ecole Philippe Gaulier who is named "Martin Boulanger" - I tell her that this is the inspiration for Peter. Lady

Capulet, we agree, is imposing, commanding, perhaps even frightening. She should have enormous cleavage and should tower over the other characters - particularly Capulet. She should be the opposite of Lady Montague. We discuss Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria as opposing images for these two characters - one exposed and bold, one covered up and subdued.

I begin to revise the edited text to employ the gender switches. I attempt to create a clear through line for each character. Focus right now is mainly on Lady Capulet and Capulet. What is their main action and journey in the original text? What will change? What will stay the same? Why?

The set saga continues. The wrought iron gate is far too expensive to be climbable. I suggest that the theatre be set up like a cabaret with a series of tables in the front row. Platforms and playing spaces can be assembled and disassembled by the actors based on the interactive nature of the show. The tables can go back into the audience when they are not being used. Ana presents new renderings. The gate and the floor are absolutely stunning. I am very excited by them. Her design includes eight round tables that fit the cabaret aesthetic but do not lend themselves to creating effective playing areas. While movement coaching *Le perimetre* at Theatre la Sézieme, I am inspired by a series of simple Ikea coffee tables they are employing in their contemporary, living room set. I bring photos to Ana indicating that the platforms should fit together some how and be varied in height. Later, Sarah and I meet with Ana and Ana's advisor, Ron Fedoruk. Through Ron, we realize the severity of our breakdown in communication - Ana has been concerned with the architecture of the set and I am focused on flexibility and functionality of the pieces. We agree that the tables can be designed to satisfy both visions and that the other elements of the set can stay as is.

November 2009 – Production Meetings, Preparations and Set Woes Continue

Weekly meetings with the production team begin. Each meeting has me becoming increasingly aware of the connotations and expectations that up when the title *Romeo*

and Juliet is mentioned. I have been so focused on steering this production away from the classic clichés that it surprises me when members of the team don't immediately grasp the essence of my vision. I work on being absolutely clear and detailed in my communications so that the team will stay on board and positive, even if they don't necessarily understand or agree with the concept yet.

There is much concern about Barbara spinning fire during the show, particularly with respect to how much smoke will be produced. A test is conducted in the Telus with the Vancouver Fire Marshall, Chan Centre staff and members of the production team. The sound of the flame is enthralling, not to mention the fire effect itself. Barbara is extremely confident, calm, professional and sexy. Everyone is enchanted and the smoke does pose a problem. Later I am told that it looks like things are a go. Everyone is very excited about this.

The set is still a work in progress. We meet in Ron's office where I learn that Ana has designed and ordered materials for a series of twelve iron tables, very few of which seem to be suitable size for a cabaret (they are too big, almost the size of a dinner table). Until this point, we have not confirmed exactly how many tables the production will actually require - twelve was an architectural decision but I feel that six is more manageable. I am concerned about where the extra tables will be stored and how much they will weigh. Again I give the reminder that each table must be light enough for one female actor to move on her own and that stage crew will not be a factor in the set changes. Ana presents mini models of all twelve tables and a floor plan. I go through each scene of the play placing tables where I require them, communicating how they will be used and identifying problem areas with respect to movement and storage (where the big set changes will occur). We settle on six cabaret tables of varying heights and one large rolling platform that will act as the major set pieces - the bed and the tomb. The balcony will be represented by the ensemble of actors or, as a last resort, one of the towers in the Telus will be employed. I leave feeling somewhat satisfied but am uneasy about having agreed to the set without seeing final renderings.

A week before rehearsals officially begin, I meet with several of the core cast members. This time is for the lead actors to speak the text aloud together in a more intimate setting before the pressures of the first public company read and subsequent table work take over. I explain that this week is a time for them to speak freely and without direction or interruption, to explore without peer judgment or pressure to perform - I am there to listen and gather information and will provide guidance only if requested or absolutely necessary. I invite the actors to share their joys, fears and goals while embarking on this production. They respond positively to this approach and are forthcoming with their individual concern with doing justice to such a well-known script, their excitement of working on such a monumental production and their goals to create authentic, unique characters. After reading the scenes aloud, the actors speak their thoughts about the text, their characters, relationships and the story. Afterwards they express gratitude for having had this head start before the ensemble rehearsal process. That feels nice!

Two cast members drop out of the production before we begin rehearsals. Ali Glinert, a final year BFA acting student, was to play multiple roles - Lady Montague, Peter and Sister Joan (traditionally Friar John) - has an injury that will prevent her from completing the school year. I divide the roles among three different ensemble members. Andrew Cohen (Friar Lawrence) is offered the opportunity to participate as a tap dancer in the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Winter Olympics and his rehearsal schedule conflicts with key dates for *Romeo and Juliet*. This news is made official three days before rehearsals are set to begin and I quickly cast Barbara in his place. This means that the Friar will become Sister Lawrence and the text must be further revised to accommodate a female in a traditionally male role.

The night before rehearsals begin, I learn the actor playing Sampson has confused the dates, not received his script and will not be at the first rehearsal. Steph Meine, the production Stage Manager, will read his part. I am not pleased.

DECEMBER 2009-JANUARY 2010: FROM FIRST REHEARSAL TO FINAL SHOW

Sunday December 6, 2009 - First Day of Rehearsal

I am nervous and excited to begin. I greet everyone as they arrive individually with a big hug and a warm smile. As an icebreaker, everyone stands in an enormous circle and introduces themselves one by one in a fun way.

The morning begins with design presentations. Ana takes the cast through a power point presentation of her research images and then presents the renderings she created in October. I had hoped to see new renderings that would reflect the recent changes and make a note that I must ask for drawings so that I can have an idea of what the tables will look like. Carmen presents costumes and make up. Both design presentations are received with "oohs and ahhs."

Before the first read I give a warm and humourous little speech thanking everyone, outlining why I chose the play and encouraging actors to place their emphasis on reading for sense, not to worry about emotion or "getting it perfect."

The reading is smooth and I am pleasantly surprised at the work that most of the actors have already done, the handle they have on the text and the choices they are making. The Capulet-Lady Capulet switch works! I will have to make more amendments to the text pertaining to Sister Lawrence. I wonder how many references to the Church I can alter or cut out completely.

In the afternoon, I set up the floor plan and set model pieces that Ana has provided in order to take the cast through what they can expect from the set. Afterwards, pushing all of the tables aside, I lead them through a series of exercises chosen and adapted to get them working together, taking responsibility for the group, balancing the space as well as to instill my cardinal rule in the theatre - quiet feet! Following this we do a second read. With the actors on their feet, they stand around the perimeter of the space when not in scenes, stepping forward when they are in scenes. This gives the

actors another opportunity to read the text aloud as well as to clarify who is in which scene when.

This exercise affords me the opportunity to walk around the different levels of the theatre while actors are on the floor. During the second half of the play when their characters are no longer in scenes, I encourage some actors to sit in an upper tier in order to get a feel for what the space looks like from above. My hope is that the actors quickly become accustomed to the quirks of working in the Telus. I ask them to note how many times they wish the actors below would look up? Jameson takes it upon himself to do this and then incorporates it into his work immediately.

This exercise does not allow time for us to get through the entire play a second time. The text is too long - I decide to make more cuts tonight and issue them tomorrow. The ending in particular needs to be trimmed. I must also find a way to alert the cast to the tendency for everyone's energy and attention to drag in the second act - from just one day of work, this is already a glaring issue.

As of this moment, the plan for tomorrow is to issue cuts, have the group read the newly cut final scene (5.3) then start fresh with table work.

Questions to emphasize during table work:

- What is going on here?
- What is the relationship?
- What do you want to see happen here? Why/for what purpose?
- Will also talk about the female hierarchy.

It is my hope that, having already focused on the major scenes featuring Romeo and/or Juliet last week that much of the time spent at the table with the entire cast will be reduced. My goal is to be on our feet by Wednesday.

Monday December 7, 2009 - Table Work in the Hut

We start the day with cuts, cuts and more cuts to the text. In order to avoid any disappointment or moans and groans from the cast for having their lines cut, I preface the cut announcements by emphasizing that edits were purely decided upon in the interest of run time and not personal judgments based on the first read. Everyone takes the cuts like professionals but by the time we finished, the rehearsal is behind schedule.

As with the lead actors last week, each person in the cast to answers individually:

- What are you excited about?
- What are you nervous about?
- What are your goals for this show?

I record the answers in my hand-written journal and am thrilled to hear an overwhelming amount of people share their excitement to be a part of an ensemble (rather than viewing their parts as "small" they recognize the opportunity they have to create well rounded characters). The positivity and enthusiasm of this cast is infectious.

Table work follows (for the first half of the play). The actors read each scene. I ask about what is going on in general in each scene as well as individually for each character. As with last week, my goal is to give minimal direction - to talk as little as possible - so that the cast can communicate their initial thoughts and ideas out without censorship or outside influence. This is a fantastic opportunity to study each actor's method of communication. I observe how each person expresses themselves, views their character and take stock of the vocabulary of each actor.

Patrick comes in to end the day with a musical rehearsal. He tests for vocal ranges and individual musical instrument ability. What a great way to cap off the day - to have a break from table work and listen to a group of 22 actors filling the space with

music created by their voices. Patrick asks all actors to bring in any musical instruments they can play for the next rehearsal and announces that Mishelle Cutler (Prologue/Apothecary/Musician) will be his co-composer. She will also act as musical director for the show.

Tuesday December 8, 2009 - Table Work, Day Two

We continue table work, this time in a smaller group. This lets me focus on what each actor is saying without the distraction of restless actors who are not in the scenes.

I am surprised when Ryan Warden (Paris) shares an elaborate back-story he has created for his character, the details of which are not evident anywhere in Shakespeare's text (to the best of my knowledge). He has decided that Paris is the son of a Chinese silk merchant, is looking for a wife from overseas who can help him to snub the Montagues and/or Prince. His story also indicates that Paris is related to Benvolio. Everyone around the table collectively drops their jaw. I have made a commitment to say yes to anything and everything at this point so I tell Ryan that I will support whatever gives him a good fantasy about his character. However, worried that the elaborate family tree he has manufactured will cause confusion, I caution him not to let his back-story dictate the back-stories for the other characters. Not five minutes later Megs says "So wait, I'm confused. Is Paris a Montague?"

This prompts the R&J family tree game:

In Verona:

Of the Court: Prince, Paris, Mercutio

Of the house of the Montagues: Lady and Lord, Romeo, Benvolio, Balthazara (as our Balthazar is a woman), Abram

Of the house of the Capulets: Lady and Lord, Juliet, Nurse, Tybalt, Sampson & Gregory, Antonia & Potpan, Peter

Of the City: Citizens, Sister Lawrence and her cloaked cloistered clan, Officers, Watchmen

In Mantua:

Dangerous and Unsavory People: The banished, Apothecary, Street Performers, Beggars, Stage managers (most dangerous)

Actors love to share their clever back-stories. They stay up all night dreaming them up and then proudly share them with you like the most eager child who wants to show how much they know and how richly they can imagine. I will tell you a secret (well, it's not so much a secret) – I will entertain the actor who wants to share but I really don't care much for psychoanalytic stories that are not evident in the text and include things like "my mother beat me" or "my father sexually abused me" etc. However, Chinese silk merchant is a new one and one I am not likely to forget for a long time. It has earned its place in this journal.

A production meeting takes place over lunch. Ana announces that she is going to Mexico on Monday and will be returning in three weeks. It is the second time today that I see jaws collectively drop around the table. I have not seen renderings of the tables and am extremely anxious now.

After lunch, back at rehearsal, the company engages in a lengthy conversation regarding suicide and just why Romeo and Juliet decide to end their lives. The cast is divided on the reason why someone would commit suicide - the implications with respect to "sin" and damnation as well as the selfishness of the act vs. the notion that Romeo and Juliet choose to kill themselves, seeing suicide as the only way to ultimately be together. This tells me that everyone is bored with table work (myself included) and I am relieved when Patrick returns to conduct a musical jam with the actors.

Nearly all actors have brought in musical instruments. Seth Reibstein (Lord Montague) can play the musical saw! Patrick leads everyone in a simple jamming exercise. This includes instruments, vocals and improvised music sounds fantastic – sinister and beautiful. I hear what the show may sound like and I am excited.

Wednesday December 9, 2009 - Back in the Telus: Actors on Their Feet

The morning begins with an in depth table work session with Sister Lawrence. We begin to explore just who Sister Lawrence is and what her relationship is to Romeo, first at the table and then the actors begin to play with II, iii on their feet.

Getting the actors up and exploring proves to be a very useful warm up for me with respect to blocking in the space - as this initial blocking session is impromptu, unexpected, there are no expectations from myself or the actors to come up with a backbone for the scene. I take them through the space and map out Sister Lawrence's garden. I encourage them to walk and play, experiment with organic movement while I look at angles and moving pictures assuring them that everything they do today is not locked down and will likely change. This helps me to formulate an approach that I think can work for the rest of the week. Oh fortunate accident.

In the afternoon I am excited to return from lunch to see the floor taped down with outlines for our tables. I am shocked to discover that Ana has changed the dimensions of our major set piece, the large platform, and it is now dangerously too narrow for the intended blocking. I am surprised to have not been consulted regarding such a major change and I struggle not to panic or be angry. I plod along with the first official blocking rehearsal with the hope in my heart that the build has not yet started.

We work on Act I, iii – Juliet, Lady Capulet and the Nurse. Despite the set setback, the women joyfully explore and play in the space. We experiment with the idea of a small space – the Capulet hall – and, in keeping with the initial concept that the large platform must be used, the “hall” is actually the top of the platform. I don't know how this will play out in reality but everyone is forewarned that everything could change.

I briefly touch upon *Stephen Heatley's rules for working in the Telus*:

- Don't think down, think up
- Share your reaction
- Stand on the diagonal – never face-to-face

And add some more as they pertain to my taste and style:

- Economy of movement - why do in 3 moves what you can do in one?
- Quiet feet have a bigger impact than loud.

These will be revised and expanded as the weeks go on, I am sure...

Thursday December 10, 2009 – Benrollio

The theme of the day is Benvolio Day as each scene we cover features Benvolio. Our work is full of fun and play. Eric (Benvolio), loves rollerblading and tries to convince me that he should play the entire show on rollerblades. While that idea does not fit with the concept of the production, he earns the nickname Benrollio and merrily we roll along.

It is a delight to work with the boys. They each bring a great sense of fun and freedom and are willing to try anything without ego or question. This is a great way to work - they make strong offers and we are able to come up with fun moments together as a team. Ben suggests that his Mercutio is a somewhat tormented but that he covers this up by acting crazy and carefree.

I introduce the French Melodrama technique of playing to “the gods,” – that everything the actors do is for the people in the very top rows. I add on the notion that constant movement on the actor’s part is noisy and confusing for the audience – we don’t know where to look or how to focus.

Friday December 11, 2009 – The Balcony Scene

My original concept around blocking the balcony scene had been to work with the ensemble - put Juliet on top of a couple of tables and have the ensemble, dressed in grey robes, create a wall around her. The advantage being that, in the round, everyone in the audience would be able to see the scene equally and the actors would be able to use the entire space while keeping true to the need to play on the diagonal in the round. The ensemble as the walls of the balcony would provide a physical barrier for the lovers, a vocal score for the scene and would include the Nurse and Sister Lawrence. This way, when the Nurse calls for Juliet the sound would come from within the balcony. Juliet would then be able to duck down and reappear without having to run off stage. At the end of the scene, the intention was to have all cloaked figures turn and become members of Sister Lawrence's cloister. They would provide a vocal soundtrack, transition the furniture and wander off in different directions of the theatre, into the house, to give the illusion of the different corners of the cloister.

Brilliant idea, no?

An empty space is always so much bigger in the imagination! With the stage being much smaller than I was envisioning, the reality is that by setting the balcony scene this way, there would be absolutely no physical distance between Romeo and Juliet. No obstacle. No danger. With the ensemble filling up the middle of the stage, Romeo would have to do much of the scene practically in the laps of the audience members. With sightlines being what they are in the Telus, it is immediately obvious that approaching the balcony scene this way would be extremely problematic. Not to mention the fact that any minute shifting on the ensemble's part would create noise and distraction potentially ruining one of the most famous scenes of all time.

Without physically having the major platform on which to rehearse, I make quick decision to go with that which I so vehemently rejected and use one of the towers in the theatre as the balcony. The rear stage-right tower (tower 1 - beside the gate) is

the best option as there are only two seats in the house that will have a compromised view (vs. 4-8 seats if using a central tower with seating on both sides). Having already decided to clear the lower seating in that tower to make room for the band, clearing the upper two tiers is a minor issue that can easily be resolved. This also can allow for action to take place in other towers at other points in the show thereby solving a concern I had - by choosing not to use a structural balcony for the balcony scene would I be limiting the potential for action in the other towers throughout the rest of the play? By setting the balcony scene on the second tier of the tower I think I will be solving a lot of problems and opening the show up to new possibility.

Megs and Jameson have no problem becoming intimate! Instinctually they explore the physical nature of Romeo and Juliet's relationship, as the text and their impulses dictate. While Romeo and Juliet explore the physical nature of their relationship, the entire female stage management team and myself are left feeling a little steamy until Romeo, who has been kissing Juliet all over her face and neck pulls away at the end of the scene segment and, slightly embarrassed, says: "In the words of Sir Ian MacKellan: 'Sorry if I do, sorry if I don't.'" Everyone blushes and looks in opposite directions.

After working on the scene for nearly two hours I make the following observations:

- The scene is too still right now, I would like a bit more movement but I'm not sure what. No need to add movement for the sake of movement so I'd rather just leave it as is until inspiration strikes me.
- How does Romeo climb up the balcony? We don't have a climbing apparatus and the Chan Centre is strict on what parts of the balcony can be used for climbing. A cheat step has been requested but it must be placed in the exact locale as a set of red cabaret curtains. Not sure how this will happen - not my job I suppose but it doesn't hurt to prepare a solution.

Jameson and Megs have taken to the notion of playing to the gods. Next time we do this scene, I will move all around the space to acclimatize them to contacting all sides.

In the afternoon we work on a couple of big Mercutio moments and attempt to find the balance between comic and tragic. We mark Mercutio's death scene out step-by-step trying to discover what, if anything, has comic potential, what is gravely serious and why. Ben's tendency is always to show too much – he's working too hard. I can see the scenes play out in my head, as I'm sure he can too, but getting the vision to translate through the actor and onto the stage is another thing! Ben is working on unlocking Mercutio's tormented side. I coach him through an exercise where, by singing a lullaby and then interspersing text, he is able to relax him and realize how little he actually has to do to be effective. Goosebumps. Everyone in the room is riveted and Ben goes home with something to think about. I am hopeful that something will click.

Sunday December 13, 2009 – Blocking the Group Scenes

Act I, scene i - Sampson & Gregory vs. Abram & Balthazar(a): This is the start of the show and it is important to introduce the concept of the entire production in a bold, clear way. In this way, this scene cannot be overly naturalistic, but as it begins the audience must identify with and become intrigued by the characters. I would like the beginning of this scene to feel like a Vaudeville comedy routine and then experience a major shift when Abram and Balthazar(a) enter and things get dangerous. This is a difficult balance. I am having a hard time imparting the notion onto the actors. The less experienced students are failing to grasp the situation and I need to devise some way to make them understand or I need to completely reformulate my concept for this scene. Tabled for later...

Note: Sarah, the actress playing Balthazar, has requested the name be changed to Balthazara to better reflect her gender. Request granted. It's Balthazara from here on in.

Act I, scene v – The Party Scene: I explain to the cast that the intention of this rehearsal is to explore the basic story and that the ensemble parts will be filled in at a later date. Sure enough however, there is always one person who wants to make the scene about them even though they have no lines. An actress approaches me several times to suggest that it is imperative that her character have interaction with Romeo in this scene in order to better explain to the audience that they are friends. I try my best to be diplomatic but this is something that irks me to no end and I don't know how much patience I will have next time this happens. I schedule far too much time for the first attempt at this scene and release everyone for an early lunch.

I take this time to work with Lady Capulet (MariaLuisa) on the “God’s bread it makes me mad” speech from III, v. I love working with MariaLuisa because she works steadily, hard and always produces a beautiful result. We discuss the scene, the overall switch of Lady Capulet and Capulet as well as her character through line.

Act III, scene I – Mercutio’s Death: With a few days having passed since last working with Ben, we approach Mercutio’s death again. We work step-by-step through the scene and employ some specific directives in an attempt to take him out of his head when he has difficulty imagining the circumstances. Little success.

First year MFA Candidate Brian Cochrane watches the entire rehearsal today and is very encouraging. He says that this will be the sexiest *Romeo and Juliet* ever. I hope so. I love sexy theatre.

Monday December 14, 2009 – Stumble Through of Act One

We stumble through the first half of the play and it takes almost twice as long as I estimated. In being able to use only one staircase to get up and down in the theatre, it takes a very long time for the actors to get into place. Sarah very quickly and directly points out that centralizing the blocking around the large platform does not work and I will have to revisit nearly all of the scenes. I come to terms with the fact that I have made many compromises based around a set piece I have yet to see.

Ultimately, the platform's presence is a huge hindrance that cuts the stage in two and stops the flow of action. This situation is exactly what I did not want and why I was resistant to having such a significant set piece be rectangular in shape - the flow of the play is circular and the rectangle cuts the stage in an incredibly awkward way. I am incredibly frustrated, upset and angry and am glad that I spent this first week of rehearsals warning the cast that we might have to change the blocking once the table arrives. This will certainly be the case.

I look back over the storyboard I created in my script and am reminded that not one scene was envisioned to be set around a platform. My original instincts knew that this show was not meant to have cumbersome scenery. Its flow is fluid and open. Sarah suggests creating an open courtyard type space that will allow for more natural movement.

I think the actors are doing good work and I am impressed by how much they have adapted in the past week. I receive feedback from Gayle Murphy (voice coach) and Carmen was that this show is on it's way to becoming a very fun piece of THEATRE, which is exactly what I want.

Trying not to dwell on the elephant that is the set piece right now. Solutions, solutions, solutions.

During the run, I am surprised and blown away by Mercutio's progress. He brings such a carefree sense of play. All week I have told him that he must have the pleasure to be a bad student and it seems to have finally started to sink in. The Queen Mab and death speeches still have a long way to go. It seems that when Ben knows what he is doing physically, when he is free to play, this specificity comes. I hope this will come about when Queen Mab is more properly blocked.

Romeo is boring and unlikable. There is no difference between his love for Rosaline and his love for Juliet. I don't see Rosaline and I don't see how Romeo changes once

Juliet comes into the picture. He needs to be more impulsive and passionate. Likewise, Juliet is reluctant. She seems as though she wants Romeo to go away rather than to marry her, pulling away at his every word and advance. I will talk to the leads about these observations and come up with some solutions.

A production meeting occurs over lunch. Holding this immediately after an epic stumble through is a horrible idea. Albeit, I did not know that the stumble would take as long as it did (1 hour 40 minutes) - nor did I expect to delay based on an actor being an hour and 45 minutes late for his call time. With Ana now in Mexico, the set continues to disturb me. I feel that I am being looked to for answers that I do not have. My inclination is to threaten to cut things that may or may not help the show based on the fact that I have not seen them. I find it frustrating to compromise with a designer who is also doing her thesis. I feel too much responsibility to the ideas and growth of others and worry that my process and product is in danger of suffering as a result.

Nick Harrison comes in for the first fight rehearsal and, despite having to make snap decisions based on new blocking that has yet to be created, all goes great! Due to the tight space, we decide that fights will be with daggers. This was my initial wish and I am glad that we can do it. The boys are very keen and the result is that the fights are challenging and rewarding, dangerous and exciting, comic and terrifying. I can't wait to see how this plays out in the end. Regardless of what happens with the blocking, the fights are very adaptable and the boys are extremely dedicated to making them stellar.

The evening ends with a phone conversation with one of the actors about his constant lateness and lack of commitment in rehearsal. He has been arriving late, asking to leave early and, the few times he has been at rehearsal it has been evident that his mind has resided elsewhere. In addition, due to work commitments, his schedule is very compromised and he is unable to live up to the demands of the show. I release him from the show and replace him with another member of the ensemble, Joanna

Williams. She has a strength and energy that will be wonderful at the start of the show and I know that this will be a good balance to Nathan, her new scene partner.

I stay up past 1am intricately storyboarding the entire second half of the play. This afternoon's stumble has me questioning my choices for entrances and exits. While I knew they were not set in stone, I want to have a more concrete plan from here on in. I will not have time to relock the entire second half as well as the first.

Tuesday December 15, 2009 – Blocking the Second Half

Today is a blur. Storyboard in hand, I am glad to know that the table/platform/monster will be set in one place for much of the second half of the play. It will be Juliet's bed and then later become the tomb. I will have to find a way to clear it entirely from the stage during the scene in Mantua. I would like to have a funeral march so perhaps this will help in dealing with the platform at that point.

From here on in I will work more-or-less in sequence. In blocking the first half of the play, I was trying to lump characters' scenes together. Here, because most of the action focuses on Juliet, it should be easier to work in order and create a stronger through line. This act also involves actors who tend to be more consistent in their work. MariaLuisa, Megs, Barbara and Andrew make strong offers and I anticipate that there will be less handholding.

A bit of spare time affords the opportunity to revisit the balcony scene. My quick chat with Jameson last night already shows results. Romeo is more passionate, carefree and excitable. Megs is also less resistant. She thought she was portraying traits of a modest, shy and nervous young girl. She steps up the passion and is on the road to creating a very endearing character that is flirtatious, impulsive but wise for her years.

I would like to use the trap door in the floor of the stage for Romeo's hiding spot in Sister Lawrence's cell. It will provide a nice reveal and add some magic to the second half of the play. The trap can later serve as the Sister's herbal arsenal, thereby tying it more strongly to the action and better integrating it into the production so that it isn't just a flash in the pan effect.

The end of the day finds us blocking the beginning of III, v - "Wilt thou be gone." This results in another "sorry if I do, sorry if I don't" moment while once again the all-female stage management team watches, their mouths agape. Megs and Jameson sure are going at this with unabashed passion and wild abandon. Hope they can keep it up. Pardon the pun.

Wednesday December 16, 2009 – The Platform

The large platform arrives at last. Oh god, it is a beast. Too big for anything and too small for anything at the same time. I am going to hide it back stage - use it as a reveal for the party scene (I, v) and then keep it hidden until the intermission when it becomes Juliet's bed. It may be architecturally interesting but it is useless.

Nick comes in for another fight rehearsal. The boys are so enthusiastic about the fights that they have purchased their own daggers so that they can rehearse over the Christmas break. Jameson and Dave already have their fight up to speed and they are adding their own personal touches.

Having Joanna replace Colin proves to be a great idea. With Nick's guidance, she and Sarah (Balthazara) choreograph a feisty bitch fight at the top of the play that will carry up the stairs and throughout the towers in the second tier. The men playing Gregory and Abram are less skilled and have little physical control. Nick points out that this way there will be one good fight and one that is a bit more clownish. The two male actors are dangerous and terrifying for all the wrong reasons. It makes sense to rid them of their daggers early on in favour of a good, old-fashioned fistfight.

Tybalt and Benvolio have an epic fight where Benvolio is on the defensive. Eric assures me in earnest that the fight plays out this way not because Benvolio is a bad fighter but because he is outmatched with Tybalt. I can't wait to see what this looks like with costumes - Benvolio's wire rimmed glasses and bow tie vs. Tybalt's muscle shirt. Having the other two men drop their daggers aids in the flash of Tybalt's fight. He enters from above, leaping from the second tier without weaponry and picks up both abandoned daggers from the ground.

There is enough time to work this fight both with and without the platform. I decide to strike it from the first scene so that everything is much more open. Three smaller tables of varying heights on the upstage right corner and downstage left will serve as the higher levels I was hoping the large platform would provide.

I rework the blocking for Benvolio and Romeo's first two scenes together. Without the platform, the actors are already much stiller and the scene is more focused. Romeo continues working on being more likable and is showing progress.

On the production side I am struggling with what seems to be a lack of trust, cooperation and understanding. Is my vision for this show being misunderstood? Doubtful? Indeed, those who know the actors and my previous work don't appear to doubt the production but I am feeling resistance from production staff. I suppose I am in a position where I have the opportunity to better refine and articulate what I want. So tired right now. I didn't eat today. Nor Monday. I haven't taken a break in rehearsals all week. My eyes are zombified. I wish someone would send me to the spa. I wonder if we can work that into the production budget...

Thursday December 17 – Blocking Complete?

Initial blocking for second half of the play is complete. While I feel that the final scene has a powerful visual impact, I worry that in a run it will feel too long. More cuts are in order but I need to see how everything flows first.

Gayle holds a session to acclimatize the actors' voices to the quirks of the Telus while I meet with Conor and his assistants to discuss lighting.

Friday December 18 – Re-block and Photo Shoot

Friday morning affords time to revisit some blocking from the first half of the play. Without the table, things flow relatively smoothly. Most of the previous blocking can be adapted to the new configuration. I work to create small areas that can be defined by light for settings such as the room in the Capulets' house and Sister Lawrence's garden. This is much more along the lines of what is being done in the second half of the play where the stage is essentially divided into three segments (until V, ii). I pay greater attention to entrances and exits and am frustrated by the Chan's reluctance to let us use the outer doors of the theatre until January. Much time is wasted going up and down the one set of stairs we currently have access to and I look forward to receiving the back stage flights of stairs that the shop is building for us.

I meet with Carmen and Barbara in the costume shop of the Freddy Wood. Photo in hand, we experiment with make-up for the photo shoot that is about to occur. I want the photos to reflect the intended look of the show so make up is imperative. Photos will include a "nude" Romeo and Juliet alone in various poses that suggest lovemaking and then photos with Barbara spinning fire in the background of the lovers' scene. Once again the fire effect is stunning. I receive some photos later in the evening and they are fantastic! Very sexy, dangerous and intriguing. The media will love them and they are definitely a departure from your average *Romeo and Juliet* - university production or professional.

Sunday December 20 – Act 2 Run and Work Through Play

We run Act 2. The ending is too long. It will have to be re-cut and reworked.

Sarah suggests that since Mishelle is both the Prologue/Emcee character and the apothecary, that she play them as the same character. Indeed this has been my intention from day one and the reason why I cast Mishelle in both parts. Based on

Sarah's feedback it is obvious that my intention is not yet clear and I will have to work on ways to better clarify this for the actor (who is now playing the apothecary as an old person) and the audience.

The afternoon is spent working through the entire play from the top. We do the Prologue and then I, i - I, v. I block the entrance of the Chorus character along with all of the actors creeping behind the gate and upstage towers. This helps the actors to visualize the play and they become extremely excited.

The rest of the day is spent working through from top of play so as to adapt the blocking to the new set. The platform will absolutely not work for the first half. It is too high, too cumbersome. Not elegant at all. It will be used only in the party scene where it can appear as a reveal. It elevates Barbara for poi and voi (a scarf dance) and additionally can contribute to the scene by filling the stage and making the party appear fuller. In addition, during Romeo and Juliet's first meeting, it can provide a physical barrier for the lovers to playfully go around before finally meeting at the edge of the platform and experiencing their first kiss.

Monday December 21 - Continue Work Through

We continue to work through the play and add some furniture transitions. We reach III, iii before the end of the day and will be in okay shape for tomorrow's full stumble through of the play.

Tuesday December 22 – Full run, notes, rework ending

Ahhhhh... the last day before a much needed and deserved holiday break.

During a run through of the entire show one thing is overwhelmingly clear - despite my best efforts to edit the text, this production is too, too, too, too long. With the first half running an hour and thirty-seven minutes and the second half at about an hour and twenty is clear that I will have to do more cuts over the break. It's becoming difficult at this stage to decide what should be cut – the actors are doing a lovely job with the text

and much of what has been kept is essential to the story. Much of the time issue is due to pace – this is sure to pick up with an Italian line run. Also, once the back staircase arrives, much time will be saved by not having to wait for people to go all the way around to the fire exits.

Surprisingly, the second half is much less heavy than it has been in the past. However, the actors are tending to play emotion rather than making active choices. Because they feel the ending is sad, they fall into the trap of displaying their sadness. This is driving me crazy.

The final scene is particularly problematic. Once Romeo and Juliet die, the show is essentially over. Why does Shakespeare include such a lengthy denouement? I tried to keep much of the following text in tact but the result is boring – much of the show is summed up in long speeches and stillness. We learn nothing new until the families choose to end their feud.

After the run, I cut the ending quite drastically on the spot with the cast on hand. We run it a few times to see how it works. The scene becomes much more efficient and to the point. The actors spontaneously explode into the sinister laughter that occurs after the Prologue at the top of the play. Spiteful laughter from the performers after a beautiful moment is a key element of Bouffon and I am delighted that the actors have instinctively tuned into this as a collective.

I am excited by the notion that Juliet will begin to subtly move while Romeo drinks the poison – a wiggle of the toes, a breath. He will have his back to her so he will not see this as he drinks. She will fully wake during his last kiss, he will realize for a moment that she was not dead and then he will die. I wonder if this is a cliché. I know it has been done before in film but I would like to play with the notion. A risk worth taking?

Things to meditate on over the break:

- What non-scripted business can happen to better flesh out both the Cabaret feel and ensemble's involvement? I begin to write a list of possibilities immediately after rehearsal. Sarah suggests the use of drugs – joints, opium and/or cigarettes – as a way to link the musicians to the rest of the physical action of the play. I have certainly wanted to use absinthe and the idea of opium appeals to me.
- What text should be cut and what must be kept? I started a list immediately after Sunday's Act 2 stumble through. I will use this as my guide and elaborate on it.
- Action plan for the next phase of rehearsal. We will have less time. What are the priorities acting-wise? What else needs to be added?
- How can I balance my life and rehearsals so that I remember to eat and can make time for *me* in a way that doesn't include consuming copious amounts of wine (i.e. yoga, taking a walk, etc.)?

Though I might do a bit of hand written planning on the plane to Ottawa tomorrow, I will not do any work until Monday. I need time to let things sit.

Holiday Break - December 23, 2009 - January 1, 2010

After taking more than half of the week to enjoy Christmas, I spend two days going over the text and deciding upon cuts. I send them out via email so that the actors have time to adjust before returning to rehearsal. Some actors reply with negotiations, offering to cut other lines in favour of keeping ones that they are attached to. I am open to this and will make case-by-case decisions.

I begin to lose sleep over the fact that the make-up workshop did not take place in December as I requested and it still has yet to be scheduled. The make-up is very specific and technical, will take some time to design and to learn. It will act as a mask and the actors need time to adapt to it by altering their physical and vocal choices.

The clock is ticking and I am starting to worry that the make-up will not work with the rest of the design components. By the end of the holiday break, a workshop is scheduled to take place in the afternoon on Saturday January 2. I feel some relief. Andrea Rabinovitch will choreograph a dance for the Capulet's party scene. This should have some dangerous, sexy argentine tango flavour - I request something that might be believable as the baby of Sonya Teyeh and Tim Burton.

I spend a few days mulling over a rehearsal plan and where to begin upon returning in January. There is not much time left before opening. Yikes! We have a lot to cover. I debate whether to start where we left off, start again from the top or start with the weakest points and work those in chronological order. I will be certain to schedule work on the big group scenes in our first week back. The challenge is finding time in a four-hour evening for fight rehearsals (one hour) and music rehearsals (one hour). This leaves only two hours a night to work the acting. Hmm... I am going to have to think about this.

Our first two days back, Saturday and Sunday, will focus on reviewing scenes with new cuts as well as on scenes where the blocking needs to be refined. Saturday's schedule will be light as it will have to be constructed around the make-up workshop. Monday will better flesh out transitions and Tuesday will be spent with Andrea choreographing the dance and then Nick reviewing the fights. Wednesday will see a run of Romeo's journey (all of Romeo's scenes) and Thursday we will run Juliet's journey. Looking forward to this.

I am still wondering about how to get actors to pick up the pace as I don't know when there will be time for a full Italian. I will perhaps have them run an Italian of each scene before we work on it.

Friday January 1, 2010

Happy New Year!

I am at the airport returning to Vancouver from Ottawa. While traveling I organize little but important lists:

- Actors available to serve as background ensemble for each of the city scenes as well as in Mantua.
- A scene-by-scene map of where each of the tables will be placed when not being used. I can't wait to get these tables. I know they are going to be much bigger than the pieces we have been working with in rehearsal and the actors (and I) will require some time to adjust.
- Additional props that need to be brought in to flesh out background action.

It occurs to me that I have made so many lists of which actor is where and playing what character or who is able to move what piece of furniture when but I've never looked at who is available to be involved in the onstage action during each scene. Good list. I look forward to using it when I get back in the rehearsal hall tomorrow.

Saturday January 2, 2010 - First Day Back

The actors are split into three groups and do an initial workshop with the make-up technician in the dressing rooms at the Frederic Wood Theatre. As planned, I remain in the Telus with the intention of working some scenes around whoever is available. While the schedule has been structured, unforeseen conflicts arise and much of it changes. Inevitably a couple of actors are late and I reprimand one of them for being unfocused in their scene as a result. I feel bad but the reprimand results in the scene being much more in line with where it needs to be.

I had a debate over Christmas about working with students vs. working with professionals. Would I ever reprimand a professional in the way I do students? I don't think so but at the same time, they are students, they haven't yet developed

processes. For some of them, this is their first time working on a show and they don't necessarily see how their lateness impacts not only the rehearsal schedule but also their performance (which trickles down to affecting their scene partners and the rest of the show).

The morning allows me to tackle the first moment of the first scene of the play – I, i. This has been giving me trouble from the beginning of rehearsals – it's one of the weakest scenes of the production. I realize I have been taking for granted the fact that the actors should know they are starting the entire play and that they need to live up to that responsibility. This was never fully communicated to them and, with having to recast the role of Sampson back in December and then slashing and cutting the scene again and again, I did not make the rehearsing this portion of the scene a priority. I schedule a good amount of time for going over it today. My intention is to make the blocking and intentions more precise for the two actors. We will do the scene again on Tuesday with the entire company and I think that the piece will come together much more effectively. Taking the time to start the play off right really sets things in motion.

Techniques used:

- Whisper your text conspiratorially. Now do the same thing but on voice.
Why? To raise the stakes.
 - When you tell an actor that something is “urgent” or “more stakes,” they might understand you on an intellectual level but it doesn't mean they can take it into the body. Every time I get an actor to whisper the text, they find what they need and then bring it onto voice. Sometimes this takes a few tries but it's a heck of a lot faster than finding metaphors or “as ifs” for them.
- Laugh off stage before you come on.
 - Why? Joanna as Sampson was dropping the impulse every time she would start her text. She would enter with a big heavy sigh and then

start the text. The two actors did not know where they were coming from or where they were going – no intention, no purpose. Again, we had already had the intellectual discussions around the given circumstances, actions and the objectives.

- “Just laugh” I say. Big laughter from back stage links the previous moment - the end of the Prologue - to the next. In having the actors carry this laughter with them, the energy is raised, they have a sense of where they are coming from. By the last time we run the scene, the actors are having fun (imagine!) and there is a clear start to the play.

The actors take some time in the afternoon to revisit their fight scenes. This begins shakily at first but by 3:30 (after lunch) everyone is back and into the swing of things.

We begin each scene with an Italian line run. The first few “Italians” are not Italians at all. They are slow, heavy, and full of pauses. I point this out to the team when, at last, I can’t take it anymore, singling out the two people who are “sort of” doing an Italian. The result is that the last Italian of the day is a true Italian and, inevitably, it is better resembles the pace of the scene. This carries through into the rehearsal and the result is lovely. This is an approach I will continue with for the rest of the week!

We work on the most chaotic scene – I, v – the dreaded party scene. This seems to be a never-ending event. So many little details to work out and so many people to manage at the same time. I love to let the actors take responsibility and figure business out themselves, then comment, guide, embellish and cut. This works for the most part and today is no exception. Andrea comes in to observe the scene so that she can have information that will help her to choreograph the dance. Great to have her laughter and support in the room as well as with her stern presence. She gives a firm lecture at the end of the scene about coming in early to do a minimum of 30-minutes warm up from here on in or the students would have to suffer “the Wrath of Rab.” Love it. I have been lecturing the students for over a year about the importance of warming up and it has had little impact. Perhaps now that their grades

may be on the line there will be some change and actors will be more focused at the start of each day!

Working this scene takes longer than I anticipated (with Andrea's notes and lecture) so the rest of the rehearsal schedule goes out the window, with the exception of one scene.

I am glad to see that Moneca, the Nurse, has used the break to pick up her socks. She was over-analyzing (both the text and herself) in the last week of rehearsal before the break but today she is in good form.

I am dismayed to see photos from the make-up workshop and to hear reports from the actors. I was extremely clear that the make up is intended to be grotesque and not in any way clownish. The photos and actors' comments reveal the opposite, indicating a major disconnect between Carmen's (and my) intended view and the view of the make up technician. I spend the evening sending e-mails, making phone calls and coming up with contingency plans.

I realize just how little time we have. In December, there was a lot of "oh, we will work on that after Christmas" – well now it's after Christmas and tick tock, tick tock!

Sunday January 3, 2010 - The Sex Ballet

As we continue working through the play, it is as if no time has passed. Actors are raring to go and we quickly fall into efficient and energized work.

We choreograph the "Sex Ballet" at last. No secret here - I love movement and transitions and the hour we spend on this piece is a pure joy. The image - a spiral, intertwining, two become one. I am again inspired by my work in the fall on *Le perimeter*, where Craig, the director requested that the actors fuse together so that the audience couldn't tell where one person began and the other ended. As much of the Sex Ballet will be done in silhouette, I hope for a similar effect. The challenge -

how to make a beautiful love piece with implied nudity last only approximately 30 seconds and have Romeo come off as a quality lover (no "wham, bam, thank you ma'am" or "that's it?!?... *question to self: can you write "wham, bam, thank you ma'am" in a thesis?*). The result is beautiful, I think. Not perfect yet and I fully expect more challenges to arise once the real bed fabric arrives.

The goal of the week is to spend the majority of the time with the ensemble, working with the group rather than individuals. An attempt to have Christine (Potpan) make a bold character choice is proving difficult. I have her try out some crazy, over-the-top choices to get her to break out of her conservative shell. The intention is not that these choices will stick but that she may find some freedom and bring her performance up to match the rest of the group. Barking like a dog, she intersperses the text. It is quite funny but I can tell that she feels self-conscious.

Working scenes throughout the rest of the day takes longer than I anticipated. For the first time in the process I scrap a good deal of the scheduled scenes. Not a big deal as we will get to them tomorrow. I am concentrating, as I said, on ensemble detail now so I don't mind taking this time.

An overwhelming number of cast members approach me individually about their concern about the results of the makeup workshop. When I arrive home there is a pile of e-mails about the make up and conflicting information from various sources. I decide to examine the original designs and try a couple of looks out for myself in order to see how difficult the designs are to apply. In about 30 minutes I complete one face. Though it is not technically perfect, it is much closer to the look than the clownish designs from Saturday's workshop. An attempt at a second look creates a similar result in a comparable amount of time. I am confident that the looks will work, that they are not difficult to apply and am glad that I tried them out so that I can answer any more questions that come up. It is unfortunate that I have had to take so much of this on myself but we can't waste any more time on this. Another make-up session will be scheduled for Friday night.

Monday January 4, 2010 - The Tables Arrive

Production meeting days always make me grouchy. This is something I have slowly come to realize throughout this process. Though the meeting is fairly smooth, I am concerned by a comment made by the make up assistant that the make up is "clown" - I have been very clear that this is not the case and the fact that the assistant is using this language indicates that there has indeed been an extreme break down in communication of vision. I am also still stinging from an earlier disagreement with props regarding my desire to serve cookies (or some kind of food) to the audience throughout the party scene. They are reluctant, citing budget as the number one concern.

The six tables arrive to the rehearsal hall. Although I requested that they each be made light enough to be moved by one petite woman, they are twice as heavy as I wanted or expected. This will affect the transitions as movement will be more laboured and some of the tables now require two people to move them when I had only choreographed one. An upside is that their size is much bigger than I anticipated. We have been rehearsing with smaller boxes so in some cases, we only need one table where there had previously been two. I'm glad that we will be revisiting the transitions tomorrow night so that this can be worked out and the actors can get the movement into their bodies (so that they can find freedom to play later).

We work music, V, iii and then fights. Patrick places actors throughout the space in order to create a full, surround sound experience. Actors know where they are and what they are singing now and it sounds fantastic. V, iii is chaotic - after the last minute cuts occurring just before Christmas break, everyone has a different memory of the scene. With some effort, debate and negotiation, we get back on track and although the scene lacks drive, the shape is there.

Fight rehearsal is filmed by a videographer from The Ubysey. She will visit a few rehearsals, documenting the process from now until dress rehearsal. I am thrilled that there will be a video recording of this process!

Tuesday January 5, 2010 - Choreography Night!

Andrea choreographs the dance for I, v. It is fantastic to see all of the actors dancing the tango as this is probably my favourite type of dance. Claire (Lady Montague) is dance captain and for good reason - she moves and dances beautifully, is confident and clear. I am thrilled to have her on board.

Due to a scheduling mix up, the actors who are also musicians in the show are late for the 7:45 call time to rehearse I, i. This week, while we rehearse in the Telus, the musicians are in BC Binning rehearsing music. This lateness shows me that they are unsure of their call time we need to assign them an ASM to keep them on track.

This lateness is a fortuitous accident however as we are able to once again play "my favourite game" - *Grandmother's Footsteps*.

This game is similar to *Red Light, Green Light*: The actors stand on one side of the room and I, as grandmother, stand on the other. I alternate between turning my back and turning to face them. The winner is the first actor who makes it all the way across the room and touches my shoulder but the actors can move only when my back is turned. If I turn around and catch them moving, they have to go back to the beginning and start again. This is a great teaching tool that I use to help actors become aware of their movement and later, how they move when they speak text. This time I use the game help the actors to remember the conspiratorial "secret behind the eyes" that they need to have for the spirit of Bouffon.

Usually this game is played with actors in one long line but due to the confines of the space they have to move in a choral clump. It is magical to turn around to see a mass of people inching towards me with mischief in their eyes. We play twice. By the second time the musicians have arrived, and I have the company hum the music for one of the scenes throughout the game while I add additional directives whenever I face them. "Slowly turn your heads and look at each other. Slowly turn your heads as a group and look at Conor" (the lighting designer is present tonight). What a great

reminder for the actors and now we once again have a reference point for the spirit of the show. They bring this energy into the rest of the rehearsal and I hope they can keep it up for the run.

Tara from The Ubysey films the second half of rehearsal (I, i and then transition work). I, i is chaotic - controlled but chaotic nonetheless. There is so much yelling and banging – it is my intention to set up the sounds to be expected in the space and the conventions of the show but in order to get people to stop I find the most effective tactic to be bashing my binder-bound script on the table while yelling "Stop! Stop! Stop!" Can't wait to see this on the video.

Transitions with the new tables go much more smoothly than anticipated. Actors remember most of their choreography and are very open to adapting to the new tables and then playing with movement and patterns. The movement of the cloister scenes is rounded - I use the image of the Olympic Rings (as there are 5 actors moving pieces and they circle round one another) – very topical this year. The movement of building Verona is jangly and jagged by contrast. This naturally occurs based on the impulse of the actors moving the pieces. In the scheduled hour and a half, we only reach II, vi but I am confident that the two more hours scheduled for Sunday will be enough to choreograph the rest. There are far fewer transitions in the second half of the play.

The transition rehearsal also proves useful for the actors who are entering the scenes to get a sense of the flow of the show. Previously actors were waiting until the stage was completely bare before entering. They realize now that they can enter on the heels (ankles? shins?) of the previous action. This should help with time.

I worry that there is not any more time to work with Mercutio on Queen Mab and the death. Have to meditate on this one and pray for divine intervention.

Also contemplating the big transition into the top of the show. It is obvious that the tables are not going to work for their originally intended purpose - to pose as cabaret tables and then be taken by the actors. They just won't fit in the audience. Should they be preset in the Verona configuration?

Wednesday January 6, 2010 - Romeo's Journey

We lightly work through all of Romeo's scenes in a row as if the show is purely Romeo's play. What is Romeo's story? This proves informative for Jameson. I need to reflect on it before arriving at any conclusions.

Thursday January 7, 2010 - Juliet's Journey

Ditto to yesterday but with Juliet. I notice that Megs as Juliet leaves gaping pauses before speaking her text. Her scene partners are left hanging. Great simple reminder of acting on the line and not in between is in need here. I get caught up with the amazing emotional range that Megs is capable of and realize that I am becoming blind to my actors' areas where improvement is needed.

It occurs to me that this is also true in the case of Mercutio. I have been so impressed by his progress (Queen Mab and the death excepted) that I am losing track of his story.

Where else is this happening? Hmmm... must open up those blinders!

Friday January 8, 2010 – Workshop #2: The Make Up Make-Up Workshop

With Jill and the make-up assistants' help, the actors experiment with trial make up based on images I assign to each of them. Conor sets up a test lighting situation in the trap room so that the faces can each be viewed under the lights. Gayle attends as well. Each actor, one by one, stands under the lights for inspection and feedback for adjustments, then Gayle has them each speak text to see what (if any) adjustments needed to be made vocally.

Romeo is a problem - the actors' features don't lend themselves to the style of make up and his eyes look vampiric. I hope he can match Juliet - light and fresh - a heartthrob!

Overall, everyone looks fantastic. I hope that this enhances and doesn't take away from the project. I worry that the extreme make up will not go with the costumes. Regardless, I am excited now.

Sunday January 10, 2010 – Transitions, Transitions

The day begins slowly - indeed a 9am call is torture to any actor but it is necessary for the paint schedule. Oh yes - the floor has been primed and is now being painted and it looks fantastic. The twisty checkerboard pattern will aid the actors in curving sweeps across the stage (rather than walking in direct straight lines) and it adds to the show's overall twisted concept.

Andrea leads a gentle warm up before fight and dance rehearsal. This affords me much needed time to go through the music transition plan with Mishelle - a paper tech for the musicians. Music is everywhere in this show – it plays in every transition, in between every single scene, at the top of the show, during intermission and as underscores to some scenes. Capulet, Sister Lawrence and Mercutio have their own theme songs and we have added the Shakespearean song “Gripping Grievs” during the transition from Act IV to Act V.

Nathan (Gregory) arrives to rehearsal with a sprained ankle. Not great given that, as the largest member of the ensemble, he is instrumental in transitions where heavy set pieces must be moved. I will have to make a contingency plan. I ask the ASM's to send me a list of who moves what where and when so that Russell can be trained up this week if need be. Upon returning from the hospital with a poor prognosis, Nathan is instantly cut from the dance as he will be unable to rehearse it. He is furious and everyone is uncomfortable as he sits in the middle of the audience sulking. I invite him to take the rest of the day off.

The rest of the day is devoted to transitions with music. We pick up where we left off on Tuesday. The focus is on working together, choreography, organization, efficiency and flow. It takes nearly the entire day to get through everything. Once again I push aside my plans for working the ensemble more thoroughly into the Verona scenes but I think (*hope*) this will happen on Tuesday and Wednesday. I will change the rehearsal schedule and we will do stop and start runs of each act.

I lose my temper and yell at everyone for too much chatter in between scenes. Constantly actors finish their scenes, go back stage and are ignorant to the fact that scenes continue beyond their exits. This is completely disrespectful to the actors working on stage. The Telus echoes terribly so the tiniest extra bit of noise makes focusing on what is on stage impossible. After many polite requests for quiet, I finally yell "Shut up!" Followed by a controlled but deep voiced "Shut the F___ up." This is not a high moment of the day but after that the chatter ceases for the rest of the rehearsal.

Ryan as Paris is having trouble and I think the make up workshop scared him - he is worried his weak choices are not going to fill the demands of the make up. He asks me what I think he should do and I tell him to stop worrying about what things sound like and to make specific choices, commit to the text and connect with his partner. After a step-by-step handholding session through a scene (micro-managing is not my favourite way of working), he arrives back at an acceptable starting point. We reached this same point just before the holidays so I do wonder what happened in those ten days - he seems to be one of the few people who regressed over the break. Later I send him an email with my detailed vision and character analysis of Paris. Ryan needs time to be on his own, make choices and discoveries and bring them in - he is not responsive in the moment or a risk taker. I hope this helps.

Transitions look and sound incredible. Everyone is working together as an ensemble. When viewed from above the actors create patterns on the floor that I know are spontaneous but they have the quality of careful choreography. We work the

Apothecary scene with all musicians - an opium den oozing with vice. Also worked into this moment is the journey of the letter - Brother John will be delayed in Mantua having been lured into said opium den. This gives an interesting twist to the following scene with Sister Lawrence as everything he tells her is now a lie.

I chat with both Romeo and Juliet (separately) about the individual journey work we did last week. Both flag some major holes for themselves. This is a great eye opener as to where they are at vs. where they need to go. Romeo's trouble areas are at the end - when he receives the news that Juliet is dead. Currently he reacts to the information as if he just found out his car has been towed, and then plays the exact same note right through to the end of the play. We work his death scene - finding more colour. He works on actually connecting to Juliet rather than playing his actor's idea of the appropriate emotion.

Juliet shares that she believes her problem area is the start of the play. Finding the youthful giddiness of fresh love. She reveals to me her realization that she had been regarding the "Good pilgrim" sonnet scene (the first encounter in I, v) as an extension of the balcony scene. Great to know this for the next time we work this scene. We need to focus on progression - why this here now? What is the journey of the relationship? What is the journey of each kiss?

January 11, 2010 - Run Through

At the production meeting it is finally confirmed that we have cookies! Yaaaaaaaay! After weeks negotiating and fighting with the props department on this point, I am pleased that the audience will be able to enjoy the live, interactive experience of receiving treats. On top of that, I receive confirmation that the fire can be lit every single night of the run (there was a chance that one or two nights would be without). Hooray. I think this is the first day that I have left a production meeting in a good mood.

At rehearsal we do our first run through since before the Christmas break. The play has a story. There is a journey. However, the show is over 3 hours right now! Ugh. It seems that every time I ask the cast to focus on pace they go slower. What can be done here? What more can be cut? And where are the backstage stairs?

January 12, 2010 - Spain and Italy Save the Day

In an effort to pick up the pace we do an Italian line run on the feet (a Spanish?) followed by a stop and start work through of the first half of the play. I am pleased to see the actors finally pick up the pace and be absolutely specific. This show is fun and has impact!

January 13, 2010 - A Controversial Cut

We repeat yesterday's process with the second half of the play with similar effect. I make the decision to cut Juliet's long speech about the potion she receives from Sister Lawrence. This is the one point in the show where we learn nothing new. The only forward action occurs after the speech when Juliet drinks the concoction. I create a transition with music where Sister Lawrence gives the letter to Brother John. Her exit is overlapped by Juliet's entrance to the bedroom. Once on the bed, Juliet examines the potion and drinks. It works beautifully but the cut is much to Megs' chagrin. She hates me today but she will be fine and the moment will be amazing.

January 14, 2010 - Last Run Before Tech

I pop into the theatre during the day to check out lighting looks and levels. Nearly every look is boring and generic. The cyclorama is various shades of grey and the lights are a general wash. Where is the isolated lighting we discussed? The lighting does not reflect the spirit of the show. I communicate this to Conor and we begin working through the play scene by scene. Neither of us is completely satisfied yet but we acknowledge that the lights are on their way.

During rehearsal we run the entire play one last time before tech. The run is good as is the pace. Megs has forgiven me for yesterday's cut and, with the music, the potion

drinking moment is very powerful. I would like to add more moments with the band watching the action in their pit throughout the first half of the play.

We are just where we need to be for tech weekend.

January 15, 2010 - This is not Bard on the Beach!

I return to the theatre to once again look at lighting with much more success. After a frustrating two hours, Conor and I come to a great understanding as the result of a happy accident. As he cycles through a transition from one lighting look to another, I see the look of the show in his transition. We discuss how until this point, the lighting I have been displeased with has been polite and conservative, reflecting traditional Shakespearean festivals rather than the chaotic, sinister and twisted elements of this production. It is out of the elements of this accidental transition light that the lighting for the show begins to emerge.

January 16, 2010 - Cue-to-Cue

This is Stage Management's day and as such I do everything I can to stay out of the way while at the same time being productive. During the little breaks in between cues I take advantage of every opportunity to give notes and ideas to the actors. Conor is still working on lighting looks and assures me that everything will be ready on Wednesday. Apart from Jameson being tired, having worked at his job all night and Meg's wearing a distractingly revealing mini-skirt that I have to ask her to change, everything runs smoothly and we finish early. Phew! I can't wait to see how everything comes together tomorrow.

January 17, 2010 - Fire Tests and Run Throughs

Stage management's time again today. We start with the fire tests. The fire poi under the lights with the music looks absolutely incredible. Barbara's black light show during the Capulet party is problematic as the wands she is twirling do not glow very well under the current black light situation. A solution is being devised that will involve a second black light and Barbara will use big swatches of cloth rather than thin rods.

We are scheduled to do two dress runs: One in the afternoon and one in the evening. During the first dress run there is so much noise backstage that I take a tally of all of the banging I can hear in the audience. This will have to be remedied by tomorrow. The second run starts late and runs 15 minutes longer than usual. Again, the actors take my note to "pace up" as meaning to slow down.

All of the elements put together - make-up, costumes, lighting and set look incredible. The show is shaping up to be better than I imagined and I am very excited. The lighting, costumes and make-up together evoke a sinister sepia photograph. Actors in groups have amazing visual impact and alone they are beautiful. I will make an effort to keep notes to a minimum now, focusing on little details while at the same time keeping my eye out for any major issues I may have missed.

January 18 - 19, 2010 - Dress Rehearsals

Monday's dress rehearsal starts late and as a result the run finishes late. It seems that the ladies' hair is taking a long time to style before the show. These are technical issues that I have little control over and it is decided that the actors' call will be 30 minutes earlier than originally scheduled.

On Tuesday afternoon I work with Mercutio on his death... again. Gayle joins us to assist. Finally we get somewhere. I take him through all of the beats and choreograph the scene for him. The shape works, and while there is still need for minor adjustments, it should at least be passable in the run. The rest of his performance in the show is so engaging that until now, his death has come off as amateur and disappointing. I hope this afternoon will spur this moment towards living up to the rest of his performance. In an attempt to help the moment out, Mishelle will underscore the speech with a slow reprise of Mercutio's theme.

With all of the technical elements falling into place, it is apparent that the actors need an audience now. They are itching for one! I had hoped that Tuesday night's run would be an open or invited dress but it seems that is not the case. The actors once

again play an interactive show to an empty space. The usual notes about specificity, pace and articulation follow.

As has been the case throughout the entire rehearsal process, I try my best to move around throughout the space to see the show from different angles. From every seat on every level, a different secret is revealed, a new aspect of the story told. This is extremely exciting. However, I am not thrilled by the view from the top tier – it is very distant from the action. I make a major note to all actors to look up to the top tier within one minute of their first entrance and to continue to remember to look up every once in a while throughout the show.

I am disappointed with the lament over Juliet's faux death. Sarah points out that the actors are not listening to each other. I have tried giving notes and organizing musical rehearsals around the moment but we are at a point where time to fix this problem does not exist. I have remedied part of the problem by shortening the moment by editing more of the text.

Sarah finds that the journey of the letter is not clear. The lighting is not precise enough yet so we miss the beginning and end of Brother John's quest. I agree that lighting is making it difficult to follow the journey but I make notes for Conor and have no doubt that this will be remedied by opening night.

The fights are stunning – dangerous, funny, terrifying. I am so glad that we went with daggers rather than long swords. The actors are adjusting to carrying them in hidden sheaths in their costumes. This enables the weapons to be revealed at the precise moment they are required without getting in the way any other time. Paris has a long sword that is hidden in his cane - this also makes for a nice reveal. He and Tybalt both die in pin-dropping silence. It's amazing. Juliet is having difficulty with getting Romeo's dagger out of his sheath at the end. This is a minor problem that Megs can figure out with practice. Can't wait for an audience!

January 20, 2010 - Preview

The preview performance is unexpectedly sold out and I am shocked to discover that there is not a seat reserved for me in the audience (they add a chair).

I take very few notes and keep an eye on the audience for much of the show.

At the top of the show, Mishelle makes sure to contact all points in the house. She still needs to work on reaching those behind her as well as people on the very top tier. The actors creeping behind the gate and within the second tier seating is chillingly effective and I am ecstatic to watch the audience slowly discover that they are there! The actors are sensitive to the audience – this is fantastic. They (audience and actors) are able to adjust to each other in time and the ensemble is so sensitive! Yay!

The audience response is favourable and the show is going extremely well until suddenly in the middle of V, ii there is a terrible, endless hissing sound from backstage. The compressed air is rapidly releasing from the bed (just before the transition into the tomb!) due to the eager hand of a "helpful" actor who has never before operated the bed. The actors quickly improvise - carrying Juliet out in their arms, they lay her on the bare stage floor and cover her up with her shroud. She matches the other covered corpses on the floor so the lack of the tomb (platform) is not a noticeable error. The rest of the scene is done at floor level with Juliet's head facing in the wrong direction (much to Conor's chagrin) and Paris' scabbard sheath having landed on her throat during the fight. Later, Jameson tells me that all he could do to keep it together was to remember the basic rules I had beaten into him for that scene (look up every once and a while, punch the operative words and keep your shadow off of Juliet's face). There is absolute, heartbreaking silence during both Romeo and Juliet's deaths (except for the odd gasp at Juliet's movement during Romeo's drinking of the poison and a few tearful sniffles during the deaths). Everything has been technically skewed but no one notices and in the end audience response to the show is overwhelmingly positive. They stomp their feet, cheering during the curtain call while someone throws roses onto the stage from above.

Everyone feels great afterwards, very proud of themselves for a job well done and a disaster averted through clever improvisation. We're all pumped for opening night. The platform is also pumped and once again ready for action.

January 21, 2010 - Opening Night

I am thrilled with the overwhelming amount of praise the show receives and the amount of joy pride with which the cast and crew are filled. I stay up until 4am and decide that opening night, with its wine and thank yous, is not perhaps the best time to evaluate everything. I think, however, that the show will be a success!

January 22, 2010 – Second Night

In the afternoon I am informed that the entire run was sold out by 10:10am. With people having lined up to purchase tickets long before the box office's morning opening, all of the tickets are gone and I have not reserved myself a seat for any future shows. I allow two seats to be added to the floor as well the four seats in the tier above Juliet's balcony to be available for latecomers. I reserve myself a ticket for the remaining nights in the run.

Neil Freeman suggests I attend the second night's performance. I am confident that I do not need or want to do this but his suggestion is enough to plant a seed of doubt in my mind and I decide go. I am pleased that much of last night's specificity and sensitivity is present in the performance. There is continuity and the audience is just as responsive as they have been the previous two nights.

January 23, 2010 – Third Time's (not such) a Charm

I attend the performance tonight only because my father is in town to see the show and he does not know how to get to and from the Telus. I sit in one of the newly released seats above Juliet's balcony. I cannot stand this location. As I anticipated, sightlines are terrible unless you lean far over the banister and I am not partial to sitting on the third tier anyhow. It is a comfort that the text is clear and images that can be seen are still powerful. I hope that by having placed Capulet here so

frequently throughout the show, the audience in these seats will feel included. These are indeed the worst seats in the house and I myself have to move to a better spot within 20 minutes.

I can only stand to watch the first half of the show – I sit backstage from intermission onward. Some of the actors seem tired and others are taking their work for granted. The audience response is still positive but the performances are adapting and evolving and I feel at an absolute loss of control to do anything about it.

January 29, 2010 – Second Last Night

I watch the show for the first time since last Saturday. I have heard favourable reports from Steph regarding the evolution of the show but I am nervous and excited as my partner, Nick Di Gaetano is in from Ottawa and is watching tonight. While the audience response continues to be extremely positive, there are slight changes that are disappointing to me. Most obvious to me is the sensitivity that the company had during the first few nights. They were nervous and unsure of how the audience would react and as a result they were listening and making spontaneous offers. Tonight I see a company of cocky actors who are in a hit show and know it. In addition, Ben plays Mercutio extremely drunkenly in II, I and I am appalled when he pretends to vomit on the shoes of an audience member. This is not the Mercutio we rehearsed and I would never, ever encourage this kind of “comic acting.” It’s cheap and self-serving.

As seemingly usual, the audience leaps to their feet at the end but I wonder if it is for the players or the production. Is there is anything more I could have instilled in the actors to ensure their continued sensitivity?

January 30, 2010 – Closing Night

I am very nervous tonight. Based on the fact that one of my Thesis Advisory committee members is coming for the first and only time, I ask the cast to keep their closing night gags and hijinx to a minimum in order to honour the show we rehearsed.

I give Ben a note privately about last night's performance and he does not react well. He spends a good deal of the show acting hard with a spiteful spirit. I am disappointed to be left with this memory of the last show in comparison with the glory of the rest of the evening and the run overall.

The rest of the show is fantastic. Everyone is thrilled with a job well done and sad to see such a special experience come to an end. I am overwhelmed by the dedication of fifty or so people who have worked so hard on making this vision become tangible and overcome by their thanks and praise for having worked with me. I am so lucky to have been able to touch the lives of these people and to have the product of my imagination become a significant part of their tangible, life experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

April, 2010

I set out to explore a non-traditional approach to rehearsing and staging a very traditional piece of text – to transcend beyond the connotations associated with such an iconic play while finding justification within the text for each unconventional choice. My intention was to create a world that contained visceral visual elements – a world that pushed the boundaries of the imagination while at the same time being rooted in familiar, though not literal, elements. It was important to remain true to both my aesthetic and to the original story. I wanted to avoid merely assigning a concept and historical era as I have commonly seen directors do to Shakespeare and other classic plays in an attempt to make them more relevant to today's audiences, but rather to integrate my concept with the text as if the two were always intended to be together.

I unexpectedly assisted in the development of marketing materials early on in the rehearsal process, admittedly through my own initiative stemming from a need to maintain creative control over how the show would be sold to audiences. Serendipitously, this involvement led me to realize and articulate a great deal about this production, particularly with respect to what the effect I wanted the show to have on the audience. I began by selecting a quote from the play to represent the production. Avoiding the clichéd lines commonly associated with the text, I chose Lawrence's warning to Romeo in II, vi: "*These violent delights have violent ends.*" This opened the door to conceptualizing the poster imagery, directing the photo shoot and creating the show's tagline "*A brave and twisted approach to Shakespeare's iconic story of lovers in a dangerous time.*" Though my involvement was initially fuelled by the desire to draw specific influential artists to the show during a time that PUSH, an international, avant garde professional theatre festival, was taking place across town, the process brought about major discoveries that enriched production. A key revelation came in defining for the press release that this show would to be a truly live, truly unique experience. This gave me the drive to take bigger risks in

developing a world that inspired large-scale fantasy in the imagination of the audience. During the rehearsal process, while I was busy focusing on story and staging major action, Sarah repeatedly urged me to flesh out the street scenes by employing more ensemble members, looking deeper into the world associated with Cabaret and bringing those details into the theatre and onto the stage. It was not until January that I had the scope of imagination to do this without the fear that doing so would be too literal, thereby spoiling my intention to create a non-literal world. I realize now that these details are what helped give this production its charm and create for the audience a world that awed and inspired – the theatrical effect created by the Apothecary's house (a suggested opium den), a band of traveling musicians who consumed bottles of absinthe and smoked cigarettes and an ensemble of singing grotesque creatures who traveled in between scenes like a team skittering insects in a mischievous dance to transform the stage and set the tone for the next scene.

In my experimentation with non-traditional methods in rehearsal, there were successes just as there were failures, as could have been predicted. Overall I was pleased with the process and the product that was generated by a dedicated company of actors and production team.

As I write this, months after the final performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, I still ponder the reason why Mercutio was such a disappointment to me, particularly the Queen Mab speech and death scene. Upon reexamination of my varied approaches in working with the actor and text, from the non-traditional games we played to comparing the folio to the modern text, to resorting to methods approaches commonly employed in North America – those rooted in such methods I wanted to reject as Stanislavsky and Meisner - I cannot surmise what more I could have done to evoke a stronger performance from the actor in those key moments. The approaches used for Mercutio's scenes did not differ much from those employed while directing other actors – those whose scenes were strong and moving. Perhaps I had too strong an idea of what kind of character I wanted Mercutio to be in relation to the rest, maybe I misunderstood the nature of Mercutio altogether. It is possible that I overworked the

actor or started off in a direction that caused irreparable confusion. Or is it just as conceivable to suggest the possibility that a different casting choice would have required less work and yielded a stronger result?

With respect to the struggles experienced throughout the set design process, the result was a set that ultimately served the vision of the show and once into dress rehearsals, most aches and pains were forgotten. In early rehearsals I entered into a problem-solving mode where my imagination was forced to expand beyond the rules that a set might impose. This led me to craft scenes around a vision based on the expectation that there would be little more than actors on the stage. When the set arrived, with slight adjustment to the blocking of scenes, the pieces enhanced the overall production in that the acting and set were truly integrated – one did not rely on the other, but rather they existed synergistically. I looked at the ways in which the entire theatre could be considered a playground and explored as many uses for the space as possible so as to create a truly live experience. On stage, in, around, behind and above the audience, in the stair wells and backstage all became areas where visual images and surround sound possibilities could be created. The focus then was not on the set pieces but how the actors used the theatre as a whole and how the set pieces could enhance the action.

Sightlines became less of a concern as I placed significant events in areas that were visible to all seats in the house. Secret pockets of the theatre were reserved for special, fleeting moments crafted to surprise and enhance the experience of the few audience members who were in the position to witness them. In particular I employed all areas of the house and, depending on their seat, audience members had the chance to spy Tybalt and a masked party guest steal an intimate moment, the Nurse flirt with men in the audience, Lady Capulet and Paris share a steamy dance, Peter become drunk on a stolen bottle of absinthe and various other party guests who danced, flirted, strolled and subtly interacted with the audience as if they too were guests at the party. Some seats were also privy to receiving an offer of cookies to eat, thereby further enhancing the live experience with the sense of taste.

Did the Gender switching work? Absolutely. I set out to create strong roles for women beyond merely casting women as men. If I could find justification for the switches in the text and if there were women in the casting pool who were up for the challenge, which there were, I was eager to adapt the text to make the switches happen in such a way that fully rounded female characters could stand out in a positively memorable way. Lady Capulet worked as the most exciting and successful gender switching experiment (perhaps because I spent the most time adapting her text). I reassigned text to adjust her storyline and to give her a clear through line for the play, establishing her as a seemingly traditional mother then gradually uncovering her intense drive for success, lust for Paris and terrifying wrath. Capulet became her foil – a weak, sexually confused husband whose comic bumbling grew to be pitiable as the audience came to realize that he lack of power in a house full of strong-minded women, the most dominating of all being his wife. The success of this switch was most clear in III, v when the nightly response from the audience was an audible journey of laughter, nervous “ooh’s”, terrified silence and, finally, heartbreaking “aww’s.” Keeping the characters’ love for Juliet prevalent was helpful, particularly for Lady Capulet who, despite her flaws, loved her daughter deeply. This helped to create empathy for the character at the end of the play.

In addition, despite having very little to say, Lady Montague was extremely memorable as a credible match for a rival as fierce as Lady Capulet. Turning Romeo’s cloistered confidant into a shamanic Sister in co-ed quarters worked better than I had hoped. Though this was a last minute change, I now can’t imagine this production with a man in the role. Barbara brought extraordinary offers, and impulsive optimism combined with a maturity that the role craves, whether played by a woman or a man. The additional mysticism of pagan references including runes and rituals added to the ambiance of the production giving further weight to the fact that this show was offering something quite different from what an audience traditionally expects from a production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Switching Joanna in as Sampson at the last minute was also a fortunate accident. Having a woman start the play immediately introduced the notion that women and men were equal in the world of this play and fulfilled my desire to have the initial scene set up the style of the production. Having the Prologues spoken by a woman who subsequently acted as the audience's guide throughout the story added to the strong, sensual nature of the play. I think these gender switches added to the credibility of the other changes. It helped to avoid the implication that women were playing roles because we did not have enough men in the cast and, while I am disappointed to have lost an actor during the process, I am pleased with the outcome.

While I would have liked to see what the effect of having a woman play the Prince would have been, having a man in the role did not take away from the other switches in the way I originally feared. I was delighted by Russell's strength, dedication and the qualities he brought to the role in rehearsal and performance.

Successful was also achieved in altering the end of the play. In an effort to shave time off of the production, one of the most memorable moments was created. Audience members expressed that they had never before seen Juliet wake up during Romeo's kiss. For me it was not a new idea but a moment created out of necessity and one that I worried might be considered a cliché given Baz Luhrman's similar choice in the 1996 film version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The consistent pin-dropping silence each night, followed by gasps and sobs during the kiss, as well as subsequent feedback from audience members who expressed their belief that all would work out well for the doomed lovers, is reward for meeting the perceived cliché head on and attempting to make it fresh and beautiful.

I am proud of this production. I love the concept and feel that the effect on stage lived up to the vision I intended to create. The design elements were cohesive and timeless. They worked together to create an evocative world that was timeless, classic, sensual and grotesque all at the same time. The actors also were committed to working as a strong ensemble. Together they embraced elements of *Le Jeu*,

Bouffon, Melodrama and Clown, and melded them with techniques to get the most out of Shakespeare's first folio. They believed in my approach and vision and as a result were committed to creating beauty and fantasy on the stage through true, grounded, live performances. I feel that the entire team was committed to developing a production that was bold, unique and exciting. They embraced the notion that this show could and would be something unlike anything they had worked on before. The payoff was clear in an audience who consistently left having experienced a classic story in a way that delighted, moved and surprised them – a way in which they had never before imagined *Romeo and Juliet* could work.

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APPENDIX A: Actors and Characters Scene By Scene

Act, scene	Actor	Character
Preshow and Prologue	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	John Dickinson	Musician
	Claire Hesselgrave	Lady Montague
	Christine Quintana	Ensemble
	Joanna Williams	Sampson
	Sarah Goodwill	Balthazara
	Seth Reibstein	Montague
	Nathan Shapiro	Gregory
	Russell Zishiri	Prince
	Ben Whipple	Mercutio
	Eric Frielich	Benvolio
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	David Kaye	Tybalt
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	Ryan Warden	Paris
1,1	Joanna Williams	Sampson
	Nathan Shapiro	Gregory
	John Dickinson	Abram
	Sarah Goodwill	Balthazara
	David Kaye	Tybalt
	Eric Frielich	Benvolio
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	Seth Reibstein	Montague
	Claire Hesselgrave	Lady Montague
	Russell Zishiri	Prince
	Ryan Warden	Paris
	Christine Quintana	Ensemble
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	Ben Whipple	Ensemble

Act, scene	Actor	Character
1,2	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	Ryan Warden	Paris
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Eric Freilich	Benvolio
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
Transition	Various	Ensemble
1,3	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Christine Quintana	Servant
Transition	Various	Ensemble
1,4	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Ben Whipple	Mercutio
	Eric Freilich	Benvolio
	John Dickinson	Abram
	Sarah Goodwill	Balthazar
1,5	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	Christine Quintana	Servant
	Joanna Williams	Servant
	John Dickinson	Musician
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Barbara Kozicki	Entertainer
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Ben Whipple	Mercutio
	Eric Freilich	Benvolio
	David Kaye	Tybalt
	Ryan Warden	Paris
	Nathan Shapiro	Petruchio
	Seth Reibstein	Masker
	Claire Hesselgrave	Masker
	Russell Zishiri	Masker

Act, scene	Actor	Character
1,5 continued	Sarah Goodwill	Masker
	Keith Smith	Fire Starter
2, Prologue and Transition	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	Christine Quintana	Servant
	Joanna Williams	Servant
2,1	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Eric Freilich	Benvolio
	Ben Whipple	Mercutio
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
2,2	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
Transition	Various – see below	Cloaked Cloisterers
2,3	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Cloaked in the Cloister:	
	Claire Hesselgrave	Ensemble – cloaked
	Christine Quintana	Ensemble – cloaked
	Joanna Williams	Ensemble – cloaked
	Seth Reibstein	Ensemble – cloaked
	Nathan Shapiro	Ensemble – cloaked
Transition	Various	Ensemble
2,4	Eric Freilich	Benvolio
	Ben Whipple	Mercutio
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	John Dickinson	Musician
Transition	Various	Ensemble

Act, scene	Actor	Character
2,5	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
Transition	Various	Cloisterers
2,6	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
Transition	Various	Cloisterers and Ensemble
3,1	Eric Freilich	Benvolio
	Ben Whipple	Mercutio
	David Kaye	Tybalt
	Nathan Shapiro	Petruchio
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Sarah Goodwill	Balthazara
	Joanna Williams	Ensemble
	Christine Quintana	Ensemble
	Russell Zishiri	Prince
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Claire Hesselgrave	Lady Montague
	Seth Reibstein	Montague
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	John Dickinson	Musician
Intermission	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	John Dickinson	Musician
	David Kaye	Musician
	Ben Whipple	Musician
	Eric Freilich	Musician
	Various	Servants
3,2	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Moneca Lander	Nurse

Act, scene	Actor	Character
3,3	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
3,4	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	Ryan Warden	Paris
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
Transition	Various	Ensemble
3,5	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
4,1	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Ryan Warden	Paris
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
4,2	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	Christine Quintana	Servant
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Joanna Williams	Servant
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
4,3 = Text cut, transition	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Seth Reibstein	Brother John
	Claire Hesselgrave	Cloisterer
4,4	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Christine Quintana	Servant
	Sarah Goodwill	Peter
	Joanna Williams	Servant
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	John Dickinson	Musician

Act, scene	Actor	Character
4,5	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Ryan Warden	Paris
	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	John Dickinson	Musician
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
Transition	Christine Quintana	Prostitute
	Joanna Williams	Prostitute
	Claire Hesselgrave	Prostitute
	Seth Reibstein	Brother John
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Musician
	John Dickinson	Musician
	David Kaye	Musician
	Ben Whipple	Musician
	Eric Freilich	Musician
5,1	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Sarah Goodwill	Balthazara
	Mishelle Cutler	Apothecary/Musician
	Christine Quintana	Prostitute
	Joanna Williams	Prostitute
	Claire Hesselgrave	Prostitute
	Seth Reibstein	Brother John
	Mishelle Cutler	Drug Addict
	Fiona Mongillo	Drug Addict
	John Dickinson	Drug Addict
	David Kaye	Drug Addict
	Ben Whipple	Drug Addict
	Eric Freilich	Drug Addict
5,2	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Seth Reibstein	Brother John
	Nathan Shapiro	Cloisterer
Transition	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet

Act, scene	Actor	Character
Transition continued	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Sarah Wilson	Peter
	Christine Quintana	Ensemble
	Joanna Williams	Ensemble
	Nathan Shapiro	Ensemble
	David Kaye	Ensemble/Tybalt
	Seth Reibstein	Musician
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Ensemble/Corpse
	John Dickinson	Ensemble/Corpse
	Ben Whipple	Musician
5,3	Ryan Warden	Paris
	Christine Quintana	Ensemble
	Jameson Parker	Romeo
	Sarah Goodwill	Balthazara
	Meaghan Chenosky	Juliet
	Barbara Kozicki	Sister Lawrence
	Joanna Williams	Ensemble
	Nathan Shapiro	Ensemble
	Seth Reibstein	Montague
	Keith Smith	Ensemble
	Russell Zishiri	Prince
	MariaLuisa Alvarez	Lady Capulet
	Andrew Lynch	Capulet
	Claire Hesselgrave	Lady Montague
	Mishelle Cutler	Musician
	Fiona Mongillo	Corpse
	John Dickinson	Corpse
	David Kaye	Tybalt
	Eric Freilich	Benvolio
	Ben Whipple	Mercutio
	Moneca Lander	Nurse
	Sarah Wilson	Peter