# Romeo and Juliet introductory notes

These introductory notes have been prepared for the audio described performance of Romeo and Juliet by Auckland theatre Company Sunday 27 July 2025 by Edward Peni and Nicola Owen of Audio Described Aotearoa.

## Set Design

This production is set in Verona in the 1960s.

The set is a dilapidated ballroom. A large wall covers the back. It’s painted green with large patches faded back to plaster. Five tall archways run the width of the back wall. There is symmetry to help to denote the two different family’s homes with the Capulets occupying the left and the Montagues on the right. A fireplace sits in second archway from the left and another fireplace in the second archway from the right. Two chairs sit by the pillars of the middle archway, next to the fireplaces. In Act 1 Lady Capulet will sit in the left chair and Montague will sit in the right chair.

A large floor spreads out in front of the wall and archways, with a mottle brown parquet wood veneer. Placed around it are pieces of furniture able to be rolled in on wheels, such as a pool table, an old TV on a trolley, and a platform ladder. It’s a pared back setting that the actors fill, with supporting players moving the furniture into place for the next scene and locations while the main action takes place somewhere else onstage.

The pool table is used by Juliet as a bed, as well as for playing pool by Mercutio & Benvolio. The old TV at the start plays black and white footage of Romeo and Juliet the ballet, and then features title cards at different moments in the play. At the Capulet’s, a fire burns on the screen and is placed in front of the fireplace. The industrial platform ladder is used to give height for Juliet’s balcony.

A large purple curtain descends from above at the Capulet’s, covering the left part of the room, with the end being pulled back to reveal the fireplace. Juliet’s room has a golden draped curtain, with a large doorway like gap, that lowers into the centre of the stage behind the pool table bed.

For the black and white ball scene the stage is transformed into a ballroom with two huge images of people dressed in black and white cat masks filling the left and right most arches, fairy lights in the right hand fireplace. A large crescent moon, approximately 2 metre tall, with a face in profile, lowers and hangs from the centre for the ballroom. It travels to the ground in the centre when the two lovers meet.

There are multiple layers of rows of 5 archways that descend. One set is approximately 1.5 metre in front of the back walls, creating a back corridor and depth in the performance area. When we visit Whaea Lawence, large floral wall panels descend to the ground behind the archways to create the sense of a herbal workspace, leaving the middle archway clear as a doorway.

In Act 2, the back green wall disappears and multiple rows of 5 Archways are placed giving a sense of depth to the space and tonal shift, creating an endless vaulted crypt.

In the scene transitions, set pieces change out as one scene ends, moving smoothly into the next scene, with the cast moving furniture on and off as needed.

## Lighting

In contrast to the fading beauty of the set, the lighting is contemporary. The character of Death, stands and sits observing the action often dimly lit with haze smoking about her. Camera flash lights flicker on accompanied by a sound effect, when the characters are introduced, and also when they arrive at the Ballroom, mimicking the old film cameras of the time. In the masked ball room scenes, bold coloured hues bathe the room, with swirls of lights as if from glitter balls. Haze smoulders throughout the whole show.

Soft beams of light shine in from either side to capture certain characters, notably Romeo, Juliet, and Death, in moments of solitude or discovery.

## Music and Sound

A musical score plays throughout the show, with themes for different locations and actions.

Death occasionally plays an old record player, which crackles with static. She carries it on in a small carry case.

The actors are miked with a reverb vocal sound effect used at high dramatic points for certain characters. The character of the Apothecary, played by Amanda Tito has a vocal distortion effect when she speaks.

## Characters and costumes

This production has been set in the glamour of the roaring 60’s (1960’s) and the costumes borrow heavily from this time with miniskirts, tight trousers, silk shirts and smart black Chanel style suits.

House of Montague:

Montague played by Meramanji Odedra — wears a tailored grey suit, shiny brown ankle boots a white shirt and a maroon cravat. His hair is slicked back from his face and he has neat facial hair. He sports a grey fedora in the street.

His son Romeo played by Theo Dāvid wears tightly fitted cream and brown striped trousers, a maroon waistcoat, black velvet jacket and a cream shirt with ribbon laces at the wide collar. His black hair is curly, and he wears a neat moustache. He has a dreamy air.

Romeo’s friends: Ryan Carter as Mercutio and Liam Coleman as Benvolio wear similar tailored trousers. Mercutio is taller with a floral shirt and a brown suede fringed jacket, messy brown hair and a moustache. He has a joking air, teasing Romeo. Benvolio is shorter and wears a green skivvy and a short-sleeved safari jacket and has neater dark hair and a neat beard. He’s kind and gentle with Romeo.

House of Capulet

Beatriz Romilly plays Lady Capulet. She is tall and haughty. She appears at first in a cream minidress with a taupe tailored jacket. In her boudoir she wears a floor length purple off the shoulder dress. In the ball scene she wears a sculptured black backless gown, sparkling diamond jewellery and black gloves. In mourning she wears a wide brimmed black hat.

Nurse - Courtney Eggleton — is a jolly bustling character with glasses. She wears a dark green pinafore dress over a pink and white striped blouse with a rounded white Alice in wonderland collar and a dark tie and a red floral headband in her dark hair. She has short white socks and red flat shoes. She sometimes uses a wooden walking stick.

Phoebe McKellar plays Juliet – she wears a creamy white baby doll nightdress with a flimsy white robe over the top and has long straight blonde hair with a jewelled headband. Her ball dress is a white halter neck maxi dress with a huge black jewel at the neck and an enormous golden tiara like the starry headdress of the statue of liberty. She has a playful childish manner, ducking under the curtains and teasing the nurse.

Jesme Fa’auuga playing Tybalt – has black leather pants, a dark green silk shirt and a colourful silk scarf. He has a brooding, menacing air.

Jordan Mooney as Paris wears a green and white stripe shirt with baggy sleeves, a maroon jacket, green beret, tight cream trousers and brown ankle boots with a tall heel. He has a confident swagger.

Whaea Lawrence, the Friar character is played by Miriama McDowell wearing a flowery kaftan, roman sandals and a colourful turban like headdress. Working with herbs she wears a brown leather half apron and carries a flat basket. For the marriage she dons a green and gold silk stole to indicate that she is leading a religious ceremony.

Isla Mayo plays Sampson, the young Capulet servant – black leather trousers, black leather cap, brown shoes, cream skirt and a green waistcoat with a brown neckerchief. Sampson’s always keen to start a fight with the Montagues.

Amanda Tito plays multiple characters: Death/Prince/Petra/Apothecary

Death character wears a black Chanel style tailored suit with a round neck, white buttons and white collar, black pillbox hat with a black lace veil that often covers her face but can be pushed back, a black calf length pencil skirt and black leather gloves. She has a lurking, menacing air, often sitting at the edge of a scene watching on. As the Prince she adds a red sash over her left shoulder and strides confidently, speaking with an authoritative tone. She dons a white coat as Petra, her blonde hair uncovered and tied in a neat bun at the nape of her neck. Petra has a comically frantic manner taking wide-legged lolloping steps. As the apothecary she is wearing the death costume, slinking in the shadows and uses voice distortion.

Just a few notes on general costume changes:

The ball scene is themed on the Black and White Ball so everyone wears black and white and face masks to conceal their identity. The masks are extravagant with lots of feathers and jewels and animal ears. In Act 2 most characters are wearing black mourning clothes.

There are scenes where characters who are already dead appear onstage for example Tybalt who lowers Juliet onto the bed at the start and near the end. There’s no suggestion that these characters have come back to life, more a sense that everyone who has a part in the tragedy still has a role regardless of whether they are dead or not dead yet.

There is no blood.

 Sometimes characters look on as if to witness scenes – Death often sits at the side of a scene, and sometimes more characters linger in the shadows in the wings. We tend to mention this to give a sense of who is onstage. At other times characters may remain onstage from a previous scene, like when Paris is still visible lying on the rug while Lady Capulet goes to talk to Juliet, or Benvolio remains weeping by the pillars. These serve as a reminder of the interwoven nature of the plot, but we try not to mention them too much to avoid confusion over the focus of the scene. In the final scene everyone is present in the tomb and everyone speaks apart from Romeo and Juliet, including dead characters.

The production is 2 hours and 30 minutes, including interval. It includes brief partial nudity, depictions of drug use, suicide, violence and haze. Please switch off all mobile phones and noise-emitting devices.

The programme says:

Verona. 1960s. Death sits reading a magazine.

Our story begins with Juliet contemplating a sleeping potion to fake her death. Death then rewinds the narrative to reveal how we arrived at this fateful moment.