

British Theatre Guide

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Romeo and Juliet

William Shakespeare

Reading Between The Lines

Reading Minster of St Mary the Virgin Church

19 September–5 October 2013

The fledgling Reading Between the Lines Theatre Company (RBL) was founded in January 2012 with the aim of creating exciting and accessible theatre for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Their inaugural production of [Twelfth Night](#) was a sheer joy to watch and they return to the Reading Minster of St Mary and the Virgin Church in the centre of Reading with this splendid, dynamic and vibrant production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

RBL has certainly taken flight and soars with this fresh intelligent modern interpretation of this tragic tale of the two star-crossed lovers and their feuding families.

The Church creates an atmospheric location for this production. Zoe Squire's inspired set design makes full use of the space with an imposing tower that becomes Juliet's bedroom and her balcony littered with modern-day city trappings, including oil drums, tyres, corrugated panels and a variety of assorted detritus.

From the moment that the cast bursts onto the stage to the sound of a pounding electro beat with flashing lights and laser effects, you know this is going to be a very different interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*.

It is impeccably directed by Hal Chambers and acted with passion and commitment from this talented cast. The company has full ownership of Shakespeare's verse that is strikingly delivered and totally accessible.

Set ten years in the future, this performance has a vitality that exudes the hostility of gang culture.

The powerful fight scenes are filled with violence and performed with such energy and realism that they leave you feeling exhausted.

Will Rastall perfectly captures the exuberance of the lovestruck Romeo and Emma Ballantine, in her first professional role since graduating, is delightful as the innocent, petulant Juliet.

This is astute casting, as the two are electrifying to watch. Both have a great amount of "street credibility" with Juliet listening to music on her headphones and leaning over the balcony for a crafty cigarette.

There are strong performances from Benedict Chambers as Mercutio and Charlie Sanderson as Romeo's cousin Benvolio.

Stephen Boyce is exceedingly menacing as the "king of cats" Tybalt who is incensed at Romeo gatecrashing the Capulet ball and challenges Romeo to a duel. In the fracas that ensues, Mercutio

is killed and the play spirals into a violent inevitable roller coaster of events that end in tragedy.

As the Nurse, Pearl Marsland creates a welcome touch of light comic relief and Benedict Sandiford brings a true humility and compassion to the role of Friar Laurence.

There is sterling support from Toby W Davies as the overbearing Capulet and Sophie Caton as the chain-smoking, unsympathetic Lady Capulet with Stuart Hayllor as the Patriarch of the Montagues.

The dramatic ending has just the right essence of pathos and the Prince's words ring so true in the hope of peace between the warring families and perhaps it will be possible to create a dystopian new world.

The production tours to the The Greenwich Theatre from 4 to 5 October.

Reviewer: [Robin Strapp](#)