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Romeo and Juliet

William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's Globe

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When you think of *Romeo and Juliet*, you don't immediately think of the American Wild West. And yet, why not? It's a perfectly apt backdrop for the age-old tale of romance that dies before it has a chance to properly take off, thwarted by warring factions and environments hell-bent on their own fights and harsh vendettas.

So this indeed is the set in the latest production of Shakespeare's all-time classic at London's Shakespeare's Globe theatre, directed by Sean Holmes. The theatre's internal architecture feels somewhat saloon-like, so it lends itself very well to this new adaptation that is both lively and entertaining.

Juliet, played by Lola Shalam, is a new take on the character who is often played as a dainty, fragile young woman who's somewhat overwhelmed by the whirlwind in which she's caught. Instead, she's assertive and robust with a voice to go with it, appearing as a buxom blonde, who would be equally likely as a character in *EastEnders*. She holds her own at every turn and overtly challenges anyone who stands in the way of her heart's desire. And so the balcony scene, where Juliet is wheeled in through the audience, clutching the balustrade akin to a fair and helpless maiden, oozes comic irony.

Juliet's nurse, played by Jamie-Rose Monk, is another larger-than-life character who makes a good comic double act with the young woman whose guardianship she's charged with but whose relationship with Juliet is more like that of a mischievous co-conspirator and important confidante, especially given the cold and distant relationship Juliet seems to have with her own mother, Lady Capulet, played by Léa des Garets. Romeo, by contrast, played by Rawaed Asde, has less presence and could do with projecting his voice across the auditorium better. But Lord Capulet, played by Colm Gormley, is appropriately intimidating.

Perhaps the overriding factor in this adaptation is its sheer energy, with frenzied parties that give way to brutal gunfights and retribution as the battle-lines are drawn in the rather lawless town in which this creative take on one of the world's oldest love stories is staged. Shootings and murders result in rough justice that punctures the optimism and vitality exuded by the youth in this ultimate tragedy.

But there's an overriding sense of fun that isn't overshadowed by the looming sadness of the tale, with an abundance of singing and dancing and the cast donning cowboy stetsons, petticoats flying, banjos playing and the occasional "yee-haw" cutting in. There really should have been some line-dancing chucked in to top it all. The American theme does, however, jar somewhat with the actors speaking in their own accents, such as Juliet's Lola Shalam in her East End twang, but it's allowable under the umbrella of dramatic licence.

And there's creativity, with the ghosts of the increasing number of dead rising eerily and forming a long line next to each other towards the end of a play whose second half which works more slickly than the first. What work less well are some of the mid-level characters such as Mercutio played by Michael Elcock and Tybalt played by Callum Callaghan not being distinguishable enough, but it's ultimately a brave and outrageous production which plays to the young but doesn't exclude the old.

Reviewer: [Shiroma Silva](#)