



A member of the We Players holds up a mask at a Romeo and Juliet rehearsal in Saratoga this spring. (Photo by Andrea Laue, sparebeauty.com)

History

A Shakespearian Classic with a California Landscape Twist: Romeo and Juliet Comes Outdoors to the Petaluma Adobe

by Elizabeth Rogers

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Players stumble around with eyes closed. The rehearsing actors are learning to open their other senses to the surroundings in preparation for their entirely outdoor performances. “There’s no backstage for us,” says Ava Roy, the founding artistic director of the group.

Through its outdoor performances of Shakespeare classics, We Players works to make perception—through smell, sound, and touch—an active experience for the actors and audience alike. This summer the group will perform *Romeo and Juliet* on the grounds of the historic Petaluma Adobe, focusing on integrating nature into the whole theater experience. For one of the pivotal scenes of the play, the ball in which Romeo and Juliet first meet, the actors will all be masked, each mask carefully sculpted to represent a species native to the area. “There’s been almost too much serendipity between the actors and their animals,” Roy says referring to the likeness of individuals and their assigned creature.

In researching their animals, from mountain lions to California quail to moths and hummingbirds, the actors have incorporated the unique behavioral patterns and movements of their chosen animals into their understanding and performance of the characters. Even the costumes that will be used in the final production were made with nature in mind: Each will be dyed with colors sourced from native plants. “It’s about getting feedback from a space,” Roy says—a way of enhancing the classics with an appreciation for the unique landscapes of California.

Tickets for Romeo & Juliet performances at the Petaluma Adobe and Montalvo Arts Center are on sale now at weplayers.org

About the Author

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