

## THEATER & DANCE

### Review

#### "Romeo and Juliet"

**By:** William Shakespeare

**Produced by:** [Montalvo Arts Center](#) and [We Players](#)

**Directed by:** [Ava Roy](#)

**Choreographed by:** Becky Robinson-Leviton

**Fight choreography by:** Benjamin Stowe

**Featuring:** Jennie Brick, Maria Leigh, Claire Haider, Rick Love, Amy Nowak, Libby Oberlin, John Steele Jr., Rush Rehm, Mohammad Shehata, Steve Thomas, Courtney Walsh

**Running time:** 180 minutes (estimate), no intermission

**When:** 5 p.m. Thursday, October 6  
5 p.m. Friday, October 7  
Noon and 5 p.m., Sunday, October 9

5 p.m. Thursday, October 13  
Noon and 5 p.m., Sunday, October 16

**Where:** Montalvo Arts Center, 15400 Montalvo Road, Saratoga

**Tickets:** \$40-\$80. Visit [montalvoarts.org/weplayers](http://montalvoarts.org/weplayers) or call 408-961-5858



Tina Case / We Players

Maria Leigh as Juliet, left, and Mohammed Shehata as Romeo, who meet at a masked ball (which is staged, not here, but in Villa Montalvo's grand salon). Audiences follow the action in We Players' site-integrated presentation of "Romeo and Juliet" at Villa Montalvo, October 6-16, 2016.

## Transported by Shakespeare from Villa Montalvo to Verona

Wear comfy shoes to see We Players' beautiful production of 'Romeo and Juliet'

By Tony Lacy-Thompson

October 10, 2016

"The play's the thing," said Hamlet. We usually see a play while sitting in the theater, or maybe watching it on the silver screen. But what if, like a "Star Trek" Holodeck, we could be transported into the middle of the action? See a swordfight take place in an actual courtyard, Juliet crying out to her Romeo from an actual balcony, and feigning death in an actual tomb?

Everything in Verona comes to life in the We Players' performance of "Romeo and Juliet" which is "site-integrated" with the sumptuous grounds of Villa Montalvo, a fitting location, yea, verily.

We first assembled in the usual seating of Montalvo's outdoor amphitheater, and were asked to choose a colored scarf to show which side we were on, Montague or Capulet. But that was the last time we saw the amphitheater, for we were whisked off to the city of Verona and the feuding Montague and Capulet families. We were led around the grounds to where the various scenes were taking place — the courtyard, under the balcony, the ballroom, etc., often by Peter (Amy Nowak) who played an interesting role, interacting with both the characters and the audience.

The fight scenes, choreographed by Benjamin Stowe, were very realistic and one was slightly worried that blood might actually be drawn. Which it is,

quite realistically in the last fight scene, though not actually.

There were a number of standout performances. Nurse, played by Jennie Brick, was a comedic joy as she played Juliet's go-between and confidante. The repartee between Nurse, Juliet (Maria Leigh) and Juliet's mother (Libby Oberlin), high up on a balcony, was wonderful.

Romeo in this production was played by Mohammad Shehata, and what a spirited Romeo he gave us. (One mother remarked "He's just like my son!") At once young, boisterous and careless, as he runs with his Montague buddies, but then also deeply moving as he returns Juliet's love.

"What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun." The 13-year old Juliet is played by Maria Leigh, and she puts heart and soul into her character's teenage love. The fact that Romeo is a Montague, hated by her Capulet family, cannot douse the love fire that she feels for him, and he for her. They decide to marry, and Friar Laurence (Rush Rehm) agrees to marry them, hoping to bring the two families together.

As darkness began to fall over Villa Montalvo, it seemed as if a darkness was falling over the play as well. Romeo kills Tybalt of the Capulets in a duel and is exiled from Verona.

Juliet, fearing she will never see him again, asks Friar Laurence for help, and he gives her a potion which will put her into a coma for forty hours. The audience then followed her funeral procession, in the dark, lit only by an eerie light from her body, to the bottom of the long Montalvo front lawn, and the Capulet family crypt. Very creepy. When Romeo returns from exile to find her apparently dead, he kills himself and the play ends with the words "For never was a story of more woe/Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

The small band that cropped up from time to time played quite evocative Elizabethan-style music, composed and conducted by Charlie Gurke, and the costumes were all beautifully designed (Brooke Jennings), as were the masks at the ball — a hummingbird, a rabbit's head, a fox (Monica Lundy). And the ball itself was nicely choreographed by Becky Robinson-Leviton.

The We Players spent some seven months putting the play together and deciding on which scenes would be played at which parts of the Villa. Director Ava Roy chose well, and the audience was led fairly seamlessly through the different scenes. This movement did tend to lengthen the play however, though one was never bored. In fact the outdoor scenery seemed to make the language easier to understand, and the production felt young and fresh.

The We Players next take on the tale of "Beowulf and Grendel" at the San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park, which should certainly be worth attending.

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**Tina Case / We Players**

Maria Leigh as Juliet. Audiences follow the action in We Players' site-integrated presentation of "Romeo and Juliet" at Villa Montalvo, October 6-16, 2016.



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Libby Oberlin as Lady Capulet, entering the masked ball. Audiences follow the action