



**SHAKESPEARE'S  
GLOBE**

 **VOCAL EYES**

## **INTRODUCTORY NOTES**

Welcome to this introduction to the 2020 Globe On Screen *Romeo and Juliet*. This production took place in the Globe Theatre in 2019 as part of the Globe's *Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank* project.

*Romeo and Juliet* was written by William Shakespeare and directed for Shakespeare's Globe by Michael Oakley. The performance lasts for 90 minutes without an interval. These introductory notes were written by Ruth James.

### **SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE AND THE SETTING FOR *ROMEO AND JULIET***

The Globe Theatre is a faithful reconstruction of the open-air theatre built in 1599, where many of Shakespeare's greatest plays were first performed. It is situated across the river from St Paul's Cathedral – on the south bank of the Thames, about 170 metres from the site of the original, and has been constructed using as many Elizabethan building methods as possible. Opened officially in 1997, today's Globe is a twenty-sided wooden structure made of oak and lime-plaster – with the first thatched roof permitted in London since the Great Fire in 1666.

The Chorus in *Henry V* describes the Globe as a hollow circle – the centre of the wooden ‘O’ is called the Yard, where there are about 600 standing, or Groundling, places. Other members of the audience sit on wooden benches in one of the three galleries which run around the circular auditorium – the upper gallery being some ten metres above the yard.

The theatre is open to the elements and performances continue whatever the weather – even during a thunderstorm. Occasionally helicopters and airplanes fly overhead and the sound of boats from the nearby river can be heard in the background.

Thrusting out into the Yard is the large rectangular stage. This stands at shoulder height – so that the groundlings nearest to the stage can lean against it, and actors can stoop down to address members of the audience directly, face to face.

Towards the front of the stage are two huge pillars, one on either side. Each pillar has been created from a complete oak tree. Although made of wood these pillars are ingeniously painted to look like polished marble. The deep base of each is octagonal and the column above is topped with an ornately carved Corinthian capital, gilded with real gold. The pillars support an overhanging roof – called the ‘heavens’. Its underside is divided into panels by gilded wooden ribs. Each panel is painted deep blue and decorated with stars, moons or signs of the zodiac. The floor of the stage is covered with well-worn wooden boards, with a trapdoor in the centre, that has two flaps that crash back when opened. Wooden steps lead down from both sides of the main stage into the yard, so that the actors can make their entrances by moving through the audience, before climbing up onto the stage.

The back wall of the stage is two stories high with a minstrel’s gallery on the upper level where the three musicians can be found. They play trumpet, tenor and bass trombones, euphonium and percussion. At stage

level, on the far left and right, are doors that lead to an unseen back room called the Tiring House or backstage area, and in the centre is a large set of wood panelled double doors. Against the back wall on either side of the double doors are two stands piled high with chunky, tall wax candles, their flames flickering in the breeze. As the play opens, three sturdy crosses are set in the centre of the stage, one a metre high and the other two slightly smaller. They are a pale wooden colour, each with a small figure of the crucified Christ. They are later moved to lean against the stands, surrounded by more candles; two crosses on the right side, one on the left.

This production of *Romeo and Juliet* is not set in a specific period and the costumes have a contemporary style that has an element of timelessness. The staging is simple, using minimal props; a bed covered with a yellow and white duvet signifies a bedroom, silver streamers hanging from the centre door behind a drum kit denote a party room, a swing hangs in Juliet's garden.

*Romeo and Juliet* takes place in the Italian city of Verona, a walled city which is a hotbed of emotions - violence, hate and love. Two wealthy families bear an ancient grudge – the Montagues and Capulets, and both families are intertwined with the House of Escalus, the Prince of Verona.

There are ten actors, with some playing more than one role, and a 50/50 gender split in casting, so that some traditionally male roles are being played by women. Most are in their twenties and there is a diverse mix of ethnicities.

The Montagues are restrained in dress, with muted colours, while the Capulets wear more flashy clothes, in gleaming materials of gold and silver. The younger characters are casually dressed, with soft black shoes or trainers, while their elders are more formal, in elegantly structured clothes. They also adopt differing styles of fighting – with the Capulets using items they might

display or wear, such as belts, weaponised jewellery and nail extensions. The Montagues tend to use more traditional weapons such as daggers, swords and sticks.

Romeo's close companions are Abraham, Benvolio and Mercutio. All four wear baggy trousers in a flowing, shiny material that looks like leather, teamed with a different colour top. Romeo is an earnest youth, with close-cropped black hair and a winning smile. His trousers are a warm petrol blue, while his jumper is patterned in black and white. He carries a small knife tucked into the back of his trousers.

Abraham reverses Romeo's colours, in black trousers, with a petrol blue jumper.

Benvolio is played by a woman, her tightly ringleted hair held back with a black hairband. She wears muted purple with a black blouson jacket on top that suits her more reasoned personality, while Mercutio shines in mustard yellow and black and white jumper, a flickering, impulsive youth, with a floppy black fringe over his expressive face. Mercutio is the Prince's cousin and thus friends with the Capulets as well as with Romeo. When Mercutio sneaks his friends into a party, they all wear loose black and white shirts with swirling geometric designs, over the same trousers, along with black masks studded around the eyeholes with silver studs.

Romeo's father, Lord Montague, is a tall, imposing figure, with a smoothly shaved head. He first appears in a large black and white houndstooth-check coat, worn over black trousers and a white polo-neck jumper. Lady Montague also wears a black and white check coat, tightly belted with a shiny black belt, her hair cut in a long, glossy black bob.

We also meet Friar Laurence. Friar Laurence is not only Romeo's confessor, but also Juliet's. He's Franciscan, and wears a black cloak with long square sleeves and a hood, like a scholar's gown, lined in white, with wide

white bands at the front edges. When he first appears, he carries a large, freshly collected bunch of herbs in a bag around his neck.

Lord Capulet is more flamboyant than Lord Montague. He has craggy features and sweeps in wearing a long, flowing cream coat, over gleaming black trousers topped with a grey patterned jacket and black polo neck, barking orders and expecting to be obeyed. Lady Capulet is a tall, elegant woman, her white hair pinned back from her patrician face. She wears killer black heels and matching black coat, and for the party has a shimmering silver dress.

The Capulet's daughter Juliet, is fresh-faced, with her long blonde hair caught back into a ponytail. She dresses in simple cream-coloured clothes; jeans and matching jacket over a white top edged with cream lace at first, then a pale silver sparkling dress with a shiny halter-like metallic top for a party. She's loose and free in her movements and exuberantly confident.

Her Nurse shares Juliet's exuberance, but is more down-to-earth, a pragmatic soul, with wavy chestnut-brown hair that sweeps her shoulders. Nurse wears a stiff blue dress with wide short sleeves, over a black polo-neck, that cinches in tightly at the waist, causing the skirt to flare out widely as she stomps about, gesturing and grimacing as she gossips and laughs. Later she wears a glittering coat of bright gold.

Tybalt and Sampson follow the Capulets. Played by a woman, Tybalt is Juliet's cousin and is tall and slim, with long dark blonde hair plaited close to her head, then hanging down her back. She wears a leopard print top with many silver chains looped around her waist and round her neck. She also has long, pointed metal nail extensions on her right hand. Both she and Sampson wear shiny black trousers. Sampson's top is white with a large black V across the chest.

Paris, Juliet's suitor, is related to the Prince. A restrained, tall figure, he is clad all in black, in a sharp, glossy suit, with black hair that flops over his long, intellectual face. He sometimes carries a silver-topped black cane.

Lastly, Prince Escalus also wears black, but with a cream-lined jacket and a black jockey cap. He often addresses us through a megaphone.

## **CAST AND PRODUCTION CREDITS**

**Jeff Alexander** plays Friar Laurence and Lord Montague

**Charlotte Beaumont** plays Juliet

**Stuart Bowman** plays Lord Capulet

**Debbie Chazen** plays the Nurse and Lady Montague

**Christopher Chung** plays Paris, Prince Escalus and Abraham

**Ned Derrington** plays Mercutio, Sampson and Friar John

**Hermione Gulliford** plays Lady Capulet

**Shalisha James-Davis** plays Benvolio

**Ayoola Smart** plays Tybalt and the Apothecary

**Nathan Welsh** plays Romeo

### **The musicians are:**

**Hilary Belsey** who plays the Tenor Trombone

**Sarah Field** who plays the Trumpet and Saxes

**Richard Henry** is the Musical Director and plays Bass Trumbone, Euphonium and Percussion

The Executive Producers are **Sophie Curtis and Paul Shuter**

Directed for the screen by **Glenn Barton**

The Fight Director is **Alison de Burgh**

The Composer is **Olly Fox**

The Choreographer is **Paul Isles**

The Costume Designer is **Alex Lowde**

Directed for the stage by **Michael Oakley**

These introductory notes and the audio description of *Romeo and Juliet* were written and voiced by Ruth James, edited by Julia Grundy and sound engineered by Gary Giles for VocalEyes.

An audio version of these notes can be found [here](#).

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