

Romeo and Juliet

Twist on classic love tale worth falling for

CARRIE MITCHELL

Romeo and Juliet ****

Inverleith Church Hall

ARE people not bored of Romeo and Juliet yet? After decades of countless new productions, you'd be forgiven for thinking that there's simply no mileage left in Shakespeare's most popular play. But you'd be wrong.

In their 25th annual Festival show, Forth Children's Theatre not only pull off a slick retelling of the original version, they actually manage to bring something new to the play.

There is a new setting, uprooting the action from Verona to downtown New York. There is a new premise with the Montagues and the Capulets as two warring Mafia families. There is a fantastic new musical score composed of classic Motown tunes. And, perhaps most impressively, there is a new romantic twist.

Baz Luhrmann toyed with the concept of a homoerotic relationship between the two kinsman, Romeo and Mercutio in the 1996 movie. Here, director Claire Stewart has managed to create a whole new dimension to the relationship by making Mercutio a woman - a woman tormented by a secret love for her closest friend.

The part is played flawlessly by budding young actress, Megan Shandly, who performs with a passion, intensity, and confidence, which is surprising for such a young actress - especially one grappling with language as dense as Shakespeare's.

She also has one of the strongest singing voices of the cast, making her rendition of Lately, as she dies in Romeo's arms, just as moving as the final tragic scene. It begs the question, why not cast Shandly as Juliet? One look at Carly Gibb and you know why. With her pale complexion, strawberry blonde hair and delicate features, she is perfect as the innocent young lover.

Gibb also has a fantastic voice, making it a considerable challenge for her Romeo, Martin Heavens, to keep up with her in their duet How Deep is Your Love. For someone who clearly isn't a naturally gifted singer, Heavens does well, even pulling off a solo performance of Ain't No Sunshine.

However, considering this is supposed to be "the greatest love story of all time", the chemistry between Heavens and Gibb could do with a boost.

There is lots of gazing and hand holding but not the slightest hint of passion in their embraces.

Other promising young actors who deserve a mention are Rachel Aedy, who transforms the normally dull character of the nurse into a saucy minx; John Campbell who makes for a highly charged and charismatic Tybalt; Michael Scott who gets the most laughs as the Friar; and Tracy Otway who is brilliant as gangster's moll, Lady Capulet.

Costume, lighting, props, and choreography are also all fantastically well done. Go and you will be impressed.

• ***Runs ends Saturday***

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