

## Star-Crossed Romeo and Juliet at the Westchester Playhouse

By Conrad Hurr

How about "Mariotto and Gianozza" written by Masuccio Salernitano in 1476? Or the story of "Romeus and Giulietta" by Luigi da Porto in 1530? Or the narrative poem "The Tragical history of Romeus and Juliet" by Arthur Brooke in 1562? Each was based on the previous one, and Shakespeare's version in 1597 was a popular story that had been retold for over a century. Now for over four hundred years Shakespeare's ninth play out of 38 has been performed repeatedly; film, ballet, and musical versions have been added to the list.

The Kentwood Players' production is traditional and set in a romantic village, Verona before there was an Italy (five major city-states such as Florence and Rome united to form Italy in 1861). It has all the requisite velvety capes and puffy sleeves, doublets and hose, slapstick and stunt fighting, chalices and thou-arts. If you've never actually seen the play live, or want to revisit it after many years, come see this vibrant production about three nights of forbidden teenage love.

Under the direction of Don Schlossman, the actors all give star turns in this heart-wrenching tragedy that begins as a farce. The first two acts have comic timing, sexual innuendo, and witty come-

backs to help the audience get to know and love all the characters. The last three acts are missing the vital last-minute saves of farce, and all the dreams, omens, and forebodings predict the devastating collateral damage that leads to lasting peace.

These are powerful performances with high comedy, tender love scenes, startling aggression, and prolonged swordplay. Nick George as Romeo Montague is suitably handsome as a Hamlet in love: "fortune's fool," making the wrong decisions at the wrong time. Meredith Sweeney as the isolated thirteen-year-old Juliet Capulet combines warmth of imagination with tenderness of heart. Don't miss Ben Brannon's gymnastics as Romeo's sarcastic friend Mercutio; he punctuates his Queen Mab speech using a cartwheel with a forward and backward roll. Drew Fitzsimmons as Tybalt personifies everything that doesn't work in unification efforts around the world. Susie McCarthy is hilarious as the coarse Nurse: always saying exactly what she means, without thinking about the consequences. Kelly Vincent steals the show as Sampson, the comic servant.

Randy Ball is particularly menacing as Juliet's father, Montague. He is startlingly similar in appearance to James B. Sherrill as the terzo incomodo Paris, or

unwelcome third party in the love triangle. Montague is constantly trying to get Juliet to social climb, by marrying her into Paris' higher social class. Paris is related the ruler Prince Escalus, forcefully played by Michael James Thatcher.

We can blame all this tragedy of mischance on James Howell as the cowardly Friar Lawrence. He allows a dangerous marriage, doesn't tell anyone about it, gives Juliet a risky potion, fails to get a message to Romeo about that potion (even though Balthazar is able to get a message to Romeo at the same time), then leaves Juliet alone to kill herself. I say kill the friar instead of Mercutio, and we can have a comedy of errors with a happy ending.

From public records in his hometown of Stratford-on-Avon, and indicated in the movie "Shakespeare in Love," events in Shakespeare's real life found their way into this play. His son Hamnet died, and daughter Susanna turned thirteen the same year he was writing "Romeo and Juliet." The Protestant Queen Elizabeth had beheaded her Catholic cousin Mary Queen of Scots nine years earlier; audiences had seen firsthand how feuding in one family had divided a country and caused many deaths. Shakespeare knew about passion and forbidden love: when Shakespeare was only nineteen he quickly married a woman who was

three months pregnant, eight years older than he, uneducated, and the daughter of a poor farmer. This was probably not the match his father would have chosen; John Shakespeare was a social climber like the Montague character, and married the daughter of his family's wealthy landlord. Just as Romeo is forced to flee Verona, legend has it that Shakespeare was forced to flee Stratford for a year because he was caught poaching on a private estate.

Tony Peresle's set design gives us everything we need in sixteenth century Verona: the street, balcony, bedroom, crypt, ballroom, abbey, and orchard, all with minimal set changes and plenty of room for vigorous fencing. Sue Stangl's sound design ties each scene together with Baroque harpsichord and flute music. The constant script references to light and dark are tangible in Richard Potthoff's light design, emphasizing the precarious balance of good/evil, and love/hate themes in the play. Valerie Wright's romantic costume design gives us a rich panoply of jewel-toned fabrics and textures on the cast of twenty three Kentwood Players.

ROMEO & JULIET, 8301 Hindry Avenue, (310) 645-5156, 3/10/05-4/15/05, 8:00pm, \$16.00, or \$14.00 students/seniors/military.

## Westchester Lutheran Seeks Injunctive Relief Against City

Westchester Lutheran Church and School is seeking preliminary injunctive relief from the City of Los Angeles' imposition of burdensome conditions on the church and school that, according to one condition, absolutely prohibit this Christian school from providing a religious education Monday through Friday and limit its religious, non-secular activities to the weekend. This complaint and concurrent Motion for Preliminary Injunction are filed as a result of today's public hearing in an effort to preserve Westchester Lutheran Church and School's constitutional and statutory liberties.

Advocates for Faith and Freedom filed an almost identical lawsuit against the City of Los Angeles for Hillcrest Christian School in the Granada Hills area of the City. Robert Tyler, general counsel for Advocates, called these restrictions "an extreme abuse of authority and a clear violation of the school's religious liberty." He further stated, "the City has no business telling a private Christian school that it has to be secular - this appears to be a pattern for the City."

Condition 7 of land use permit - also known as a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) - imposed on the Church states: "Permitted uses shall consist of secular education programs Monday through Friday and religious education programs on Saturdays and Sundays." Therefore, Westchester Lutheran Church and School, a private Christian school created

to provide a religious based education, can no longer provide a religious education during the week. Another condition (10A) requires that Westchester Lutheran Church and School establish a "Traffic Management Program with a Trip Reduction Plan." This carpool provision requires the school to maintain an average carpool of 3.5 persons per car. Failure to achieve the 3.5 ratio will result in automatic reduction in the maximum number of students allowed to be enrolled. Since that time, Westchester Lutheran Church and School has attempted to work with city representatives to have the objectionable conditions removed and/or revised from the CUP, but have been unsuccessful and any further efforts appear to be futile.

### Background

WLCS has been serving the community for over 50 years in the location on the corner of 77th and Sepulveda in Westchester. In 2002, WLCS submitted an application for CUP. The CUP sought to redevelop, rehabilitate, and improve the site for continued church and school use. There would be no increase in the occupancy of the church or school as a result of these plans. The new buildings would be used to improve the religious and educational environment for the existing students.

This lawsuit is based upon liberties protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution as well as the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000.



Eleanor Cramer, Westchester's local leprechaun and her friend, Beverly Fredericks

## Holiday Spirit Alive at the Westchester Family YMCA

By Beverly Fredericks

Entering the YMCA today, St. Patrick's Day, we were all greeted by a charming Irish Leprechaun. She is an elder member of the YMCA, Eleanor Cramer. She was all dressed in appropriate attire, the entire outfit was hand-made by Eleanor.

Everyone put on a happy face when they saw her, especially the children. I couldn't resist asking her if I could take a photo of her in her costume. She was

delighted. I thought it would make a great story for our local hometown news paper.

One of the office staff agreed to take a photo of Eleanor and her photographer, which is me, Beverly Fredericks. I'm also a local residence.

The wearing of the green was very apparent today, even the water therapy instructor wore a green head band with feathers and shamrocks during his water class.