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The rhythm of love

Theatre LILA's *Romeo+Juliet* is all about the movement

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It's modern, it's magical, and it's all about that movement. Theatre LILA has reinvented the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, putting the hearts of two women in the middle of the story, creating a timeless romance for a new

age. But what sets this show apart is the way director Jessica Lanius shows the overwhelming power of love through the art of dance.

We know the basics — two star-crossed young lovers at the cusp of adulthood fight for their right to love amid their families' hate for one another. The story has been retold and reimagined on stages and through films (*Shakespeare in Love*) and musicals (*West Side Story*). But this production bites its thumb at traditional gender roles, casting women as the leads: HJ (HeatherJane) Farr as Juliet and Kelsey Rodriguez as Romeo. But women take other key roles, too: Kailea Saplan plays Romeo's cousin, Benvolio, and Jessica Jane Witham portrays Tybalt. The talented cast performs multiple roles, with a standout performance from Claire Arena Haden as the Nurse.

The show demonstrates that William Shakespeare's words are without boundaries. But there's another shift that takes place on stage, with ensemble dancers and lead actors alike stomping, jumping and pirouetting to the rhythm of love. Dressed in traditional renaissance robes — spiced up with leather vests, sequins and revealed ankles — the cast gives a moving illustration of two hearts completely enveloped in affection.

The dance numbers are dispersed throughout the play, coming to life when characters' emotions are at their highest levels. With a black curtain backdrop — and only three ladders and a handful of lanterns as their set — shadows are free to spread out and silhouette. While the purple and pink lights and glowing candles create an elegant ambiance, it's the movement of the troupe, and some modern club music, that really sets the scene.

Theatre LILA's artful movement not only expresses Romeo and Juliet's undying love for each other; it also show familial discord between the Afro-Latino Montagues and the Caucasian Capulets. Those sweet and innocent violet hues turn to blood-red spotlights. And percussion keeps time with the rage that cuts like a knife.

When Romeo believes Juliet has died, flower petals fall from the rafters, like butterflies descending from the sky. It is one of the most jaw-dropping scenes in a production full of gentleness and passion.

Romeo+Juliet plays for one weekend only. Remaining performances are at 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. on March 16 and 2:30 on March 17. The show is in Overture Center's Promenade Hall.

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