

# Where art thou? USD's 'Romeo & Juliet' can show the way

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

The USD theater department will be presenting Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' for the two weekends around Thanksgiving. The cast will present evening performances starting at 7:30 next Friday and Saturday and on Dec 3-6 on the Knutsen main stage in the Fine Arts center. There will also be two matinees on Nov 23 and Dec 7 at 2 pm.

"I think that really what's unique about this production is that we're really staying true to the play," said director Chaya Gordon-Bland. "I'm not interested in enforcing any gimmick or altered time scheme or any kind of fancy interpretive slant on it. It's exciting to see how Shakespeare plays work on Shakespeare's terms."

According to Gordon-Bland, what the audience thinks when they hear 'Shakespeare' is what they should see on stage.

"In terms of time period we've chosen more or less to stick with Renaissance Italy as the setting which is where it was written," she said. "It's a little bit of a hybrid between Renaissance Italy and Elizabethan England."

The students in the cast see the benefit of putting the classic play in its original setting as opposed to a more contemporary approach.

"I can really appreciate modern adaptations," said Casey Coates, a senior who plays Friar Lawrence. "By keeping it in this period, it doesn't say anything specific and the audience is allowed to take what they want out of it."

Though Romeo and Juliet is a classic tragedy, Coates says the show will not be a complete downer.

"There are some lines in there that if played right, they can be very funny in a play that's filled with tragedy," he said.

"Shakespeare has given you those moments to laugh."

"The fun aspect of it is the stage violence," said Gordon-Bland. "There are a lot of really big fight scenes. I had the privilege to design the fights and build the fights. They will attract and speak to a certain population. It's not rated-R but definitely PG. I think anybody could enjoy it. The play will meet them wherever their at."

For Ceci Quintero, the senior playing Juliet, one of

the highlights of the show is the set.

"I think the set is going to be so beautiful," she said. "There's so much texture. The tomb that they built, it's all wood but painted to look like marble. There's a working fountain on stage. Just the visual nature of Shakespeare helps understand what the text is actually saying."

### READ VS WATCH

In a show that most of the general public is familiar with from high-school English class, Gordon-Bland says she hopes people will open their minds and hearts to enjoying it on stage.

"People read it in high school and often they don't get a chance to see it so it may or may not be something that resonates for them," she said.

"Having the opportunity to see this play produced on the stage in a truly theatrical way, it's a very unique and rare and special opportunity for the audience."

According to Quintero, this is the only way to truly appreciate Shakespeare.

"I didn't like Shakespeare because I had just read it in school," she said. "Shakespeare wasn't meant to be studied in a classroom, it's so much more tangible and grittier than that."

The cast hopes their performance will make an impact.

"Hopefully after seeing it they decide to go more often or even to try it," Coates said.

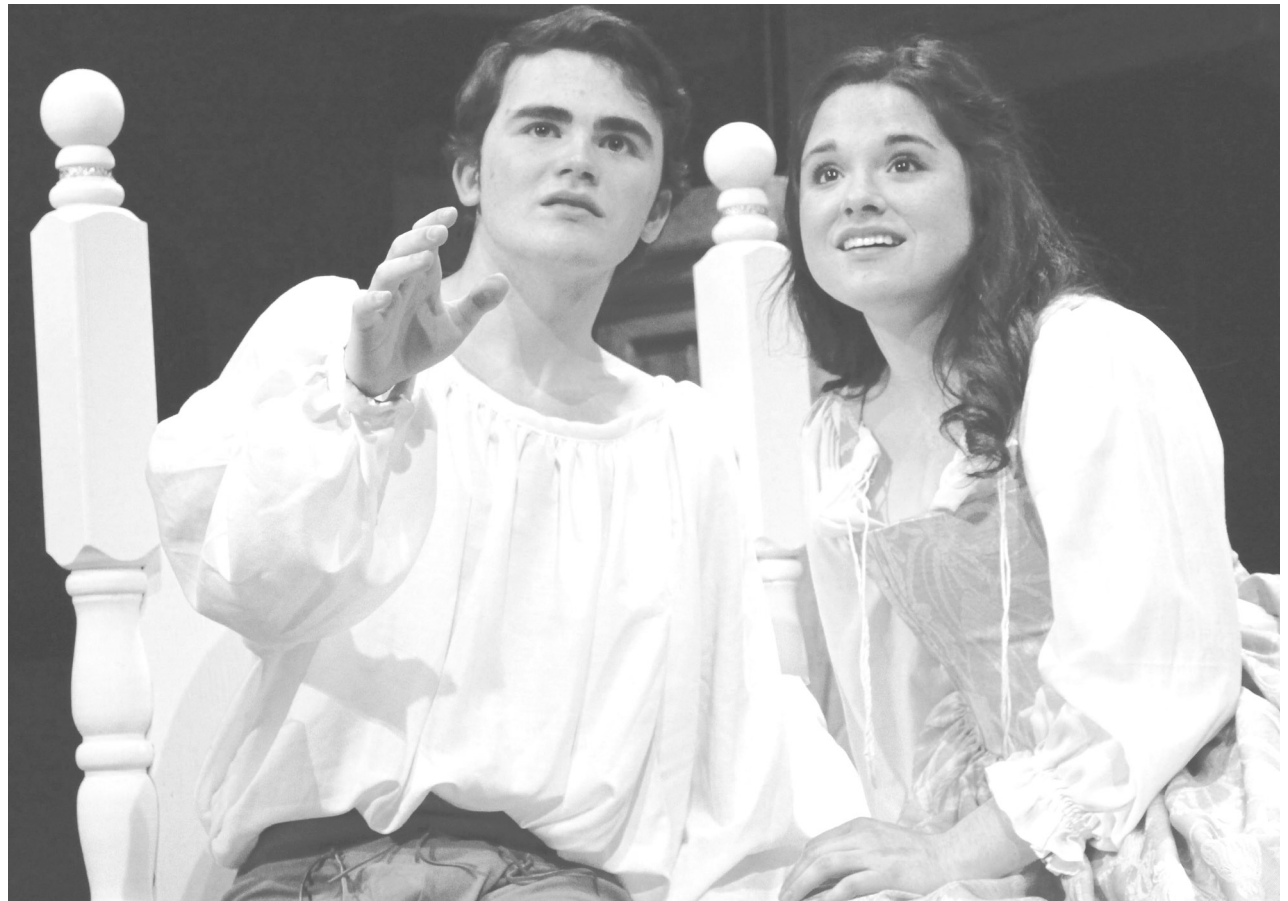
Nick Akins, playing Romeo, agrees.

"I'm hoping people will think 'This story means so much more to me now seeing it rather than reading it,'" he said.

### THEMATIC ELEMENTS

According to the director and cast, Romeo and Juliet is a play that should not just be taken at face value.

"The other thing that's been important to me as a director is I actually feel that this play has a lot of themes and messages and ideas and questions that resonate with us over time which is probably the reason it's been done so much and studied in the schools," said Gordon-Bland. "These rivalries between the households, whether you call that Montague and Capulet, black/white, native/non-native, Arab/Jew, just fill in the blanks there. It's sort of these blind hatreds that are



The University of South Dakota's theater department will feature Shakespeare's 'Romeo & Juliet' beginning next Friday.

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only and unfortunately brought to light for us when they lead to tragedy."

"There are things we want the audience to come away with like what violence and hate can do in terms of ruining and ending people's lives," said Coates. "Even people that aren't directly involved. Romeo and Juliet are both youthful and innocent, so for them to become the victims of these older feuding families, it makes the families realize what errors they've made. There's so many innocent people that become victims of hate in the world today even and I think that's what resonates with the show beyond the sappy love story."

### AN ACTOR'S LIFE

Though the cast has worked hard on communicating the deep thematic elements of the play, Gordon-Bland says she never loses sight of the show's priority.

"Our performance work is just as much about education as it is about final program," she said. "It's a great learning and growing experience for our students. We have a cast of 16 students, maybe five or six of them have previous experience with Shakespeare. For the rest of them this is a first experience. They're truly digging in and rising to the challenge. If you can do Shakespeare you can do anything."

The pressure on the

actors increases because it is not double cast.

"I don't see how you could be double cast for a Shakespeare show," said Quintero. "The sheer size of the show and the amount of dialogue you'd have to memorize, the fight choreography alone."

According to Coates, though the language is a challenge, Shakespeare gives the actors some clues that help with performing.

"It's emphasizing the words that are most important," Coates said. "Shakespeare will capitalize words sometimes in the middle of a sentence which seems grammatically incorrect but it's intentional to say this word is really important. So an audience member not understanding every metaphor and every Elizabethan nuance is still able to get the gist of what each line is."

Another challenging aspect for an actor is analyzing their character and discovering their motives according to Akins.

When first given the part, Akins had to discover where the romance-guru got his talent for love among such hate-driven family members.

"I think Romeo is not very close to his family," Akins said. "He wants any chance he can get to distance himself from his parents because he is so opposed to their hate. He doesn't understand it. That's why he's so ready to

jump into anything opposite."

Akins, playing Romeo, also said the cast has unique challenges as a group moving through different shows together.

"I was in next to normal. Ceci [who plays Juliet] played the role of Diana and I played her son. There were a lot of us from Next to Normal who got cast in this and it was really funny to all of us how our relationships changed."

For Quintero, the greatest pressure comes from the high-schoolers who will be attending special matinees.

"I'm most scared for those performances," she said. "When I was in high school I would have loved coming but I know that most of my class wouldn't have. Being able to get through to them and help them understand and get excited about it is really daunting. For them, if they don't understand the language from the get-go, you've lost them. We worked really hard on getting the prologue which sets up the whole story intelligible and setting it up for them to get their ear tuned to what it's going to be like for the rest of the play."

### AUDIENCE PREP

For a play with such intimidating language, there is really no need for the audience to grab their textbooks in preparation for enjoying Romeo and Juliet.

"Everyone is familiar with Romeo and Juliet so I

think our audiences will already be somewhat prepared," said Gordon-Bland. "Just being open to the experience is all people can do to prepare for this. Let it wash over you. In the language there are all these rhetorical devices. The point of the audience is not to see the mechanism of that, the point is for them to receive the music of the language and the story that unfolds."

Gordon-Bland says that all ages should enjoy the show.

"I think it's really a great play for everyone," she said. "Shakespeare is notorious for including something for everybody because that's what he would be doing in his theater. There's beautiful heightened poetic language which might speak to a certain population and there's also a lot of low-brow humor which might speak to someone else."

Even the little ones are welcome.

"I've found young children can be incredibly engaged in Shakespeare sometimes more so than their adult counterparts," Gordon-Bland said. "Are they understanding every word? Certainly not. Nobody is. But they do seem to latch onto it very well in terms of the storytelling."

For more information including ticket prices, visit [usd.edu/fine-arts/theater/current-season.cfm](http://usd.edu/fine-arts/theater/current-season.cfm).

# County commissioners wrap up canvassing of election

By Alan Dale  
The Plain Talk

After taking two days extra to wait for their next scheduled meeting, the Clay County Commissioners made quick work of their Thursday, Nov. 6 agenda.

Commissioners canvassed the 2014 general election and despite one ward—Rural Ward 2—being off by two votes, due to a state rule that states any discrepancy of less than four votes can be approved, they signed off on the county's final election tally.

The county also renewed the county's landfill permit. The landfill

is located along Bluff Road approximately two miles out Vermillion's city limits.

Commissioners also approved days off after Thanksgiving and Christmas for city employees. Those same workers will also be

granted a half day on Christmas Eve as commissioners approved a noon finish to the day's work activity.

Also mentioned was that the Nov. 25 agenda features further discussion on the potential

implementation of a Wheel Tax in Clay County.

The next meeting is set for Tuesday, beginning at 9

a.m. at the Clay County Courthouse.

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Objectives

- What an MS relapse is and isn't
- The MS relapse experience—it's different for everyone
- The science behind the symptoms in MS relapse
- Treating MS relapses—know your options

Event Information

Date: Thursday, November 20, 2014 Presented by: Tara Jo Bernhardt, RN

Check-in: 5:30 PM Advanced Neurology of Colorado, LLC

Time: 6:00 PM Fort Collins, CO

Location: Red Steakhouse  
1 East Main Street  
Vermillion, SD 57069

Space is limited. Please call 1-877-219-0410 or visit [www.msrelapseprogram.com](http://www.msrelapseprogram.com) to register. Remember: You and a guest are welcome at this free educational session. All MS relapse therapy decisions should be made under the guidance of your healthcare professional.

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