

WORDS FROM THE WISE

IN CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR CHARLES ROY

So many centuries after Shakespeare wrote the play, why are we still interested in taking that journey to Verona?

For this production I wanted to get at something very pure. I'd done political versions of Romeo and Juliet, productions that accessed contemporary politics, gang violence and what it all meant in a modern way. What I wanted to get at with this one was what the play was like in its pure experience.

I tried to do as unadorned a version as I could. It begins with a chalk circle and our actors step in and out of this chalk circle to create the world of the play. I wanted to create a world of pure imagination, of pure fantasy.

Romeo and Juliet endures because there is no other play quite like it. You feel that rush, that thrill, that exhilaration of young and reckless love. It all happens very fast. A matter of seconds after meeting, Romeo and Juliet are kissing. A matter of hours after kissing, they're proposing; and a matter of hours after proposing they're actually married. I love how fast that is. And figuring out how fast that is, and committing to the speed of it all is an awful lot of fun. It's the rush of first love that is actually accessed in its purest form in this play. I don't know any other play that comes close.

The play is brilliant because it gives you that extraordinary thrill, that recklessness of love without consequence in its first half, and then in its second half it gives you nothing but consequence. And the reason I love the play is that Shakespeare has the courage to say that despite the consequences, despite the fact that these two are destroying so many things in the wake of their love, it's actually worth it.

Everybody only gets one first love, and the moment it's gone, it's gone, and the moment it's gone we immediately become cynical about love because we know how much it can hurt. Romeo and Juliet gives us access to those feelings again, and it's kind of a lovely reminder of what it meant to love with your entire being. And that's worth something.

