

Blewbury Players

RO↑**meo**



Juliot

by William Shakespeare
Directed by Christopher Stain

Summer
2021

Trustee's Note

'The cause of plague is sinne and the cause of sinne are playes; therefore the cause of plagues are playes.' So said Thomas White, the puritan preacher, during one of the plagues which closed theatres in Shakespeare's day. Welcome back to Orchard Dene, adapted to protect you from plague if not from sin. We auditioned for this production of Romeo and Juliet in February last year, so it's been a long wait. We have been overwhelmed by the enthusiastic response from the cast, crew, Friends and our audiences to the decision to proceed this year. It confirms that theatre in Blewbury addresses a strong need in our community, so we must hope that SAGE doesn't get wind of the above view about the causes of the pandemic and we are not frustrated again.

We haven't been entirely passive over the past year. We've zoomed and produced two sketch shows, Blewbury Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Online, and BBC Online - The Lockdown Edition. The latter was entirely self-written and emerged from a series of Zoom sessions - 'Creative Labs' - over the winter of 2020/21 to encourage new writing and to keep us sane during lockdown. You can find both shows on our website.

Since The Crucible, our last production at Orchard Dene in 2019, we have lost a number of much-loved members of the Players'

family. Each made important and memorable contributions to our work. Roy East designed our first Crucible and a number of community operas in the church, the first Noye's Fludde, Gawain and the Green Knight and the Snow Queen. Ann Saunders, as owner with Peter of Orchard Dene, played a key part in the creation of the open air theatre and supplied our shows with countless props over the years. Marion Armstrong was quite simply one of our best actors; audiences loved her. Jolyon Kaye introduced Peter Saunders to Stockwells Players in Aston, sowing the seed of what became the Blewbury Players. He later directed Murder in the Cathedral in the church and was called upon to act whenever a butler was required. Ron Freeborn was an early and longstanding Trustee, a director and designer and unique actor. Our logo, inspired by the Garden Theatre, is Ron's work.

We are indebted to them all for their talent and support. We miss them deeply but their spirit and memory continue to inspire us.

Looking forwards, we are planning a pantomime for Blewbury in the village hall in January. We are hoping that by then, fully vaccinated, we will be able to gather again inside, avoiding plague but not necessarily some festive naughtiness. We look forward to seeing you there.

STEVE WHITE



Director's Note

I am delighted we have reached the point where this production will be performed to a live audience. Most of the cast were auditioned at the start of February last year, so it's been a very long wait. It's a great pleasure to work with the Blewbury Players again – my third time – which I appreciate is a rare honour. As ever I am hugely impressed by the level of talent and commitment from all involved.

I saw no good reason to set the production in a bygone era or indeed in a place as far away as Verona, Italy. Falling in love against the odds, gang fighting and knife crime have so much currency for us. I wanted to bring this “Verona” closer to home – and I would argue that I'm only following the writer in that respect.

Talking to Melissa (designer), who has done such a wonderful job to create the world for this production, we thought about gang rivalries within living memory in this country. We hit on the era of mods and rockers, depicted most iconically in the film *Quadrophenia*. The early 1960s, have a hint of nostalgia for us now. At the time, rival identities – fashion choices and music tastes – were fiercely defended. The undercurrent of violence was very real, with gang fights taking place in seaside towns in 1964 at Brighton, Margate, Clacton. There was even a clash dubbed the “second battle of Hastings”.

Young people's lives hang in the balance in *Romeo and Juliet* not only because of the

conflict between two households but also because of tension between the generations. Perhaps the clashes between mods and rockers were in some way a result of the frustrated energies of a younger generation trying to carve out different paths for themselves, rebelling against post-war austerity and old-school authority – the Prince, a political figure in our Verona, is understanding enough but ready to impose the death penalty if needs be. By the early 1960s there is a feeling that young people have arrived at a crossroads – on their Tritons and Vespas of course.

Looking this year at our ideas for the production in the context of coronavirus and the challenges we still face, we wondered for a moment whether the play could be about anything other than living through a pandemic. Certainly coronavirus has presented its challenges for us. The isolation – segregation if you like – that has been imposed on all our households, not just two, brings extra resonance to the need for contact that *Romeo and Juliet* feel, as they reach out to each other across the divide and, despite all the risks, want and try to touch.

We hope you will enjoy the way a live performance in such a magical local setting can bring us all together in so many ways. No doubt the experience for all of us this year will be all the more precious for its novelty after all we've been through.

CHRISTOPHER STAINES



Christopher Staines



I am delighted to return to Blewbury to direct this production after *Cider with Rosie* (2014) and *A Servant to Two Masters* (2010). I work

mostly as an actor, but also as a director, voiceover artist, workshop leader and teacher. My first experience of performing Shakespeare was with an amateur company in an outdoor venue, so it gives me particular pleasure to direct this production here.

Among roles in theatre productions all over the UK, I have particularly enjoyed performing in Shakespeare plays, including two different productions of *The Tempest*, one with the Royal Shakespeare Company, and another where I played both Caliban and Ariel – and yes, it is just about impossible – as well as Rosencrantz in *Hamlet* (National Theatre), Cassius in *Julius Caesar* (Storyhouse, Chester), Edgar in *King Lear* and Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Tobacco Factory, Bristol). I have also appeared on TV and film in a range of dramas such as *Quiz*, *Wolf Hall*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Survivors*.

Designer's Note

Drawing on the world of mods and rockers in the very early 1960s, we wanted to set the action in an industrial wasteland, with rusted corrugated-iron sheets on derelict concrete walls at odds with the beautiful surroundings of Blewbury, just as in the play the destructive cycle of human conflict is at odds with the natural world that surrounds it.

The ups and downs of the staircases suggest the highs and lows the characters experience and the hierarchies within which they operate. They bring *Romeo and Juliet* that bit closer to the sun, moon, the stars and the birds they compare each other to, but also suggest the dangers they face if they should fall from their orbit.

The hedge behind helps us to suggest other internal spaces beyond our set, while the open structure helps us to create the shifts of dynamics for different scenes.

The central platform might be a bed or a tomb, a stage or just a meeting place. It provides the possibility for unity that brings *Romeo and Juliet* together as their love bursts

into flower like a plant sprouting up out of the rubble, bridging the gap between their opposing families, reaching beyond grudges of the past and the segregation they've left 'behind' them.

A shrine on the wall doubles for Friar Laurence as a place to store the herbs and potions that he is expert in. Beyond his interest in herbal remedies, he is as much a youth leader and social welfare officer as a religious figure, aptly enough for our 1960s setting.

It has been a great pleasure working and collaborating with Christopher Staines (director) despite the challenge we faced of discussing ideas during lockdowns over Zoom. It feels great to see these ideas finally come to life. I would like to thank Peter Ritson (construction manager) who took care of all the construction and scenic painting, Vanessa Fox (costume supervisor) for her efforts to source our ideas for the costumes and all the Blewbury Players trustees who have made all of this possible.

MELISSA SOFOIAN

Cast

Capulets:

Juliet Buket Ahmed
Capulet Brian Nutter
Lady Capulet Stephanie Hilder
Nurse..... Patrycja Meadows
Tybalt..... Keith Heddle
Paris Will Strike
Angelica..... Rebecca Lane
Peter Edward Morris

Montagues:

Romeo George Brooks
Montague/Uncle Capulet/Friar John
..... Bob Brooks
Benvolia Jessie Coller
Mercutio Matt Phillips
Prince Louise Esplin
Friar Laurence..... Matthew Pettigrew
Apothecary / Leader of the Watch.....
..... Ciara Hardman

Other Capulets, Montagues and officers of the Watch played by members of the company



There will be one interval of twenty minutes

*Please turn off mobile phones during the performance
Please do not use photographic or video equipment during the performance*

Production Team

Director Christopher Staines
Director's Assistant Trish Brooks
Designer Melissa Sofoian
Production Managers ... Sheila Loy and Steve White
Construction Peter Ritson
Lighting Design . Adam Stockley and Andrew Forman
Sound Sam Hewson
Wardrobe Vanessa Fox
Movement Philippa Weeden
Fight Director John Sandeman
Stage Manager Tracy Silverthorne
Theatre Managers Karen Forman and
..... David Long
Props Peter Saunders
Publicity Elizabeth and Roger Murphy
Box Office Sarah Donne
Friends Secretary Roger Colebrook
Programme Design Loraine Fergusson
Programme Production Pres Wells
Photography Peter Willison
Bar Manager Jeff Dawson
Treasurer Sue Colebrook
Back of House Audrey Wood
Neighbours PR Jean and David Richards

With the help of

Sarah Bennie, Jim Cheshire, Vikki Claridge, Marion Cox, Ian Davies, Rob Dean, Gay Edwards, Alex Elderfield, Rob Forman, Angie George, Jane Gibson, Doreen Gilbert, Bill Gore, Jason Harmer, Sue Huart, Maureen Knapp, Phoebe Laidlaw, Mine Mcpherson, Annie Morgan, Bob Parkes, Margaret Parkes, Matthew Phillips, Mark Phillips, Laura Pusey, Marilyn Read, Toby Ritson, Joan Robertson, Lucy Ryan, Sarah Salter, Hilary Savage, Linda Shields, Ben Silverthorne, Chris Smith, Dick Street, Maddy Tym, Doreen Tyrell, Chris Willison, June Wolff... and others.



Acknowledgements

Our thanks to Zillah and Al Laidlaw for hosting the play in their beautiful garden.

Thanks also to the Oxfordshire Drama Wardrobe for access to their store of costumes, the Allens of Winterbrook Farm for supplying material for the set and anybody who lent from their wardrobes and lofts the clothes of their youth or provided props.

Friends of Blewbury Players

Around 100 folk support the Blewbury Players by becoming a Friend. They receive priority ticket booking, a Friends interval reception, a Christmas newsletter and a free Evening of Entertainment each spring. As you know, 2020 was a horrible year without a summer play or a Friends Evening. Nonetheless almost half of our Friends continued with their subscriptions, despite being offered a "bye". We are incredibly grateful.

Please contact Roger Colebrook, Friends' Secretary at rogercolebrook@gmail.com. Our website, www.blewburyplayers.co.uk also provides information and application forms. The subscription is £15 per annum per person and this money, along with associated gift aid, is invested in maintaining the theatre and equipment.

Blewbury Players

We do not have formal 'membership' and are always delighted to welcome new faces, experienced or not, who wish an involvement either on or behind the scenes or who would simply like to be added to our email list. Please visit our website www.blewburyplayers.co.uk for more information about getting involved

Trustees

Richard Blackford, Trish Brooks, Sheila Loy, Coral Richards, Peter Saunders and Steve White



Productions

The Blewbury Players have performed over forty years of productions at Orchard Dene as well as many occasional performances in the Village Hall (VH) and St Michaels Church (SM), one at Wallingford and one in the grounds of Ashbrook House (AH).

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1976 The Merry Wives of Windsor | 1997 The Merry Wives of Windsor |
| 1977 The Taming of the Shrew | 1998 The Government Inspector |
| 1978 As You Like It | 1999 Scenes from a Separation (VH) |
| 1979 The Crucible | 1999 Peer Gynt |
| 1980 The Tempest | 2000 A Midsummer Night's Dream |
| 1981 Henry V | 2001 Dancing at Lughnasa |
| 1982 Romeo and Juliet | 2002 Murder in the Cathedral (SM) |
| 1983 Lark Rise | 2002 Alice Through the Looking Glass |
| 1984 Twelfth Night | 2003 As You Like It |
| 1985 A Midsummer Night's Dream | 2004 Miss Elizabeth Bennet |
| 1986 Cold Comfort Farm | 2005 David Copperfield |
| 1987 Toad of Toad Hall (AH) | 2006 Marriage a la Mode |
| 1988 Cabaret (VH) | 2007 The Winter's Tale |
| 1988 The Beaux Stratagem | 2008 The Canterbury Tales |
| 1989 The Comedy of Errors | 2009 Noye's Fludde (SM) |
| 1990 Dark of the Moon | 2009 Twelfth Night |
| 1991 The Importance of Being Earnest | 2010 A Servant to Two Masters |
| 1991 Four in the Round (VH) | 2011 Peter Pan |
| 1992 Much Ado About Nothing | 2012 Under Milk Wood (VH) |
| 1992 Mixed Blessings (VH) | 2012 She Stoops to Conquer |
| 1993 Death of a Salesman (VH) | 2013 Tom's Midnight Garden |
| 1993 The Country Wife | 2014 Cider with Rosie |
| 1994 Under Milk Wood | 2015 Jack and the Beanstalk (VH) |
| 1995 Habeas Corpus (VH) | 2015 The Taming of the Shrew |
| 1995 The Merchant of Venice | 2016 A Midsummer Night's Dream |
| 1996 Ring Around the Moon | 2017 Great Expectations |
| 1997 The Visit (Wallingford) | 2017 The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe (SM) |
| | 2018 Lark Rise |
| | 2019 The Crucible |