

## / CHARACTERS

**Romeo** | A young nobleman of Verona, son of Lord and Lady Montague

**Juliet** | Daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet, sworn enemies of the Montagues

**Mercutio** | Friend to Romeo, allied to the Montagues

**Benvolio** | Cousin to Romeo and friend to Mercutio, allied to the Montagues

**Tybalt** | Nephew to Lord and Lady Capulet, cousin to Juliet

**Paris** | A young nobleman, allied to the Capulets and a suitor to Juliet

**Lord Capulet** | Head of the House of Capulet, Juliet's father

**Lady Capulet** | His wife, Juliet's mother

**Lord Montague** | Head of the House of Montague, Romeo's father

**Lady Montague** | His wife, Romeo's mother

**Escalus** | Prince of Verona

**Friar Laurence** | Romeo's teacher, confessor, advisor and friend

**The Nurse** | Juliet's nurse and closest confidante

**Other characters** | Capulets, Montagues, Harlots, Guests at the Capulets' ball, Juliet's Friends, Mandolin Dancers.

## / SYNOPSIS

**ACT I** It is morning in Verona's market square. A chance encounter between high-spirited young men from the Capulet and Montague families leads to a raging battle in the piazza, with all the townsfolk taking sides. Escalus, Prince of Verona arrives and admonishes Lord Montague and Lord Capulet to keep the peace, on pain of death. They do so, unwillingly.

Later in the day, Juliet prepares for her first ball, under the fond gaze of her childhood nurse. Her mother arrives with the news that it is time for Juliet to marry, and that her parents have chosen Paris as her husband.

As dusk falls, the guests arrive at the Capulets' palazzo for a grand masked ball. Tybalt and Paris are present as members of the Capulet clan. Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio arrive in masks, joining the festivities to goad Tybalt. Romeo sees Juliet, and it is love at first sight for both of them: neither realising until it is too late that their families are sworn enemies. Tybalt recognises Romeo and is furious at the insult. Romeo leaves, only to return to the palazzo garden and Juliet's balcony, where the young couple meet again and fall ever deeper in love.

**ACT II** The next morning, Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio return to the market square. Romeo is preoccupied with thoughts of Juliet and does not join his friends at the carnival celebrations. Juliet's Nurse arrives with a letter from Juliet: if Romeo is sincere in his love for her, she will meet him that morning at Friar Laurence's church, so that they can be married. Romeo is overjoyed, and a short while later, Romeo and Juliet are joined together in holy matrimony by the Friar. Juliet returns home to await Romeo's visit to her bedroom that night.

Romeo leaves the church and is accosted by Tybalt, looking to avenge the insult of Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio's unwanted attendance at Lord Capulet's party, and spoiling for a fight. Romeo, knowing that he is now related to Tybalt by marriage and wanting no argument, tries to leave but is goaded by Tybalt and a fight soon breaks out. In the melee,

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Mercutio is fatally wounded by Tybalt. He dies, cursing the Montagues and Capulets for their senseless quarrel. Enraged at the death of his friend and forgetting his earlier desire to make peace, Romeo kills Tybalt. Romeo flees as Lord and Lady Capulet arrive, grief stricken at the death of their nephew, followed by Escalus, who proclaims that Romeo is now banished from Verona, on pain of death.

**ACT III** As dawn breaks the next morning, Romeo and Juliet awaken in Juliet's bedroom, having spent their secret wedding night together. Romeo must leave; if he is found inside Verona's walls he will be executed. The Nurse enters followed by Lord Capulet with Paris: Lord and Lady Capulet have decided that, following Tybalt's death, Juliet's marriage to Paris must take place as soon as possible. Juliet is reluctant but, seeing no way out, gives in.

Desperate, Juliet runs to Friar Laurence. He gives her a potion that will give the appearance of death. She should drink it the night before her marriage to Paris, her parents will convey her lifeless body to the family crypt, where she will wake 42 hours later. Meanwhile, Friar Laurence will send word to Romeo, who will come and meet her as she wakes, so that they may leave Verona and be together. Alone in her bedroom, Juliet summons all her courage and drinks the potion.

The following morning, Juliet is discovered 'dead' in her bed and, dressed in her wedding gown, is laid to rest in the Capulet family crypt. Romeo, who has returned without receiving Friar Laurence's message with Juliet's plan, is maddened by grief and kills Paris, who has remained beside Juliet's bier. Rather than live without Juliet, Romeo takes poison, and breathes his last as Juliet wakes from her deathly sleep. Finding Romeo dead, she takes his dagger and stabs herself.

**EPILOGUE** As the Capulets and Montagues mourn their children, Escalus encourages them to forget their quarrel, forgive each other and make peace.



*RNZB dancers Madeleine Graham and Joseph Skelton.  
Photograph: Ross Brown*