

## BALLET

Romeo and Juliet  
West Australian Ballet  
His Majesty's Theatre  
Review: Tim Balfour

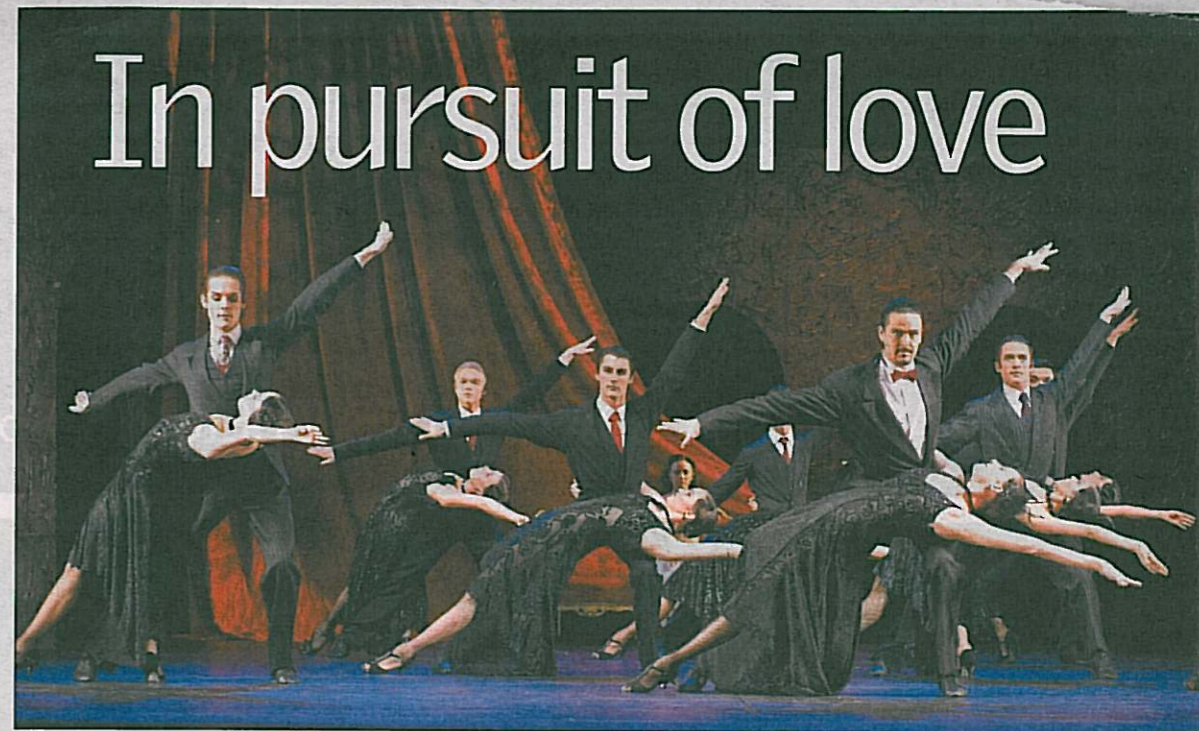
Securing Yuri Vamos' 1930s reworking of *Romeo & Juliet* is among one of West Australian Ballet's more inspired artistic decisions. While Vamos' choreography doesn't always measure up to the passion of Sergei Prokofiev's intensely moving score, the work does play to this company's diverse array of talents and strengths.

Within the confines of a simple set comprising diminishing rows of arches and backlit drapes, the feuding Capulet and Montague families battle it out 1930s style.

It's quite a minimalist looking stage, so Michael Scott's costumes do well to create a convincing 30s atmosphere. Early male ensemble scenes with Tybalt's henchmen dressed in 30s garb and packing heat are choreographically and stylistically compelling. In one of a number of inspired theatrical moments, the street brawl is stopped after a menacing black sedan inhabited by the city's administrator rolls on stage to a dramatic crescendo in Prokofiev's score.

Group dances are strong in this work and are characterised by swiftly executed angular, two-dimensional glyph-like forms that transition via circular or snaking motions of the body. Such sequences are very effective but there are moments, especially during partnering sequences, where the movements look unnecessarily complicated and clumsy.

The casting of Juliet is always a dilemma for directors and choreographers: do you choose a seasoned leading artist with emotional depth, or an artist who may look the part but has less experience with psychologically demanding roles? Sometimes you



**Dramatic:** Michael Scott's costumes create a convincing 1930s atmosphere in WA Ballet's *Romeo and Juliet*. Picture: Jon Green.

can get these attributes rolled into one artist, but it's rare.

There is a lively athleticism to Sarah Sutcliffe's portrayal of Juliet and she captured the essence of her character's innocence, childish naivety and resultant comic moments well. When a scene called for more emotional depth, however, Sutcliffe's performance often appeared vacant.

Some may argue that a girl in her early teens doesn't have the capacity for such emotion and that Sutcliffe was coached to behave in this way. But whatever the explanation, a lack of emotional depth is what the audience ultimately witnesses.

Sergey Pevnev typically gives it his all in a dramatically convincing and technically proficient portrayal of Romeo and is always a pleasure to watch perform.

The pas de deux between Pevnev and Sutcliffe build slowly to represent the lovers' first awkward

and clumsy embraces to their later state of rapturous true love. This worked in early scenes, but it later looked as though Pevnev and Sutcliffe were fighting a losing battle against the confines of some highly restrictive choreography. As a result, later pas de deux rarely matched the heights of Prokofiev's emotionally charged score, though the tragic tomb scene came close.

Pevnev's partners in crime, Cass Mortimer Eipper and Daryl Brandwood, put in excellent performances as Mercutio and Benvolio respectively. Exceptional quality of movement and polished characterisations marked both their performances.

Wearing a black singlet and gun holster, Benjamin Marrett's swarthy looking Tybalt looked like the archetypal gangster and appeared to relish the role. David Mack's sleazy representation of Paris, to whom Juliet is reluctantly betrothed,

provides yet more genuinely comic scenes.

Among other highlights is a fast-paced street scene involving a band of dancing vagabonds, which showcased the special talents of young artist Joseph Simons.

Guest principal artist Ivan Gil-Ortega will also be performing *Romeo* alongside WA Ballet's Fiona Evans as Juliet.

Despite not quite providing the emotional outlet that one might expect, given Prokofiev's deeply affecting score, Vamos' *Romeo & Juliet* compensates in other areas. Vamos' flair for the comic moment, his powerful male ensemble scenes and numerous opportunities for supporting cast members to shine certainly make this production worth a look.

**Romeo and Juliet** is at His Majesty's Theatre until July 18.