

A REVIEW: ROMEO AND JULIETTE

# 79th KM High Senior Play opens tonight at auditorium

(A review of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Kings Mountain High School Senior Play that will be presented Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at B.N. Barnes Auditorium.)

By AL RANKIN

The place is a mythic, turn-of-the-millennium nowhere called Verona. Rival families vie with one another for control of the city. Street gangs fight, rumble, and spout poetry in the name of two warring families, the Capulets and the Montagues. At a riotous ball, Romeo (Jesse Moschler) - young heir to the Montague fortune - sets his eyes on the Capulet heiress, Juliet (Lindsay Farnsworth). For both, it's love at first sight, and their passion spins the blood-thirsty world of their respective families' loyalties out of orbit. Director Betsy Wells centers this production of *Romeo and Juliet* on the tension of opposing forces and flat-out puts her faith in the tale's simple yet potent power. What need, after all, to elaborate upon Shakespeare's foolproof story? The timeless tale unfolds naturally and, when warranted, with highly engaging theatrics.

Wells drives a radical, brilliant, hands-off-the-handlebars bravado to this adaptation of Shakespeare's most romantic masterpiece. Her style demands the audience overlook sparse sets and instead to imagine present day Verona - not the Verona of Shakespeare's day. In this production there are no ladies with elaborate pointed hats and veils, no festive gowns, no oceans of lace, gossamer or embroidery, no warriors with gauntlets, no lutes nor mandolins, no men mounted on steeds with shimmering chain mail and helmets, no men in tights and codpieces. Instead, think baggy jeans, leather jackets, stiletto heels, vibrant tattoos, awesome piercings, electric guitars and roaring

motorcycles - we can almost envision tough young hoodlums mounted on Harley-Davidsons tucked tightly between their things.

The director brought in professional stunt artists to train male cast members for the strenuous knockabout stuff of revels and roistering. Indeed, the youth of modern day Verona are depicted as brawling, cavorting young men divided into two gangs as a take on "West Side Story" melees that flare and clash with frenetic pandemonium of fisticuffs and martial arts instead of swords, spears, daggers, and truncheons.

Mercutio (Jason West) delivers a speech with such intensity that he seems on the verge of violence. Romeo physically pulls him back to reality. Mercutio's hero worship of Romeo is amplified. His derision of Romeo's new love is not lighthearted banter but bitter, almost jealous scorn, and his subsequent taunting of Romeo is harsh and accusatory, especially in comparison to the playful antics of Benvolio (Brandon Gist) and Balthasar (Kevin Ghonda). His ardor for Romeo becomes evident after he is mortally wounded by Tybalt (Tripp Dalton). Mercutio clutches Romeo in a farewell embrace before staggering away to die.

Among those portraying the older characters, Amanda Mitchell as Nurse is a standout. Her prattling delivery and doty demeanor combine with superb comic timing to create a vivid characterization that almost steals certain scenes. Miles Hovis delivers a tour de force Lord Capulet in the upbraiding scene, progressing believably from a tender and loving father to an angrily affronted patriarch to an unreasonable and violent tyrant. Though one of the youngest, Hovis seems the most mature and polished of the cast. Daniel Teasley depicts his earnest but ineffectual Friar

Lawrence with dry humor and real compassion for Romeo.

As fair Juliet, Lindsay Farnsworth delights, then later moves the audience with her own tears and pathos. Her Juliet is sometimes funny and feisty. She is also depicted as experiencing a crisis of confidence. She shuns the Nurse - first by rejecting her presence, then by turning away a good-night kiss and kneels upon her bed, nervously clutching the potion from Friar Lawrence. Juliet doubts herself, speaking quickly and with obvious fear, but once she utters Romeo's name aloud she becomes noticeably dreamy again. And she drinks the potion. The portrayal of Juliet's liberation from her family and the feud - through her love for Romeo - is the most memorable sequence of the production.

The author of this adaptation of Shakespeare's play apparently worked hard to protect the original text, but sacrificed a noticeable number of great lines to the lightning pace, no doubt guided by the perceived limitations of younger actors. But Director Wells corrects the script very nicely by carefully restoring, through deft condensing, some of the more important soliloquies such as Mercutio's Queen Mab speech. ("And there she comes, drawn with a team of little atomies" - is it possible that Shakespeare foresaw nuclear powered vehicles? Scholars disagree). And in addition, the ingenious Jesse Moschler is not at sea with Shakespeare. He visibly finds the emotional core of every scene in his face and body language - he gives great James Dean; well, more like great Leonardo - as in the multitalented versatility of Leonardo DaVinci, the sweet pageboy looks of Leonardo Whiting in the famous 1968 film coupled with the tough rough rambunctious style of Leonardo DiCaprio in the 1996 version.

He is all of that and more. Moschler brings a fresh and youthful charm to his Romeo, effectively evolving into a young man whose heart swells in pain and anxiety beyond his comprehension.

Wells briskly paces the concluding scenes. She emphasizes the swiftness of events and multiplying misfortunes to evoke the rapidity of the tragedy without depriving the play of some of its power. This production is effective drama, due especially to directional prowess and a slew of rich supporting performers, including Stephen Anthony (Prince Escalus), Marybeth Bell (Lady Capulet), Russell Keller (Lord Montague), Kim Robertson (Lady Montague), Alex Bennett (Friar John), Paris (Paul Shergill), Kenny Grant (the Servant), and Amanda Walker (the Narrator).

In the end, what you get emotionally out of this psychedelic tribute to youth and beauty trapped in a stressed out world, depends on what you bring in. A basic familiarity with the original - plus having seen one or more of the modern film adaptations - will enhance the viewer's pleasure.

Go thither to Barnes Auditorium at Kings Mountain High School, where *Romeo and Juliet* starts at 7:30 p.m. tonight, continues tomorrow night and ends Saturday. Its beauty will linger in your heart and memory. Cheers to the 79th consecutive year for Senior Class plays at KMHS, the only high school in the area still producing Senior Class plays annually!

(World traveler and published author, Al Rankin, enjoys spending his retirement years as Photo Lab Manager and the Kings Mountain Eckerd's).

## SOCIAL BRIEFS

### Christmas music set at Cleveland

An evening of Christmas Music will be held December 11 at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium of Cleveland Community College.

Featured artists are dulcimerist Joe Collins and guitarist Mike McGee, both of whom are making their third appearance at the college.

There is no admission fee. At the conclusion of the performance, CDs, tapes, tablature books, and dulcimers will be available for purchase.

For more information call 484-4139.

### Gaston Choral group sets Winter Concert

The Gaston Choral Society will present its winter concert, "Something Christmas," December 6-7 at 8 p.m. at Unity Place, 201 W. Franklin Blvd., Gastonia.

Tickets at the door are \$6 for adults and \$4 for students and seniors. Advance tickets are \$1 less.

For more information, call 853-ARTS.

### Forever Plaid set for another weekend

The final performances of the Kings Mountain Little Theatre production of "Forever Plaid" will be held at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the new Joy Performance Center in Kings Mountain.

KMLT's next production will be "Rumors" in late February and March. Auditions for five women and five men will be held Sunday, Jan. 6 from 2-5 p.m. and Monday, Jan. 7 from 7-9 p.m.

For tickets or more information on either of the plays call the office of the Joy Performance Center at 730-9408.

### Charity Chapter sets yard sale Saturday

Charity Chapter #548 will have a yard sale at their meeting place on Childers Street Saturday, Dec. 1 from 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

Refreshments will be sold. The public is invited.

### Chicken stew set at Antioch Center

Antioch Community Center will host a chicken stew Saturday, Dec. 1 at 11 a.m. at the Antioch Community Center, located on Antioch Church Road off Highway 29 between Grover and Blacksburg, SC.

In addition, there will be an inside yard sale which begins at 7 a.m.

### Parents Night Out slated at Arts Center

The annual Parents Night Out program for children in grades K-6 will be held Friday, Dec. 7 from 6-9 p.m. at the Arts Center, 111 S. Washington St., Shelby. The cost is \$10 per child.

Children must be pre-registered. For more information call 484-2787.

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## Lifestyles Deadlines

The Herald welcomes your lifestyles news for publication in each Thursday's paper. Lifestyles items include weddings, engagements, anniversaries, birthdays, club news, church news and community news.

Deadline for information and articles is 12 noon on the Monday immediately following the event. Items received after that date may be deemed too late for publication and refused.

When holidays or other reasons make it necessary for the paper to publish a day early the deadline is Friday at 12 noon.

There is no charge for articles. However, there is a \$5 preparation fee for birthday pictures for ages 0-5. Forms, which must be signed by the parents, are available at the receptionist's desk. Regular advertising rates apply for birthday articles and pictures for persons ages 6 and above. There is a \$10 preparation fee for wedding, anniversary and engagement pictures. Wedding forms are also available at the receptionist's desk.

Information and articles may be mailed to The Herald, P.O. Box 769, Kings Mountain, NC 28086, brought by the office at 824-1 East King Street, or sent by fax to 739-0611. All articles and information are subject to editing for clarity, spelling and/or length.

## News Deadlines

The Herald welcomes your news for publication in each Thursday's paper. We ask that you observe the following deadlines:

Deadlines for regular news and sports is 5 p.m. Tuesday. In cases of meetings and other activities held on Tuesday night, information will be received until 9:30 a.m. Wednesday.

Items received after deadline will run if time and space permit. If not, they will be held until the following week if they are still timely.

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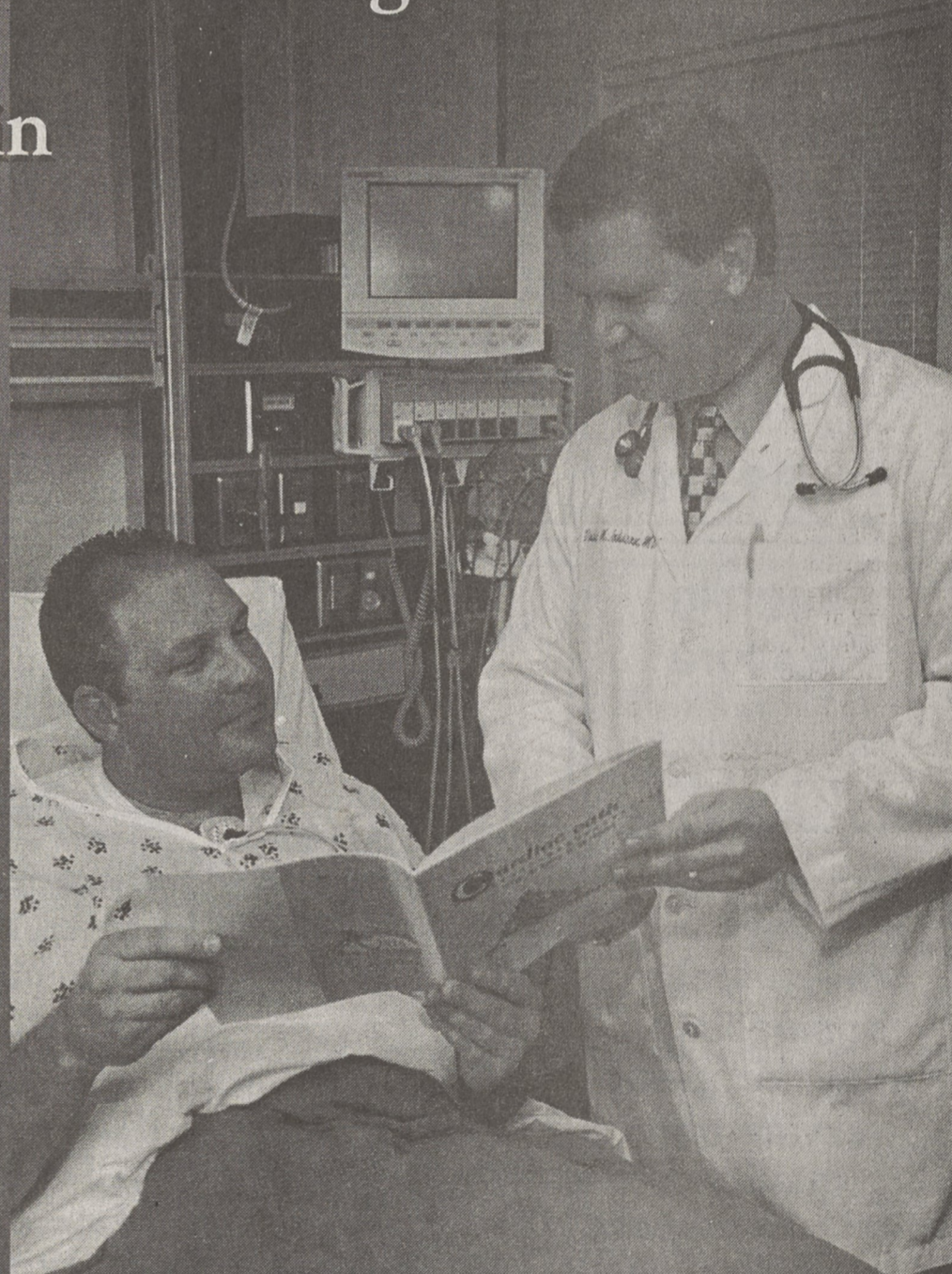
## Welcome To Our Neighborhood... New Kings Mountain PHYSICIAN

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