

Carroll University sponsored a celebration of the arts this past weekend. It combined chamber and choral music, graphic arts, and drama around the theme of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." Instead of performing the play as written, James Zager, director/playwright, took some liberties with the original script.

In this reconstructive version, all the emphasis is on Juliet. We experience the story from her perspective. She learns of events primarily through her nurse or her parents, though she does have some secret meetings with Romeo and her friar, who is on her side in her desire to follow her heart rather than her parents' directives to marry Paris.

A simple set design comprised of a raised platform and some folding chairs supports the drama. All the minor actors sit in chairs around the periphery of the stage, coming and going as needed. A church setting is created by projecting a stained glass window on the back wall.

The strength of Katie Binger as Juliet carries the show. Binger has delivered in every role she has taken at Carroll. The theater arts program will certainly suffer a loss with her departure in June. Trevor Erikson isn't as comfortable with Shakespeare as Binger is, but his ardor and sincerity compensated for his occasional hesitations.

A third actor who made his presence felt is Danny Polaski who played Juliet's father. His scene with Juliet when he threatened to disown her for not wanting to marry Paris, his arranged suitor, was especially frightening. Her mother, enacted by Emily Rindt, needs to exude more energy in her role, and Jackie Hulina, the infamous nurse, could have made more of her key position in Juliet's life. She definitely shows great promise, though, but should work on better voice projection and more intensity.

The mix of Shakespearian and contemporary idiom is interesting. Retaining the most beautiful poetic passages as written was a wise choice, however. No one could improve on those love scenes and Juliet's soliloquy before taking the sleeping potion (the most powerful scene in the play, by the way.)

The only thing that bothered me about their version of this drama is the omission of a key element in the plot – why Romeo never got the message from the friar, which basically causes the eventual disaster. The abrupt ending of the play with Tybalt pronouncing the sentence of blame on all those who participated in feeding the fires of dissension was a powerful touch.

All in all, a worthy rendition of the beauty and horror of this classic love story. The language is deliciously poetic at times, and the innocence and passion of young lovers as well as the poignancy of their inevitable doom at the hands of forces that shaped their destinies is an affecting combination of elements. No wonder this is one of Shakespeare's most enduring works. Carroll's offering is an impressive one. It's too bad that it only runs one weekend. It seems like an immense amount of work for so few showings.