

## **Tulsa Ballet: Romeo and Juliet**

### **Dance Magazine**

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### **Tulsa Performing Arts Center**

**Tulsa, OK**

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**Performance reviewed: Feb. 11**

Edwaard Liang has created a strong and satisfying rendition of the age-old tragedy. He has re-imagined some of the plot elements while keeping the feeling of the MacMillan and Cranko versions with their vibrant crowd scenes and rhapsodic love duets. His inventive choreography served the story with flair. In Soo Youn Cho the company has a radiant Juliet who is a ballerina from head to toe. The magnificent Prokofiev music was played live by the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra.

The opening scene in the marketplace sets the stage with the violence that governs the people of Verona. The fight that breaks out spreads even to the women and girls; when the dust settles, it's a young girl who has been killed, foreshadowing Juliet's death.

Meanwhile Juliet is fussed over by both her mother and nurse, who wield the fancy dress she will wear to the ball. After they each cup a hand under one of her breasts to show that she has grown up, Juliet steps back, drops the dress, and the two women reach forward to pick it up, almost knocking heads. They freeze in a sweet, funny tableau.



*Yoshihisa Arai as Mercutio.*

Liang has sprinkled the evening with other poignant moments that further the plot. The mandolin dance that usually serves as a divertissement is replaced by a witty romp between Mercutio and Benvolio to try to shake Romeo out of his love stupor. When Juliet is deciding whether to take the sleeping potion, Tybalt and Romeo appear to her in a vision and convince her to take it. Lady Capulet, on seeing her daughter apparently dead, rages at her husband, thus showing the fault line in their relationship.

In the famous balcony scene Liang avoids the iconic images: He alternates swooping, ecstatic lifts with sitting on the floor in quiet contemplation of each other. The kiss is soft and melting, and Juliet spontaneously opens her chest and arms, exposing her heart to him. As they bid farewell, with her now atop the stairs, she reaches down while he stretches up, both yearning for what is never to be.



*Alfonso Martín and Soo Youn Cho as Romeo and Juliet.*

In the crypt scene, as Juliet comes to life, Romeo has just poisoned himself but is still alive. (This plot twist, coincidentally, was also used by Ratmansky in [his version](#) for National Ballet of Canada.) As she holds his hands, he slips to the ground and she's left holding the air. Needless to say, this last scene is, well, tragic.

The Tulsa Ballet dancers really rose to the occasion of this majestic production. Cho made a beautiful, tender Juliet who transforms from playful and carefree to passionately in love. Her limpness when she was faux-dead was fantastically chilling. Alfonso Martín grew into his role as Romeo. Yoshihisa Arai as Mercutio almost stole the show with his sassiness and fabulous technique. Lady Capulet, played by guest artist Megan McKown-Miller, went crazy when Tybalt was killed and practically spread her body on top of him, mourning him with such ferocity that it brought tears. Even minor

characters like the three harlots performed with great verve. (Alexandra Bergman played the central harlot with particularly outsized daring.) A weak spot was Tybalt, danced by Jonnathan Ramirez Mejia without a shred of “fiery” menace. The baby blue costume (sets and costumes courtesy of Houston Ballet) didn't help. Since Tybalt is a key figure in the plot, it seemed to this reviewer (who was a guest of the company) that Mejia's bland performance dampened the evening's drama.

But this is a *Romeo and Juliet* to last. The love scenes are exquisitely musical; the story is well told; and the choreography holds one's attention throughout.



*A radiant Juliet: Soo Youn Cho*