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GIRL GANGS ROAM VERONA! QUEEN MAB MAKEOVER!

Taffety Punk Theatre Company

presents

The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

Directed by Lise Bruneau

Featuring company member Kimberly Gilbert as Mercutio

Guest artists include Rahaleh Nassri (Romeo), Kelsey Grouge (Juliet), Michelle Shupe (Friar Lawrence), Toni Rae Brotons (Nurse), Tonya Beckman Ross (Capulet), Erin Sloan (Lady Capulet), Esther Williamson (Benvolio), Abby Wood (Tybalt), Julia Brandeberry (Paris), Elizabeth Webster (Prince), Allyson Harkey (Montague), and Happenstance Theater's Sabrina Mandell (as Sampson and other riff-raff).

Fight Choreography by Dog and Pony's Lorraine Ressegger.

At the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop
545 7th Street SE (near Eastern Market Metro)

Pay-what-you-can previews at 7:30 pm on September 15, 18.
Performances at 7:30 pm on September 19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 27, October 2, 3, 4
Saturday Matinees at 3:00 pm on September 20, 27, and October 4.

All tickets \$10

For tickets call 202-261-6612, or email tix@taffetypunk.com.

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When Lise Bruneau, company member and Associate Director of Taffety Punk Theatre Company, found out that Shakespeare Theatre Company was going to produce an all-male version of *Romeo and Juliet* in Fall 2008, it plucked a chord of feminist outrage within her.

“In Shakespeare's time,” says Bruneau, “he did it with all men. For some reason, all of the theaters in America think this is so fascinating that they never tire of doing a Shakespeare production with all men! It happens over and over and over again!”

And so [Taffety Punk Theatre Company](http://taffetypunk.com) – winner of the John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company at the 2008 Helen Hayes Awards – has

prepared a retort discourteous to the Shakespeare Theatre Company's all-boy rendering: an all girl *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Bruneau.

"We had to jump on it and just offer up something positive," she says.

As Bruneau prepares the production, which opens on September 19, she's finding that reversing polarities and bending gender in a different direction released untapped energies in Shakespeare's text:

"The first thing that happened is," says Bruneau, "when I was doing the cut, I found myself protecting absolutely every sexual or gender reference in the entire play, because they were all fascinating to me. Things like Friar Lawrence telling Romeo to stop being womanish. He asks: "Are you a man?" Which is just great, given the gender bending that we're doing. It's just a wonderful thing to find."

Bruneau says that past the unexpected and delightful collisions of Shakespeare's sense and her own sensibility, an all-woman production of *Romeo and Juliet* excavates the aggressive cut and thrust nature of youthful male sexuality written into the work.

"The Mercutio scenes that always hit the floor," she observes. "The Mercutio, Benvolio and Romeo scenes that are rarely seen in their entirety are full of dick jokes and sexual references... Talking about love, talking about babes. There's a ton of it, and I've never seen that in the play before. I didn't know that it was so rampant with this male testosterone, hot streets of Verona banter. The purity of the love relationship is offset by kind of wordplay."

In Taffety Punk's *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's rapier-sharp wordplay is yoked to a forthright physicality. Lorraine Ressegger, of Dog and Pony DC, has been called in to choreograph the play's swaggering and pugnacious fight scenes, which Bruneau sees as a centerpiece of the play.

"Most women, and especially women that are trained fighters, are jumping out of their skins to be able to use some of the skills that they have," says Bruneau. "And we never ever get to use them. So the fighting has been going really well."

The fight choreography in the show reflects the nature of the play's characters, says Ressegger. "Mercutio is quick, wild, sometimes rash," she says. "Tybalt is always poised, extremely well trained, precise, most don't want to engage him."

Ressegger also says that the dueling violence of the play spirals as the feuds unravel. "At the top of the show fighting is a natural occurrence. It's about dominance, humiliation, besting the other person. People get hurt, injured, tagged – but no one has been killed. In the beginning, the fighting is tense and people are on guard, but everyone knows you don't step over the line. The death of Mercutio causes a dramatic shift in attitudes."

The physicality of Taffety Punk's production is also underscored by the set, which is a playground of jungle gyms and swings that Bruneau says will call forth "climbing, holding, swinging and jumping" from the all-female cast.

"It's unharnessed energy and power that women have just been sitting on," she says. "They've just been sort of holding inside this passion for movement – and doing much more aggressive movement than usually we're allowed to do."