

Review: Birmingham Royal Ballet, Romeo and Juliet

By Su Carroll

Birmingham Royal Ballet, Romeo and Juliet, Theatre Royal Plymouth

Carlos Acosta's introduction as the new director of Birmingham Royal Ballet was overshadowed by theatres plunging into darkness during the pandemic. But with this sumptuous production of a classic ballet now in the spotlight, he is showing us how he means to go on, producing popular favourites alongside new and exciting work.

He is on safe ground with *Romeo and Juliet* and Prokofiev's magnificent score (resist the temptation to hum along to the bit they pinched as the theme for *The Apprentice*). And before I go any further I must acknowledge the Royal Ballet Sinfonia under conductor Philip Ellis. The orchestra, for reviewers, is sometimes a bit of an after-thought but they really set the tone (pardon the pun) with music that leapt from the pit and filled every inch of the Lyric auditorium. From forceful and urgent to heartbreakingly poignant, they were remarkable. You could sit there and let the sound wash over you. It was wonderful.

In the programme notes, Carlos Acosta says Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* is one of his favourite ballets. First created by MacMillan in 1965 for The Royal Ballet, it is packed with drama – heart-stopping swordfights and family showdowns – and the most moving of love scenes, tender and emotional. MacMillan worked on BRB's first production in 1992, six months before he died.

This *Romeo and Juliet* is wonderfully accessible for audiences. The story is clear and simple which makes it easy for younger people. It's exciting and uplifting. The sets look like massive masterpieces of Renaissance art – rich, dark colours, heavy brocades hanging from the ceiling, and voluptuous robes that looked like the wearer had just stepped out of a Holbein painting.

At the heart, though, are the two star-crossed lovers. Dressed in simple, pure white. It is an effective way of conveying how they feel. Gone are the crowded scenes of the town and the ballroom, gone are the dark hues. Here are two people alone and in love.

Miki Mizutani as Juliet and Yasuo Atsuji as Romeo were perfection, drawing the audience into their intimate world. I wasn't the only one who left with a tear in their eye.

Welcome back BRB. The company return in the spring with Carlos Acosta's new work – his take on *Don Quixote*. I can't wait.