

Director's Notes

[These notes were part of the program for the production. A more detailed discussion is also available.]

Over the generations that Shakespeare has graced the stage, certain of his plays have stood out or seemed more apt for certain times. Perhaps it is just that we are able to see in them what is uppermost in our own minds. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reminded us that plays, after all, are merely mirrors for us to look into and see ourselves. Tonight the cast and I want to share such a vision with you--an image of ourselves at the end of the twentieth century which we find very disturbing; partly because it hasn't changed in the four hundred years since Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. We looked and saw a thin veil of civilization covering what at bottom is very primitive behaviour. We saw a society in which children are caught in a web not of their own making and destroyed by it a world in which the sins of the fathers are very much visited upon the heads of the young. It could be any number of places in today's modern world but we will call it Verona.

In Verona, a young man named Romeo, as much in love with love as any young man has ever been, falls in love with Juliet, the daughter of his father's enemy. Juliet returns that love. Perhaps no one even knows what began this generations old quarrel. It ends, however, with the deaths of these lovers which, the Chorus tells us, is what it takes to bury their parents' strife. Hence the play does not end with the deaths of Romeo and Juliet on stage but with the reconciliation of their families.

In the early days of rehearsal, we examined this play closely in the context of our modern experience. The question we kept coming back to was very bleak: when does this stop? In a society which ritualizes violence, even celebrates it, how hard is it to break the pattern of habitual response? We talked of Ireland, of the Middle East, of deep hatreds and tribal warfare in this century of quarrels born of nothing but an "airy word" at home. We talked of love. And so, we share with you the story now in modern dress because we think it is a play for our time. What we've also discovered is how much it celebrates the sanctity of life, and the promise of love.

In closing, I would like to say a very special thank you to my designers

and production team and to everyone who has given so very much to this project.