DOESNT SO MUCH FREELY ADAPT THE PLAY AS KICK IN ITS FRONT DOOR, PEE ON ITS LIVING ROOM CARPET, EVICT ITS TENANTS, BURN THE JOINT DOWN AND HOLD A DRUG-CRAZED RAVE AMONG THE SMOULDERING IAMBS

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

WNCC

WOKING'S NEW CINEMA CLUB

[USA; 1996]; Cert.12; 120 minutes

CREDITS:

Directed by	Baz Luhrmann
Screenplay	Baz Luhrmann & Craig Pearce
Photography	Donald M McAlpine
Costume Design	Kym Barratt
Music	Nellee Hooper

CAST:

Romeo	Leonardo DiCaprio
Juliet	Claire Danes
Ted Montague	Brian Dennehy
Caroline Montague	Christina Pickles
Fulgenico Capulet	Paul Sorvino
Gloria Capulet	Diane Venora
Tybalt	John Leguizamo
Father Lawrence	Pete Postlethwaite
Mercutio	Harold Perrineau
Dave Paris	Paul Rudd
Balthasar	Jesse Bradford
Benvolio	Dash Mihok
Nurse	Miriam Margolyes
Captain Prince	Vondie Curtis-Hall
Apothecary	M Emmet Walsh
'Diva'	Des'ree

Australian director, Baz Luhrmann (Strictly Ballroom) has done something truly audacious – and like most acts of audacity, some will find it repellent. He has left Shakespeare's rich poetry intact. What he has trashed is the tight corsets that have literally and symbolically stifled Shakespeare's passion and fire.

The first ten minutes are aggressive and an affront to what an audience would normally expect from Shakespeare but allow yourself time to adjust to the MTV style editing, the striking sets and costumes, and you'll find it an exhilarating ride.

This brave movie opens with a lone TV set in the middle of a black screen. The TV crackles into life and Shakespeare's introduction is recited as a modern day news broadcast.

Welcome to Verona beach, a sexy, violent other-world, neither past or future, ruled by two rival families, the Montagues and the Capulets. This is a world where gun toting teens, sport Hawaiian shirts and beach front brawls are an everyday event.

The patriarchs Ted (Brian Dennehy)for the Montagues and Fulgencio (Paul Sorvino) for the Capulets are business rivals. Wealthy, selfish, ruthless and powerful, these parents share an enmity that has become the birthright of their offspring.

"Shakespeare has written us an extremely violent work. It's full of violence, sex, drugs, suicide — teenage suicide . . ."

Baz Luhrmann -
'Empire' (April '97)

Gun battles in a petrol station, helicopter pursuits through the metropolis of Verona beach, complete with car chases, squealing tyres and explosions, do not sound as though they could possibly be used in a Shakespeare production. The strange thing is it all works. Giving the play this modern twist makes for an understanding of the text and brings the feud to a whole new level. This version is accessible whilst still extracting all the complex levels of meaning from the play.

Leonardo Di Caprio (pre Titanic) portrays his Romeo as a lover not a fighter. He makes the role entirely his own bringing a sensitivity rarely seen before. Speaking the immortal words as if they were his own, this portrayal has touched the heart of millions. (not just the screaming teenagers) His instinctive grace and gut wrenching emotion bring another dimension to the play that so many of us have studied, but so few have really appreciated.

Can we confidently say that we understood the underlying themes of teenage suicide, sex, extreme violence and corruption ,when watching the corset and tights versions which so often abound.

We first meet Romeo on the beach sitting under the Sycamore Grove, now the proscenium arch of a derelict stage. This setting coupled with the dark, rolling sky reflects his inner turmoil. Something which follows him throughout the film.

Romeo's entourage comprise of his ever faithful man servant. His cousin, Benvolio (Dash Mihok) and the flamboyant Mercutio (Harold Perrineau). (who appears at the masked ball in silver spangly boob tube, mini skirt and high heels!!)

Claire Danes in *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*

Claire Danes captures Juliet's wide eyed innocence and iron determination beautifully. Bearing in mind that she was only 16 years old when she played the role she is possessed by an almost unsettling self awareness and composure. When we first meet her at the costume party, she is dressed as an angel which only serves to reinforce her apparent vulnerability. Yet she has the strength to arm herself and confront the Friar when faced with an arranged marriage to Paris (who bears a remarkable resemblance to JFK Jnr).

The supporting cast are truly outstanding and form the backbone of the film. As Friar Laurence, Pete Postlethwaite is the new age priest and confidant of these star crossed lovers. Recognising that this union could resolve age old rivalries, he champions their cause whilst ultimately orchestrating their fateful ending.

Miriam Margoyles, as Nurse, is a frumpy Latin mama. Her exaggerated accent brings a touch of comedy to this role. Instrumental in getting the lovers together, she stands alongside Friar Laurence in their pursuit of happiness.

Nominated for a variety of awards across the globe, the film is sadly underrated. It swept the board at the BAFTA's and received an Oscar nomination. Perhaps the establishment wasn't quite ready for such a bold presentation of the Bard.

William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet may be messy, occasionally incoherent and overwrought but it's also fervent and true to it's desires. We confess to a biased view as some of the score was used at Michelle's wedding in 1997. It is after all the greatest love story.

Michelle Smart & Suzi Robbins

WNCC Members' Reactions Summary
19th Season, 1998-99.

Title (No. of Reactions) Score>>3>>>>4>>>>5>>>>6>>>>7>>>>8>>>>9>>>>10

8= Road to Morocco (33).....7.52
5 Mrs. Brown (45).....7.93
14 Twelve Monkeys (23).....6.00
12= Letter From My Village (20).....6.50
7 Grosse Pointe Blank (38).....7.58
6 Ridicule (46).....7.78
2 It's A Wonderful Life (27).....8.41
8= Shooting Stars (27).....7.52
4 The African Queen (32).....8.06
11 The Boston Strangler (37).....7.24
10 The Wings Of The Dove (42).....7.29
12= The Blue Angel (28).....6.50
1. The Full Monty (36).....8.50
3. Le Grand Chemin.....8.07

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