



Sublime: Kevin Jackson and Madeleine Eastoe

Game-changing wild ride

Vanessa Keys

ARTS WRITER

SHAKESPEARE purists be warned: Graeme Murphy's *Romeo And Juliet* has nary a whiff of the traditional text.

In this production, commissioned by the Australian Ballet, gone is the crumbling city of Verona, in its place a universal, timeless space that does its darndest to represent every culture and religion — from Hinduism to Catholicism.

The star-crossed lovers are married by Japanese monks in a Buddhist temple, Mercutio and Tybalt are slain in a psychedelic Indian marketplace and the Capulets' ball — where Romeo and Juliet first meet — takes place in a gothic palace that's dripping with neon stalactites.

REVIEW

Romeo And Juliet

Sydney Opera

On paper the concept reads like a gaudy revue but Murphy's masterful storytelling prowess once again prevails, resulting in a game-changing ballet that leaves you begging for more.

Its eccentricity never overpowers the core love story in some scenes; it even helps to heighten Shakespeare's idealised, impassioned depiction of first love.

Madeleine Eastoe's Juliet is utterly resplendent, exuding a childlike beauty that teeters between giddy exuberance and heart-

wrenching agony. Her balcony pas de deux with Kevin Jackson, a strong yet playful Romeo, had the audience riveted. The pair make a sublime partnership.

Daniel Gaudiello's bawdy, mischievous Mercutio induced theatre-wide hysterics, while Amy Harris's flawless technique gave Lady Capulet a dangerous edge.

It's not a particularly pretty ballet and it certainly won't be to everyone's taste, but the commitment from all involved, from Murphy and the dancers to set designer Gerard Manion and costumer Akira Isogawa, gives us no choice but to be rid of our preconceptions.

A wild ride you won't forget in a hurry.

Opera Theatre, Sydney Opera House; until December 21, sold out, australianballet.com.au, sydneyoperahouse.com.au