

ROMEO AND JULIET, on motifs of Shakespeare
Choreography by Mark Morris
Presented by the Virginia Arts Festival
Chrysler Hall
May 8-10, 2009jFor tickets call: 1-800-982-2787

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

Let's begin with the end. You've probably heard by now about Mark Morris' "happy ending" ROMEO AND JULIET. It's danced to Prokofiev's 1935 lighter and more lilting score which did not please dictator Joseph Stalin and was moth balled. The composer was forced to redo the work with a serious, traditional intent. In 2006 musicologist Simon Morrison found the original in Profofiev's library in Moscow. The score ultimately fell into the hands of choreographer Mark Morris.

The lovers do not die at the end. Friar Laurence intervenes and stops Romeo from doing himself in. The couple then does a lovely pas de deux surrounded by heavenly stars. They are far away from the mean streets of Verona. As a result, it doesn't seem that different from the original ending. The musical is ethereal and lovely but not joyous. One feels the two lovers have gone to a place of peace. Don't expect to be shocked.

The ballet as done by Morris works best when he is dealing with the characters as opposed to what he does in the crowd scenes. The opening street rumble between the Montagues and the Capulets, the ball and the festival in the square seem muddled, messy and bogged down with repetition and padding. These too long scenes work best when the characters take over. When the stage is cleared of peasants and such, a whole different show begins to unfold.

Mercutio, played by an elfin young woman named Elisa Clark is humorous delight. Her death, as a result, is deeply moving. Tybalt is also danced neatly by a woman, Julie Worden. The ending of this scene, as their dead bodies are born aloft, is a majestically theatrical. From this point on, with one unfortunate exception, the dance pretty much follows the plot of the play. David Leventhal is a sensitive somewhat restrained Romeo, maybe even too much so. Megan Williams is a statuesque, sexy Juliet. In a typical Morris' conceit, she lifts Romeo a time or two. Over all they work well together. Near the end there is a very long scene where Paris brings

wedding gifts to Juliet's parents. It accomplishes little except to dilute the momentum of the action. It's simply more padding.

The Virginia Symphony Orchestra conducted by Stefan Asbury did a highly dramatic, bombastic, truly fine rendition of the score. Allen Moyer's box set of panels works well enough but restricts possible lighting effects by James F. Ingalls. While this production is not without its flaws, the magical Mark Morris nearly always manages in the nick of time to escape painting himself into a corner and usually comes up with ample amounts of brilliance and genius when needed. That's exactly what he does in this case.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.