

In a Name, Unleashed and Intense

By KEN JAWOROWSKI

In Shakespeare the big scenes stir your blood, yet it's the small moments that can steal your heart. That's never more apparent than in the balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet" at the Baruch Performing Arts Center, a co-production of the Acting Company and the Guthrie Theater.

As the two lovers part, Romeo (Sonny Valicenti) offers Juliet (Laura Esposito) one final, tiny finger-wave, a boyish and tender gesture that elicited a quiet "awww" from many in the audience. That delightful detail caps an exhilarating rendition of the famous scene.

"Romeo and Juliet" is, of course, a play of enormous, reckless passions — clans feud, friends quarrel, and lovers swoon. Here, those passions are met head-on, and with real skill: William Sturdivant, as Mercutio, quarrels with fearsome anger and seethes, frighteningly, as he meets his death.

As Juliet, Ms. Esposito is never less than appealing, while Mr. Valicenti's Romeo is suitably hasty and rash. And Chris Thorn, as Lord Capulet, is particularly rousing when, furious at his defiant daughter, he seeks to force her into an arranged marriage.

"Romeo and Juliet" continues through Saturday at the Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Avenue, at 25th Street; (646) 312-4085



"Romeo and Juliet": Laura Esposito and Sonny Valicenti star at the Baruch Performing Arts Center. Photo Michal Daniel.

Despite occasional missteps, the language is ably handled here. Mr. Sturdivant and Mr. Thorn are most impressive, pairing anger with equal measures of ease. And Ms. Esposito and Mr. Valicenti are well matched — together they deliver more than enough power to drive this dependable production, directed by Penny Metropulos. If the ensemble sometimes overlooks a chance for subtlety, it can be tough to fault them. After all, young lovers aren't known for their restraint.