

Theatre

Romeo And Juliet

Lyric Hammersmith

Lyn Gardner

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MICHAEL BOGDANOV'S last production of *Romeo And Juliet* located the play in the sun, sex and chianti playgrounds of the Eurotrash brat pack complete with flash sports car. Now, for the English Shakespeare Company he takes a poor theatre approach and comes up with a far richer result.

The company are putting on a play. The play is *Romeo And Juliet*. The resources are minimal: a table to serve as the balcony, a ladder for the orchard wall, a simple bed. Against black curtains, dressed in a raggle-taggle of costumes — the oldies in Edwardian cast-offs, the youngsters in underwear, braces and leathers — the cast of 11, many doubling parts, tell the story with simple, piercing clarity.

Bogdanov is not always the subtlest of directors and there are moments in this production when it seems pitched too obviously at the GCSE crowd. He also can't resist being flash — the ending with the lovers transformed into gold-sheathed statues, and the survivors hounded by the tabloid press, is lifted directly from his previous production and is absurdly out of place here.

But there are also some delightful touches, which make you see the play through fresh eyes. The fight

between Tybalt and an umbrella-brandishing Mercutio beginning as a lark and turning suddenly to tragedy. Or there is Romeo, ever so slightly rearranging his clothes before approaching Juliet for the first time. Paris, a bit of a nerd, going into a tizzy at the mention of "fresh female buds".

Rarely has the gulf between the younger and older generation been so clearly charted and rarely has there been such a pair of picture book lovers as Joe Dixon and Joanna Roth's *Romeo and Juliet*.