

# Mp3 Cast Recording - The People Vs Friar Laurence, The Man Who Killed Romeo And Juliet

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A mixed bag of musical theatre styles. Think Sondheim meets Meinken, drop acid with Jerry Herman and beat up Andrew L. Webber. Hillarious and inventive lyrics on top of sing-able and memorable melodies. 18 MP3 Songs EASY LISTENING: Musicals/Broadway, EASY LISTENING: Cabaret Details: To retell the most famous love story of all time, The People vs. Friar Laurence, the Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet, uses a simple formula: Murder + Teenage Angst + Political Intrigue + a Crisis of Faith = Musical Comedy. Part whodunnit, part Second City style satire, this show delivers a resounding comic punch. If you want to see Romeo Juliet, it's probably playing at high school near you. If you want to see a musical, Cameron MacIntosh will take your money. But if you want to see Romeo Juliet, hear great music, and laugh your ass off, see The People vs. Friar Laurence, the Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet. Ron West helms this fantastic show. Virtually Second City royalty, Ron recently won Chicago's prestigious Jeff Award for directing Curious George Goes to War at the Second City ETC. In Amsterdam, he shepherded the cast of Boom Chicago in Europe, We Created a Monster. In LA, when he wasn't playing his recurring role on Third Rock From the Sun, or serving as a consultant to Whose Line Is It, Anyway? Ron has directed several projects for L.A. Theatreworks and The Open Fist Theatre Company. Phil Swann is a staff songwriter and producer for DreamWorks SKG. Most recently you heard two Swann songs on MCA recording artist Lee Ann Womack's critically acclaimed holiday album entitled, "A Season For Romance". Also look for another Swann composition to appear on Lee Greenwood's up-coming release, "Stronger Than Time". Mr. Swann currently sits on the board of directors of The Songwriters guild of America.

RECENT CHICAGO REVIEWS COPLEY NEWS SERVICE - 5/21/04 The People vs. Friar Laurence, The Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet Review by Dan Zeff The new production at the Upstairs Theatre at the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre is called "The Second City's Romeo and Juliet Musical: The People Vs. Friar Laurence, the Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet." That's a pretty ponderous title for what is certainly the funniest new show of the season. What kind of evening is this "Romeo and Juliet"? Conjure up Shakespeare meeting Second City with a dash of Stan Freberg for garnish. Remain faithful to the

storyline of "Romeo and Juliet" but insert Barney Fyfe as a town constable and transfer the wedding scene of the young lovers to an outtake of "Our Town." The show never lets up on the facetious factor, like injecting references to Paris Hilton and former governor Ryan. Spectators will detect quotes or references to virtually every play in the Shakespeare canon. Topping off the evening is a musical score as clever as you'll hear this side of Stephen Sondheim. The show is built on the conceit that Friar Laurence is accused of responsibility for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet and is put on trial by the Prince of Verona. The trial is an excuse for an unending cascade of hilarious songs, name-droppings, sight gags, and running jokes. The friar turns out to be a randy old gentleman, though not as lecherous as Juliet's father, Lord Capulet. There is some gender swapping, a delicious flow of ribald humor, and a visit from God at the end of the show. Co-authors Ron West and Phil Swann must have worn out a rhyming dictionary coming up with the nonstop ingenious lyrics for the show's vast number of songs. The two stop at nothing to squeeze in one more giggle into the proceedings and yet the show never turns silly, self-congratulatory, or self-indulgent in its comedy. It may be a touch too long, but I'd hate to be responsible for cutting even one delectable scene or song from the evening. This "Romeo and Juliet" is not only great comedy, its pretty good Shakespeare. West and Swann follow the original tragedy closely, at least in narrative, and inject all kinds of in jokes that will delight Shakespeare fans. One number in particular stands out for its ingenuity. Romeo and Juliet sing a duet called "We're the Ones Who Started It All," in which they rhapsodize about all the famous romantic couples in history who got their start from these star-crossed lovers, down to Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore. For two hours, the level of energy and invention never flags. That's a tribute to West and Swann, and the versatile and talented cast, who clearly have bought into the show wholeheartedly and are having the time of their lives. Romeo is played by Keegan-Michael Key, the backbone of those brilliant Second City E.T.C. revues of recent seasons. Key should lower the decibel count a bit, possibly the only blemish in the ensemble performance. Nicole Parker's Juliet is very much a young woman of today, and none of this nonsense about Daddy picking her future husband. Bruce Green resembles a gnome out of "The Lord of the Rings" as the salty Friar Laurence. Ron West does double duty as co-author and as Lord Capulet, a man staking a claim to every serving wench in sight. David Castellani makes a wonderful blowhard Mercutio. Brian Gallivan is a hoot as the slow-witted servant Gregory. Rick Hall is a splendidly self involved Paris. Lauren Bishop takes on a bunch of roles, including the servant girls who put themselves at Lord Capulet's service. Roberta Duchak

plays Lady Capulet like a character out of "Dallas" or "Peyton Place." The music accompaniment is provided by pianist Lisa McQueen, who was thoroughly enjoying herself playing in one corner of the stage. The shows functional and often funny physical look is provided by Heather Graff and Richard Peterson (sets and lighting) and Alison Siple (costumes). Ron West completes his personal trifecta in the show as director as well as co-author and co-star. This "Romeo and Juliet" put me in mind of another Shakespeare spoof called "Bombitty of Errors," which had a lengthy Off-Broadway run and two successful visits to Chicago. That show was good, but this one is better. The show gets a rating of four stars.

Wherefore art thou, Romeo? To make us laugh at Navy Pier May 21, 2004 BY MARY HOULIHAN  
Chicago Sun-Times Staff Reporter Chicago Shakespeare Theater, known for its smart, respectful productions of the Bard's work, has in past summers shown a sense of humor by using its upstairs theater for stagings of the "The Bomb-itty of Errors" and Second City's "Hamlet! The Musical." Now add to this list another hilarious romp through Shakespeare's world that takes a decidedly wacky look at the story of those infamous star-crossed lovers. The unwieldy title of this hysterical spoof -- "The Second City's Romeo and Juliet Musical: The People vs. Friar Laurence, the Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet" -- says it all. Yes, a hapless Friar Laurence, who dispensed the deadly potions, is on the hot seat as he tries to explain his role in the demise of Romeo and Juliet. Locked in a cell with Prince Escalus, he puts his creative spin on the story as the nine-member cast acts out his winding tale. As it turns out, even in 16th century Verona, giving a coma-inducing drug to a 14-year-old is not a wise move. Creators Ron West and Phil Swann vigorously attack the elements of Shakespeare's story, loosing the Bard's words and adding a blizzard of laugh-inducing moments that ramp up the original story line. This is a land of witty songs, wacky characterizations and silly modern references that fit together like warped pieces of a very old puzzle. Except for a drawn-out ending that could use some tightening, nothing was out of place. In the role of Juliet, Nicole Parker, a regular on Fox's "MADtv," is a delight to watch. A subtle comedian of bottomless talent with a Broadway-quality voice, her grasp of comic timing is impeccable. She inhabits each song with a willful comedic power that sparkles and shines. The gangly Keegan-Michael Key, also a member of the "MADtv" cast, is a sad-sack Romeo pining over a lost love. He comes to life with a vengeance when he spots Juliet. This is a Romeo who puzzles over his Shakespeare-speaking friend Mercutio and admits, "I get the Cliffs Notes. I do what I can." With the cast dressed in modern clothes, this "Romeo and Juliet" may look like a typical Second City skit, but it is much more. As is to be expected,

there is very little of the real Shakespeare here -- maybe four or five lines from the original play. Instead, West and Swann have shrouded the tale with witty story devices and a bright cloak of catchy songs (piano accompaniment is provided by Lisa McQueen) that add to the ribald humor while moving the story along in the best traditions of musical theater. Parker and Key are marvelous in their duets together. In "We're the Ones Who Started It All," they provide a witty list of lovers who took inspiration from their story. There are Kate and Leo, Demi and Ashton, Frodo and Sam, and Tracy and Hepburn, who "send royalty checks." The death scene is transformed with the vaudeville-like number "Thank You for Dying First," which the couple perform with a wicked relish. The modern references, from Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" to Norm on "Cheers" and Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," can be a bit much, but most fit in easily here. The best is the guard at the Capulet's house, an easily duped Barney Fife look-alike. Luckily, the Prince's tired Columbo imitation withers under the quizzical eye of Friar Laurence's "Who are you?" The solid cast performs a whirlwind of roles with the greatest of ease. All have training in various improv groups, and it shows. Bruce Green, who also doubles as Juliet's randy nurse, is impishly sly and slippery as Friar Laurence. Joining him are Ron West as a wiry Lord Capulet, Roberta Duchak as an unsympathetic Lady Capulet, David Castellani as a pompous Mercutio, Rick Hall as the inquisitive Prince, Brian Gallivan as an effeminate Tybalt, and Lauren Bishop in a handful of chameleonlike supporting roles. Thanks to a series of "very good imaginary masks," she supplies the musical's twisted ending with a neat surprise.

critics' reviews  
From the Chicago Tribune  
Laughs come thick and fast in Shakespeare parody  
By Chris Jones  
Tribune arts reporter  
Even the Day-Glo imaginations of Franco Zeffirelli and Baz Luhrmann couldn't come up with a musical number wherein Romeo sings to his recently expired ladylove the heartfelt ditty "Thank You for Dying First." But for Ron West, the author and director of Second City's whip-smart, intensely amusing, PG-13 summer "Romeo and Juliet" parody on Navy Pier, that's an obvious emotion for a musical Montague - a.k.a. Keegan-Michael Key - with an eye on his own historical import. Not that Juliet gets forgotten. In the hands of "MADtv's" Nicole Parker, this is the kind of teenager who doesn't hesitate to extract a post-mortem confession from Romeo that he was a lousy kisser all along. There are so many ways that an R+J parody could go wrong, one gets dizzy even contemplating them. Any regular theatergoer has seen stacks of productions that function quite nicely as parodies, even if they didn't appreciate their own hilarity. But thanks to a proudly nebbish directorial sense, oodles of clever material and a truly remarkably impressive ability to make fresh satiric hay out of the most

hackneyed iconography in all of dramatic literature, West's show somehow avoids every pothole. In short, it's a blast. "We're the ones who started it all," warbles Parker's post-modern Juliet, implying that Doris and Rock, Demi and Ashton, Frodo and Sam, all should make their royalty checks payable to Capulet and send them post-haste to Verona. "We're like Paris Hilton and five guys I know personally," adds her lovelorn mate. Despite the unwieldy title, "The People Vs. Friar Laurence: The Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet," this summer effort co-produced by Chicago Shakespeare and the sketch-comedy meisters from Wells Street is a good notch better than "Hamlet the Musical," which did nicely in this slot a couple of years ago. "The People vs. Friar Laurence" works so well because it's wisely disinclined ever to slip into silliness or campy. West is too much of a comic egghead for that. With only the odd sinful exception from an over-the-top minor player, West and his crew play the thing with such severe faces, the laughs come thick and fast. Key has his usual comic flourishes - although he could dial things down a little - and there's also a consistently funny turn from Bruce Green as a Friar Laurence who looks and acts like he was raised by the squirrels of Sherwood Forest. But this show belongs to the fabulous Parker, who has not worked much before in Chicago. A prodigious comic talent with a stellar set of vocal pipes, she twists her way deliciously around an original mock-Broadway score from the Los Angeles-based Phil Swann that's good enough to make you think of Alan Menken or Marc Shaiman's work on "Hairspray." Luckily, Chicago musical-theater veteran Roberta Duchak is there to send herself up splendidly as a Lady Cap trapped like a gilded rat. West works in everything from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to Kevin Bacon via Susan Lucci and tiramisu. Swann gives the lovers a ballad titled "Why Don't We Use Each Other Tonight?," which sets just the right tone. At two hours plus, it probably all goes on a bit long. And the deus ex machina ending is a whimper more than a comic bang. West, clearly, was having altogether too much fun to properly tear himself away. The Second City's Romeo and Juliet Musical BACKSTAGE By Faye Geahos One would expect to laugh during a production presented by The Second City. And, one would expect to see quality drama during a production presented by The Chicago Shakespeare Theater. What, then, should one expect from a performance that is presented by both The Second City and The Chicago Shakespeare Theater? Here's a hint, the title is "The Second City's Romeo and Juliet Musical: The People vs. Friar Laurence, The Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet," and the outcome is a hilarious and ingenious take on Shakespeare's classic tragedy. Writer, director and actor Ron West and musical director Phil Swann are gourmet comic chefs. They gathered facts from Shakespeare's play, mixed in

some seedy musical numbers, threw in some talented actors, and served up a magnificent show with a few tasty twists. West plays the role of Lord Capulet and leads the ensemble through his masterful comic creation. Keegan-Michael Key in the role of Romeo emerges as the show's star by weaving his well-timed lines in and out of dialogues and songs. Key is joined as the star by his beloved Juliet, played by Nicole Parker, and by Lauren Bishop (Benvolio and Friar John), David Castellani (Lord Montague and Mercutio), Roberta Duchak (Lady Capulet), Brian Gallivan (Tybalt and Gregory), Bruce Green (Friar Laurence), and Rick Hall (Prince Escalus and Paris). In short, the entire cast is the star. Modern spices, including an appearance by Barney Fife and an Independence Day party in Verona, add flavor to the play, and Shakespeare's original story remains in tact -- basically. Even God Almighty (who strangely resembles Prince Escalus) would come down from Heaven to celebrate "The Second City's Romeo and Juliet Musical: The People vs. Friar Laurence, The Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet."

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