

TO LAUGH OR NOT TO LAUGH

Events Center to host reading of 'Romona and Joel'

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Take Shakespeare's tragedy "Romeo and Juliet," move it from Verona to Victor and turn it into a comedy, and you have August Mergelman's "Romona and Joel."

A dramatic reading of the Cañon City playwright's newest script will be presented Saturday at the Annex Events Center, 507 Main St. The reading starts at 7 p.m. and is followed by a 1980s Dance Party at 9 p.m. Admission is \$5.

"It's kind of a corny play," Mergelman said.

The location and tone of the play are not the only changes — gender roles have also been switched.

In Mergelman's version, Romeo becomes Romona, portrayed by Carissa Remillard, and Juliet becomes Joel, portrayed by Joel Hamilton. Joel's family throws the party and wants him to marry Miss Paris, played by Cheri Hinz; Ramona, Herman (Mercutio), played by Jayson Carpenter, and Ben (Benvolio), played by Kiel Adams, crash the party; Ramona visits Joel in the famous balcony scene which takes place in the barn; and it is Ramona who is banished for the crime of gambling (rather than murder).

Set in the Old West, the feud between the Cabots and the Montgomerys is based on a rabbit hunt years prior between the fathers — played by Mark Hamilton and Tony Schenk. The young lovers meet and continue their relationship under unobservant eye of Tita, Joel's nurse portrayed by Juliana Aragon-Fatula, who acts as their chaperone.

"Tita has all the funny lines," Mergelson said.

Eventually, Ramona lies about making a bet with Herman to protect Miss Paris from being hung as a horse thief. Because gambling has been outlawed by the Victor Sheriff, Ramona is banished to her uncle's home in Florence.

Drama ensues and eventually both end up in a drug-induced sleep. Because this has become a comedy, the ending is not nearly as sad as the Bard's.

"People should come to see Shakespeare in a new light and to see a play in a different type of poetry," Mergelman said. "The whole thing does rhyme the whole way through."

Because this is reader's theater, action on stage is limited and even most costuming is left up to the audience's imagination.

"I'd like to get someone interested in producing it and publishing it," Mergelman said.

This is the second Shakespeare play Mergelman has rewritten to take place in Old West Colorado. He wrote "A Midsummer's Night Western" in the summer of 2006. This play was featured in a reading at the third Playwright's Showcase of the Western Region in spring 2007 and is currently being produced at Red Rocks Community College.

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