

# In a riff on Shakespeare, *Fat Juliet* takes her story back

Stevey Hunter's play playing with *Romeo and Juliet* "won't change the world" but it just might change yours.

By [Morgan Mullin](#)



*Daniel Wittnebel*

The cast and crew of *Fat Juliet* during rehearsals.

It might seem trite to say Eastern Front Theatre and Shakespeare by The Sea's *Fat Juliet* is an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* unlike any you've ever seen—yes, even counting the dreamy Leonardo DiCaprio-Claire Danes redux from 1996. But what if I was to tell you that this spin on Shakespeare's star-crossed story, debuting at Alderney Landing from Oct 22-31, is more fun and relatable than any you've ever heard of?

“The very first moments of the play, we see Juliet, in a bathing suit, considering herself in a mirror—perhaps not so favourably. And then, a little bit conspiratorially, she announces to the audience: ‘No one can love you if you're fat, you know. My mother told me that.’” Kat McCormack, the show’s director, says, leaning over the table at rehearsal for emphasis. “That, to me, is a little bit of the thesis: Do we actually have these thoughts about ourselves, or is this something that someone has put in my own mind?”

The story—written and starring playwright Stevey Hunter—reframes the story from Juliet’s perspective, smuggling themes of self-love and body positivity into the historical play.

“I never saw myself as Juliet, until I actually was like, ‘*Oh, unless she was fat, because when I was 16, I was fat*’—and I’ve never seen that. Why haven’t I seen that? Why don’t we see fat people falling in love? Because fat people fall in love all the time,” Hunter says, seated near McCormack. “So then it just turned into: Okay, well let’s see this timeless love story, but this time it’s from the perspective of what it would have been like for me, as a fat 16-year-old.”

That means the stage at Alderney Landing is being constructed to look like a Billie Eilish tour, with a 20-foot high four-poster bed and big sleepover vibes. Body-positive illustrations by Coast contributor Mollie Cronin of Art Brat Comics round out the scene. “The Shakespeare language kind of comes out like regular conversation,” Nathan Simmons, the actor who plays Tybalt, adds, while Lou Campbell (playing Angel) nods next to him. Another departure? “It’s going to totally smash everybody’s idea of who Romeo is and totally dethrone Leonardo DiCaprio,” says Peter Sarty, who’ll be playing the heartthrob. “He’s a bit of a fuckboy!”

“I know this play won’t change the world,” adds Hunter. “But it might change someone’s world.”

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# A SASSY, SWEET-16, SHAKESPEAREAN ROMP (with a message)

October 27, 2021

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*Playwright Stevey Hunter, Lou Campbell and Nathan Simmons in Fat Juliet, an Eastern Front Theatre/Shakespeare by the Sea co-production at Alderney Landing Theatre; sold-out but new seats have been made available; closes Oct. 31. (Daniel Wittnebel)*

Stevey Hunter's Fat Juliet is a rollicking, playful twist on Romeo and Juliet full of rapidly-changing visual images and pop songs and dance.

Already sold out, a few more seats have been added for this co-production by Eastern Front Theatre and Shakespeare by the Sea at Alderney Landing Theatre, Dartmouth, until Oct. 31. (Box office is 902-461-8401).

This 75-minute show would be perfect for teens in its celebration of self-love and self-acceptance whatever one's parents or peers or inner voices may say. The multi-media experience with its comical swirl of rapid-fire imagery in cartoons, projections and photographs is as visually entertaining as TikTok.

The teen energy and angst is wonderfully real in Juliet's fluffy, pink bedroom defined by a giant four-poster bed with a backdrop of a window with ever-changing light. Here Juliet, played by writer Stevey Hunter, is just turning 16 and longing for her first kiss. For her entire life her mother has told her she is too fat and has devalued her to the point of disguising her birthday party as the annual Capulet pool party.

Hunter's Juliet is feisty, feminine and highly convincing as a frustrated 16-year-old tossing about in her sugary, princess dress and texting on her bejeweled iPhone. Shakespeare's nurse has become Angel (Lou Campbell), a loving individual and good friend no longer employed by the Capulets. Nathan Simmons is Juliet's cousin Tybalt, a bouncy, lovable youth.

Director Kat McCormack and her actors capture all the excitement and purity of young love in Shakespeare's words; the hybrid of 2021 and 1597 language works well. The "It was the nightingale, and not the lark" speech is as achingly lovely as always.

Hunter's version has a Paperbag Princess twist and thankfully removes the tragic deaths from the original. Shakespeare's tragic, life-altering sword fight between Romeo and Tybalt is a hilarious, slow-motion pillow fight.

*Peter Sarty and Nathan Simmons in Fat Juliet. (Daniel Wittnebel)*

This show has a complex and amazing design in timing, music and visual technology. On the creative team are: scenic designer Ell Zagar; costume designer Everette Fournier whose colourful looks fit Zagar's storybook set; lighting designer Jessica Lewis; composer and sound designer Jackson Fairfax-Perry of the Indie-Pop band Hillsburn; video and projection designer Christian Ludwig Hansen; illustrator Mollie Cronin (@art.brat.comics), whose charming and comic cartoons of different female bodies are projected above Juliet; choreographer Zomi Tombing and violinist Rosanna Burrill with additional sound by Peter Sarty.

Fat Juliet recalls Robert Munsch's children's stories with heroines and scenarios that turn expectations on their head in a funny, boisterous and meaningful way. Let's hope this show can be remounted. Let's hope for more plays from Hunter, a smart writer with a good eye for comedy and an honesty in speaking truths.



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## Tourist

By Probably Theatre Collective

Lou Campbell is my kind of weird. Their solo show, *Tourist*, is a strange and delightful trek through a variety of dating profile types that we all can recognize with a knowing chuckle. They are presented as absurd caricatures that we can laugh at, but also (gasp!) may even see ourselves in. (I am more of a snail, myself. What about you?) But this is not just a satire about the dating world; it is also about how we perform our identities for each other, and for ourselves. Campbell's performance is hilarious, and the writing is absurd and astute. *Tourist* is a short and sweet offering from an artist with a distinct but relatable point of view. - ML

Neptune Imperial Studio

1589 Argyle Street

PYWY

Friday, August 30th at 5:00 PM

Sunday, September 1st at 9:30 PM

Monday, September 2nd at 6:15 PM

Wednesday, September 4th at 10:15 PM

Thursday, September 5th at 6:45 PM

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Whether we are on Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat or Tinder, most of us adopt aspects of different personas when we present ourselves online. Lou Campbell's piece ***Tourist*** is an interesting exploration of our many representations of self and asks, "what if you could date yourself?" They perform an array of their very disparate personas for us, from an earnest supply teacher, to a zen raw vegan yogi, to a manic pixie dream girl. With the use of projected video Campbell is also able to interact with another version of self, a SnapChat filtered inner critic who worries about what the audience will think. In the end a snail emerges, they are neither female nor male, or perhaps they are both. This multiplicity in the snail connects nicely to the reality that Campbell may not be wholly any one of these characters, but perhaps they are also all of them. Campbell is an engaging performer, their characters come fully to life with just the switch of one costume piece, and the audience is left considering how we choose the constructions of ourselves, in the way we behave on and off the Internet, and we may walk away feeling inspired by the snail.

**Tourist** plays at **Neptune Imperial Studio 1589 Argyle Street** at the following times: September 2nd at 6:15PM; September 4th at 10:15PM and September 5th at 6:45PM.

**The Halifax Fringe runs until September 8th, 2019. Schedules and tickets are available for all the shows [HERE](#), at the venue of the show 30 minutes before it begins (cash or credit), or at the Fringe Hub at Neptune Theatre (1589 Argyle Street) from 10:00am-10:00pm daily during the festival.**

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