

Setting the Scene for Rachel and Juliet

Lynn Redgrave talks with Amy Arden about Rachel and Juliet, her deeply personal odyssey into the life of her late mother Rachel Kempson, a promising Shakespearean actress whose search for Romeo lasted her entire life. Redgrave performs her one-woman show at Folger Theatre April 10–12.

Tell us about Rachel Kempson.

She was the most romantic person I knew. She was always full of romance. She was in love with this role [Juliet] until the end of her life. It was a kind of proof that the spirit can stay young.

One of the themes of Rachel and Juliet is your mother's "search for Romeo."

What does that mean?

She fell in love with him [my father Michael Redgrave] almost immediately. She fell in love with his picture outside the theater, in fact. My mother was actually the one who proposed. He asked her to move in with him, and for my mother, that wouldn't do at all, so she said, 'Oh darling, why don't we get married?'

My father, you can call him bisexual or you can call him gay, but he couldn't be her Romeo. She was so in love with him. And in his way, he was in love with her. But he had this longing in his nature for something else. And there was desperate disappointment in that. And then encouraged by him, I think because he felt so guilty, she began to have various affairs.

In drawing so personally on your own life as a writer, what's it like to then "bare all" performing these plays?

When I did *Shakespeare for my Father*, I looked at the scenes where I was playing my father or myself as opportunities, joyful opportunities, to be with my father, who was long dead. When I'm playing my mother, I'm meeting my mother. It's a very odd feeling, it's a wonderful feeling. I don't feel like, 'Oh, I'm going to bare my soul.' And I'm not saying anything that they haven't said themselves.



Anabel Clark

The Redgrave family has a wonderful theatrical legacy. How has this inspired your own career?

My mother was very supportive when I decided I wanted to be an actress. She gave me this wonderful and rather dramatic advice, 'How much do you want to be an actress? Supposing your father and I said we wouldn't support you, would you go and throw yourself off the bridge into the Avon?' Now the Avon isn't really deep around Stratford [laughs] and I'd stand on the bridge and think, 'Now, if I couldn't be an actress, would I really want to jump off the bridge?' And I decided that I did feel that strongly about it. And could I be without it? No, I could not. There's never been a time when I haven't felt like that.

Did you ever want to play Juliet?

In *Shakespeare for my Father*, I did play Juliet in the scene with the Nurse. And just for good measure, I'm including that in this [*Rachel and Juliet*]. And if they think I'm too tall, too old, or whatever, well [laughs], I'm doing it.

Rachel Kempson
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Sir Cecil Beaton