



# Romeo & Her Sister

by Jillian Blevins

Directed by Stephen Buhler

## Cast:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Francoise Traxler

SUSAN CUSHMAN: Rachel Gar-El

SALLIE MERCER: Kwakiutl Dreher  
Maribel Cruz

MATILDA HAYS: Katy Morehouse

EDWIN FORREST: Scott Shomaker

BENJAMIN WEBSTER: John Burkhart

ELEANORA: Maribel Cruz  
Megan Fangmeyer



MISS CUSHMAN AND MISS SUSAN CUSHMAN AS ROMEO AND JULIET.

***Romeo & Her Sister* is presented by special arrangement with the playwright.**

## Synopsis:

In 1845, Charlotte Cushman is the most famous American actress in the world, well-known for playing men's roles in the plays of Shakespeare. Despite her international fame, she harbors a secret, hidden in plain sight: she loves women. Celebrated in her own country, she has brought her sister Susan to London to play Juliet to her Romeo. Old resentments between the sisters surface as Charlotte--along with Sallie, her dresser and closest confidant--struggles to balance her exploding career, her tumultuous relationship with writer Matilda Hays, and her affair with another young woman, all while keeping her personal life hidden from her fans, her sister, and her bitter rival, Edwin Forrest. Will the play be a success or a flop? Will Charlotte and Susan put aside their differences and come together in time for the curtain to rise? Will Forrest uncover Charlotte's secret and use it to ruin her career? And can Charlotte allow anyone close enough to know the real her?

## About the Playwright:

Jillian Blevins is a playwright and theatre artist whose short plays have been performed in Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, New Haven CT, Providence RI, Portland ME, and New York City. In 2020/21, she conceived and produced 'Digital Dionysia', a six-week online new works festival which featured her plays 'Izzy at Zoom Therapy' and 'Be The Bacchae' along with 24 other new plays from around the globe. In the summer of 2023, her one-act 'The Bed Trick' was a participating play in Valdez Alaska's Last Frontier Theatre Conference, and her 10-minute Jewish sci-fi comedy 'Space Laser, in Space!' was a finalist at the Samuel French Off Off Broadway New Play Festival. Her queer historical dramedy, 'Romeo & Her Sister' will premiere in June 2024 at the New Hampshire Theatre Project, closing their season and in celebration of Pride Month. Proud member of the Dramatists Guild.

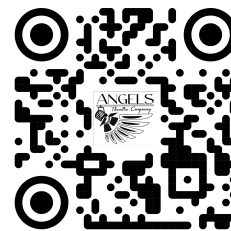


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## Dramaturgical Notes:

I confess to being a theatre history nerd. And, while this era is not my particular era of scholarly interest, I know the history of the American theatre in the nineteenth century was dominated by personality and intrigue – an uncomfortable blend of high art and tabloid sensationalism. Thus, *Romeo & Her Sister* provides its own unique blend of nineteenth century historical drama and a contemporary exploration of sisterhood, queerness, and theatrical presentation. Blevins brings the period to life with a modern sensibility and a knack for dialogue that pays tribute to the nineteenth century stage, while remaining informative, relevant, and real in the contemporary theatre.



Salon Reading Series

History, however, is not the only, or even the primary reason to be enchanted by *Romeo & Her Sister*. Blevins artfully and astutely uses the history to form a backdrop for a more meaningful conversation about family, scandal, and the changing artistry of the American stage. And, in the process, she resurrects one of the great actors and personalities of the American stage. Cushman's artistry was celebrated during her lifetime, but theatre history tends to overemphasize her gender-bending and queerness rather than her abilities on the stage. Blevins recaptures this aspect of "Our Charlotte" and uses her history, and famous rivalry with Edwin Forrest, to create a human story that moves beyond the hyperbole of her celebrity. For, at its core, *Romeo & Her Sister* is an exploration of sisterhood, the difficulty of coming home, and the struggle to balance the public and the private self. Blevins delivers a moving historical portrait of a woman (or women) who are caught in the business of living life and must identify and heal the bonds that connect them.

Behind this family exploration is a fascinating, if underdeveloped, discussion of honesty in representation. Directed by Sallie, as she works with Susan to find the truth behind Juliet, this examination of the nature of love and its representation on stage is a signal to a later American obsession with emotional honesty in the theatre. That this discussion originates with Sallie, a free black woman in Charlotte's employ, is a neat theatrical sleight of hand. But Blevins counters this move with one of the most beautiful passages of the play where Sallie describes reading the plays of Shakespeare as a child, and being disappointed that the productions (including Charlotte's own), failed to live up to her expectations. This idea, set against the historical rivalry between Cushman and Forrest is Blevins at her best; subverting the focus of the main plot line to create a modern agency in Sallie and "forecast" the direction of theatre history in America.

*Romeo & Her Sister* is an achievement. Well-crafted and internally complex, the play provides an intimate portrait of three women struggling to connect with one another amidst a society bent on challenging their position. And, while each succeeds, the story does not feel forced—and it remains historically accurate. It is a rare example of a work that uses its history to provide a necessary lens, bringing our modern condition into focus. Charlotte, Sallie, and Susan each make discoveries and decisions that feel very relevant to our contemporary world. And their story is one that can enrich us all.

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Thank you for your contribution!**



**Special Thanks to Turbine Flats and Eastmont Living for hosting the Salon Reading Series; thanks to the Angels Theatre Company Board of Directors, Stephen Buhler, Jillian Blevins, and the cast of *Romeo & Her Sister* for their work.**



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**for *Old Bat* by Ellen Struve!**