

CODE 40: VERONA

By Dwayne Yancey

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Code 40: Verona

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DEDICATION

*For Trina, Rain and Keith,
who helped make this work possible.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

“Code 40: Verona” begins at the ending of Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” but envisions a modern twist – it’s a police drama, in which incompetence and political pressure rule the day. Balthasar and Friar Lawrence still flee the bloody scene in the Capulet family tomb and are apprehended by church security guards. But this time, security calls the police who proceed to investigate the crime. The police release the friar because they can’t imagine how he would be involved and instead try to pin the crime on Balthasar. The mayor, Escalus, is under political pressure to crack down on gang violence; the public defender’s office is understaffed and can’t deal with such a complex case; and budget cuts force the medical examiner’s office to lay off the lab assistant whose toxicology work might unravel the mystery. Meanwhile, TV crews hound everyone connected with the case. In the end, the prosecutor, faced with evidentiary problems but eager to secure a conviction in a high-profile case, offers Balthasar a plea bargain. Does he accept?

Performance Time: 35 to 40 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(6 m, 2 w, 14 flexible, extras)

Male

POLICE OFFICER 1: Night patrolman who responds to the churchyard crime scene.

POLICE CHIEF: The chief law enforcement figure in Verona.

POLICE INVESTIGATOR: In charge of investigating the deaths.

PRINCE ESCALUS: Mayor of Verona who is up for re-election.

BALTHASAR: Friend of Romeo, mistakenly charged with murder.

POLICE OFFICER 2: Responds to crime scene.

Female

PARALEGAL: Assistant to the public defender of Verona.

LAB ASSISTANT: A bright, eager assistant to the medical examiner who figures out what really happened.

Flexible

WATCHMAN: Security guard at the church.

TV REPORTER 1: First reporter on the scene of the murder.

TV REPORTER 2: Second reporter on the scene of the murder.

AIDE TO MAYOR: Assistant to the mayor.

JAIL GUARD: Guards the prisoner Balthasar.

PROPERTY ROOM CLERK: In charge of evidence.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: Overworked lawyer who is appointed to defend Balthasar.

PROSECUTOR: Trying to convict Balthasar.

BALIFF: Provides courtroom security.

JUDGE: Presides over Balthazar's case.

MEDICAL EXAMINER: A crusty, old-school coroner.

TV REPORTER 3: Another member of the media horde.

TV REPORTER 4: Another member of the media horde.

DISPATCHER: Voice only.

EXTRAS: To run TV cameras.

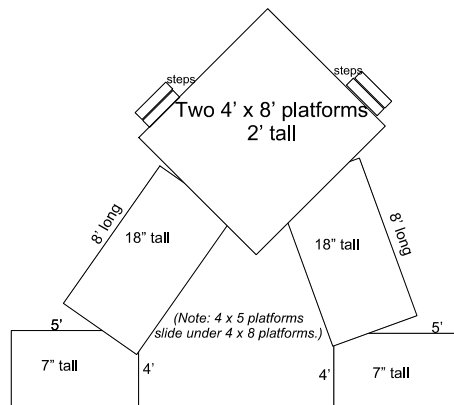
Author's Note: In a pinch, some of the male roles could be played by females, and doubling is possible as well. I wrote the script on a suggestion by a high school theatre teacher who needed a script for a class that would likely be 5 males, 15 females. With the exception of the offstage voice, all parts have at least 10 lines. The three smallest roles are those of the Watchman, TV Reporter 3 and TV Reporter 4.

SETTING

This play has a multitude of settings, yet flows seamlessly from one to another. This can be accomplished fairly easily. In one of the earlier productions, a basic unit set was created with platforms: two 4' x 5' platforms and four 4' x 8' platforms. The platforms were placed at varying heights, two each at 24" tall, 18" tall and 7" tall. The platforms were arranged on each side of the stage, with the tallest platforms placed upstage and the shortest placed downstage. The crime scene was on one side of the stage and the mayor's office on the other. Lighting cross-fades helped determine playing areas. Simple asterisks within the script indicate a switch in focus.

Use minimal set pieces to keep the action flowing. For instance, the courtroom can consist of a desk and chair on wheels for the judge and two small tables for the attorneys. The edge of the platforms can be used as chairs.

OPTIONAL: In earlier productions, the TV and press conference scenes were filmed prior to the performances and played on TV monitors at the side of the stage. Or you may choose to have live feeds from backstage. This allows additional setup time for other scenes.



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PROPS AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

Police tape for crime scene	Envelope
Microphones	Breath mints
Cell phone	Files
Police radio (walkie-talkie)	Deck of cards
TV cameras	Briefcases for attorneys
Telephone	Lab equipment
Envelope	Menu or order pad
Keys	Property room bag
Pack of chewing gum	Police siren
Flashing lights (police car)	

ORIGINAL CAST

*"Code 40: Verona" was first produced Oct. 23, 2003 by South
Caldwell High School in Hudson, N.C.*

Director: Beth Woodard
Police Officer 1: Tyler Farthing
Police Chief: Landon Lankford
Police Investigator: Skyler Goff
Mayor Escalus: Tim Price
Balthasar: Daniel Stallings
Paralegal: Veronica Greene
Lab Assistant: Sarah Thomas
Watchman: Andrew Rice
TV Reporter 1: Corie Schreiber
TV Reporter 2: Ashley Lovins
TV Reporter 3: Kathy Riddle
TV Reporter 4: Katie Taylor
Aide to Mayor: Amy Coffey
Jail Guard: Donna Hatley
Property Room Clerk: Asia Calloway
Public Defender: Candi Johnson
Prosecutor: Logan Ford
Bailiff: Lucas Johnson
Judge: Adele Watson
Medical Examiner: Stephen Schonewolf
Voice of Dispatcher: Caiti Kincaid

Scene 1

(AT RISE: ONE of the members of the cast, or the director, may wish to deliver this introduction for the benefit of audience members who aren't familiar with the ending of "Romeo and Juliet." Should you feel the audience knows the story, feel free to omit it.)

CAST MEMBER: We all know the story of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." Two star-crossed lovers from rival houses. Determined to be together, they devise an elaborate escape plan to fake their deaths using sleeping potions. Tragically, of course, it all goes awry. Juliet is pronounced dead and buried. Paris, the man her father wants her to marry, goes to her tomb at night to pay his respects. So does Romeo, with his servant, Balthasar. Paris and Romeo wind up fighting. Romeo kills Paris. Then Romeo, distraught at the apparent death of his love Juliet, drinks poison and dies at her tomb. Friar Lawrence, who is in deep in the whole sorry conspiracy, shows up too late to save Romeo but just in time for Juliet to awaken. She sees both Romeo and Paris dead, and with Romeo's dagger, kills herself. Friar Lawrence and Balthasar flee the bloody scene only to be apprehended by the night watchmen at the church. You got all that? Now, in Shakespeare's version, half of Verona shows up on the scene next ... the Capulets, the Montagues, the prince of the city. They quickly figure everything out ... Friar Lawrence's confession and the letter Romeo gave Balthasar to give to Montague certainly helped. So the two houses make up, and the prince pronounces the famous sad end to the play: "For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo." Well, that's Shakespeare's version.

Here's another version. Suppose, just suppose, Shakespeare were around today. He might be writing hip TV dramas like, say, *(insert name of popular crime show)*. And instead of an ending that ties everything up neatly, his ending might go something like this ... after all, he'd need a cliff-hanger to keep the audience around for the next season.

End of Freeview

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