

## Professional Acting with Colorado Shakespeare Festival, 2016-2021

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### As Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* (2019)

*“Anne played the (usually male) fiery and outrageous Mercutio, delighting audiences with her bad-ass sword fight with Tybalt—played by a ripped actor 15 years her junior.”*

—Mare Trevathan, colleague on multiple projects

*“The principals in the street fights—namely, Tybalt (Marco Robinson), Mercutio (Anne Penner), and Benvolio (Jessica Robblee)—keep the young-male testosterone-infused antagonisms rolling. Penner and Robblee are a gas as saucy boys, tossing off sexual innuendos and personal barbs. The fight scenes, also staged by DuVal, are epic!”* —Bob Bows, [Colorado Drama review](#)

### As Queen Margaret in *Richard III* (2018)

*“An unexpected pleasure is Anne Penner, who takes on the problematic role of Queen Margaret and makes her long, hate-filled rants clear as crystal and her madness almost moving.”*

--Juliet Wittman, Westword review

### As Portia in *Julius Caesar* (2017)

*“Penner’s turn as Portia, Brutus’ wife, is heartbreaking in its intensity and humanity.”*

--A. H. Goldstein, Boulder Daily Camera

My most substantial and complex role with Colorado Shakespeare Festival was Mercutio, the loud-mouthed, bombastic, fast-talking, restless friend of Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*. It’s a dream role usually played by a young man, but I got to play him when I was a 44-year-old woman. Mercutio’s language is deliciously rude, sexually charged, aggressive, vivid, poetic, and in many ways, very *male*. Inspired by director Chris Duval’s desire to have a Mercutio who was born a girl but now lives her life as a man, I imagined she had run away from home as a teenager and entered military service. She is a badass fighter whose skills surpass those of all her friends and her sworn enemy, Tybalt. As I worked on Mercutio, his pronouns kept shifting between feminine and masculine, and eventually I realized both were accurate.

Playing this role—hyperbolically verbal and physical even for a male—was shockingly liberating. That sensation of freedom while embodying a man was energizing and alarming. And that led me to think about the weight of gender in so many plays, including in Shakespeare. How much do women get to talk? How many decisions and plot points are decided *for* them versus *by* them. These thoughts were a big catalyst for creating *The Lady M Project*.

Briefly I want to mention working on two other roles with CSF. In 2018 I played Queen Margaret in *Richard III*. I collaborated with Erika Randall, the movement choreographer, on a language of gestures Margaret executed to curse Richard and all of his compatriots. We developed this strange yet effective vocabulary which spooked the audience and fit perfectly with Margaret’s intentions. And second, it was a treat to work on a non-Shakespeare play, Mary Zimmerman’s

*The Odyssey*, in summer 2021. Because of the heightened style of Zimmerman's text we used many of the same acting tools that Shakespeare's texts provide (antithesis, line endings, scansion, verbs, alliteration, assonance, word choice, etc.).

#### Supporting Documentation

- +*Romeo and Juliet* script excerpt: Act 1, scene 4, Queen Mab speech with hand-written notes on scansion, operatives, word choice, line endings, rhyming and word play with Romeo.
- +Mercutio actor notes, research, and conversations with director Chris Duval
- +Letters written by CSF collaborators available in Letters folder: Amanda Giguere, Jeff Parker, Lois Shih, Mare Trevathan, and Hadley Kamminga-Peck