Baz Lurhmann's 1996 adaption, of William Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' is a worthwhile watch for all audiences, from those who enjoy testosterone-filled action, or even a forbidden romance. Lurhmann's astute use of loud sound FX's, dramatic music, clever and conceptual costuming, convincing performances, careful symbolism and intricate filming techniques all merge together to form a trendy modernised re-telling. It is a remake will appeal to Australia's younger generation as opposed to the classic versions of the original play. The only thing that will deter the audience is whether or not they will be able to understand the complicated old Shakespearean English used in the original version.

From the outset, Lurhmann is able to modernise the classic 'Feuding Family' saga and simultaneously reveals where the famous story is meant to be set. The film's prologue kicks off with an attention snapping montage, as burning buildings crumble in a fiery blaze. A blaze that soon envelopes a newspaper headlined "Montague vs Capulet". This is then followed by a glorious wide shot of Verona City. In the wide shot, two large corporate buildings stand side by side. These prestigious buildings are separated by a statue of Jesus Christ. Whilst one building has a "Capulet" logo, the opposite has a "Montague" sign. All of these careful visuals tells the audience the story of the opposing Houses and their ancient grudge. Subtly, Lurhmann shows, ironically, though the Jesus Christ statue, that both vengeful Houses are heavily affiliated with Christianity, despite the slaughter and unholy acts both Houses exhibit. With careful visuals like this, Lurhmann's cleverly put together Prologue shows both House's hateful feud and the violent reality in which the film is to be set.
To enhance the mood and atmosphere of a specific scene, Lurhmann used certain genres of music to each specific scene, ranging from dark dramatic opera, to soft melodic instrumental pieces. By thoughtfully matching scenes with music, Lurhmann is able to manipulate a viewer’s emotions. For example, Mercutio’s death scene includes dramatic instrumental music. This creates the needed excitement and tension for this scene. Just before Mercutio dies, sad violin music is suddenly played to give the audience a sense of grief and disorientation. Another example of Lurhmann’s precise music placement is the scene where Romeo alone at the beach. To give the audience a sense of his loneliness and a sense of emptiness, a slow blues tune is played. This type of music is perfect for this scene as the audience really empathizes with Romeo. By particular selection of music, Lurhmann is able to manipulate the audience’s thoughts and emotions by producing heart wrenching scenes.

Lurhmann uses an array of sound FX’s to enhance his scenes. In the opening fight scene, the Montague boys are ready to shoot the Capulets after a fight is instigated. Just as Romeo’s cousin is found at gunpoint, all background noise turns silent. The only thing audible is a fast wind that becomes louder, as well as the squeaks of an eerie sign swinging back and forth. Soon these two sounds are pierced by a cigarette being lit and a match dropping. The use of these sounds adds tension and suspense to the scene. Furthermore to emphasize Tybalt’s speed and agility, whirlwind like sounds accompany his movements before ear splitting gunshots fire. By incorporating loud and over-the-top sound FX’s, Lurhmann can hint to certain qualities that characters have and create intense and dramatic scenes. Overall, this element of the film leaves the audience at the edge of their seats through exciting and loud sound FX’s.
Lurhmann uses an array of symbolic moments to make the audience to perceive things a certain way. Throughout the film, the concepts of 'Destiny' and 'Fate' are repeated throughout the film. To make the death Romeo and Juliet seem like an inevitable thing, he sets the scene at a church filled with glowing candles and large crosses to symbolise a higher power. Juliet is purposefully surrounded in a sea of candles to represent god's holy light. A statue of an angel accompanied by a large cross, overlook Juliet's bed to signify that she is being watched by god and holy spirits. The fact that Lurhmann includes religious icons and images to use as props creates a belief that the ending could not be avoided for it was their destiny. Another example of Lurhmann's use of symbolism is the scene that Romeo climbs off the balcony to hide from Juliet's mother. As Romeo plunges into the pool, Juliet looks down upon him and expresses her ill feelings for her love as a "sinking" feeling. At that moment, a close-up of Romeo's face slowly submerging underwater to sink to the bottom. Lurhmann uses the shot of Dicaprio sinking into the pool to symbolise the eventual demise of their relationship, making the audience feel a sense of concern and foreboding. Overall, Lurhmann uses different props, religious symbols and dialogue and camera angles to give the audience a sense of what is going to happen in the film.

The actors’ performances in the film are outstanding and work well with the scenes. The best scene in the whole film is Mercutio's death scene, as Harold Perrineau's acting performances captivate the audience. The way he pretends not to be hurt is thrilling, even his delivery of the lines, making fun of his own death, "Tomorrow, you shall see me a grave man" are superb. Mercutio then lets out a mighty roar, repeating the words, "A plague on both your Houses". As the last of the remaining people flee the beach, a long shot reveals a dying Mercutio consoled by Romeo. This powerful scene will have audiences spell bound. Moreover, Claire Danes does an excellent job at portraying a stereotypically naïve and 'Young love' demeanour. Her lack of respect for authority really shows through her performance. Romeo is often criticised for seeing love with his eyes. However, once again this role is portrayed perfectly by Leonardo Dicaprio. The performances of the leads are very believable and entertaining. Through these actors’ performances, Lurhmann is able to make his film relevant to a young Australian audience.
Lurhmann uses brilliant conceptual costuming to give each character a representation. Lurhmann modernises the use of costuming from the opening scene. For instance, parading around the streets of Verona are the Montague boys who wear unbuttoned Hawaiian shirts sporting un-naturally coloured hair, while the Capulets dress stylishly in leather and metal heeled Cowboy boots. Clearly, the different dress standards represents how the Capulets are more formal and aggressive in their demeanour. At the Capulet's party, each character is given a specific costume to represent their personalities. Lady Capulet, Juliet's mother, is a self-centred woman, obsessed with power. To match her personality, Lurhmann dresses her as Cleopatra, Who is known as a powerful Queen. Moreover, what better costume to give Lord Capulet than Cesar? A powerful man skilled in wars, politics, also wealthy and popular. Furthermore, Juliet's costume is that of an angel, straight hair with a white dress to symbolise her 'Purity'. In Shakespearean's time, angels were thought to be very beautiful. Romeo's costume, is as a metaphor, making him appear as a knight in shining armour. Lastly, Tybalt looks cruel, cunning and viscous in his outfit as a 'Demon'. By giving the characters certain types of costumes, Lurhmann is able to help the audience form an impression of who the character is and what they are like.
Lastly, Lurhmann use a whole arsenal of filming techniques and camera angles to achieve the desired effect. For example, he uses fast moving cameras, low angle shots, special effects, camera filters, close-ups, slow motion, sequences and music to make the audience feel a different emotion for every scene. In the fight scene with Tybalt, Mercutio and Romeo, Lurhmann chooses to have the camera move speedily between the first two foes, Tybalt and Mercutio, creating a blurred effect. This evokes some confusion from the audience and mimics what the characters may be feeling and seeing. When Tybalt stabs Mercutio with the shard of glass, the critical moment is slowed down to create an intense dramatization of Tybalt's action. As well as this, low angle shots show Mercutio falling screaming "A plague on both your Houses". This is then followed by a mighty thunderstorm. The camera then changes high above the heads of the men below. The use of the thunderstorm and howling wind gives a sense that these actions are a result of Mercutio's death and are being judged by a higher power. By using the weather to emphasize the characters emotions, the significance of his words are amplified. Another example of Lurhmann's cinematic techniques, is the drug taking scene. To represent the hype and high of the ecstasy, Romeo seemingly stands still while everything around him spins in a blur. Fast paced editing, distorted voices, blearing music and camera shots all give the audience an overwhelming feeling of the craziness of the party, for someone who is high on drugs. Eventually, the drugs wear off, everything becomes soft and peaceful again. Overall, Lurhmann's acute use of cinematic techniques all merge together to manipulate the audiences emotions, whether he wants them to feel as though they're on drugs or feel grief because of the death of an important character.

Baz Lurhmann's 1996 adaption, of William Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' is a must see for all audiences. Its clever and astute use of loud sound FX's, dramatic music, clever and conceptual costuming, convincing performances, careful symbolism and intricate filming techniques, will leave the audience breathless and spellbound by dramatic and intense, to heart breaking and romantic scenes. I give the film an 8/10 and recommend it for mature audiences.