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Shakespeare faces the music

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 April 9th, 2004 by Megan Green

If you are a Billy Shakespeare, Cole Porter, Julia Stiles or Heath Ledger fan, you will want to catch “Kiss Me, Kate,” this year’s Ram’s Head Spring Musical which opens tonight and plays April 9, 10, 15, 16, 17 at 8 p.m. “Kiss Me, Kate” is a professional effort, and the energy and pizzazz of the 50 students involved shines in this classic production.

“Kiss Me, Kate” is the story of a theater company attempting to put on a production of “Taming of the Shrew.” Its two stars, Fred and Lilli (ex-lovers), play Petruchio and Katharine; however, the production is overshadowed by the two stars’ battling egos. Their offstage personalities bleed through onstage, as the show slowly begins to unravel. The show takes some crazy twists when two humorous gangsters arrive, followed by Lilli’s militaristic fiancée. All of the characters find themselves torn between the past and the present as they attempt to finish the show.

The production is led by Merritt Forrest Baer and Cindy Prieto playing Fred and Lilli, respectively. Both turn in compelling performances as strong actors and singers. Something should certainly be said here on behalf of Ram’s Head for scouting out new talent on campus, as both are freshmen. Other roles include Bianca (a sassy and sexy Sasha Cox), Lucentio (a sweet and mellow Kyle Duarte), Baptista (a comic Mike McCunniff-Reid), the General (a witty Eric Lowe), Hattie (a strong-voiced Mamie Rheingold), the two Gangsters (an absolutely hilarious Robbie Evans and Jay Nancarrow), as well as a wonderful ensemble. Each is successful at breathing life into their varied roles.

A great adaptation of “The Shrew” (another recent adaptation was “10 Things I Hate About You”), this production is filled with show-stopping numbers. Starting with “Another Op’nin, Another Show,” “Kiss Me, Kate” brims with classic Broadway tunes. Highlights included Katherine’s “I Hate Men,” Petruchio’s “Life That Late I Led,” and the ever-comic “Brush Up Your Shakespeare.” Other memorable songs include “Always True To You” and the spectacular, energized dance number “Too Darn Hot.” (I was left panting, it was so hot.)

The choreography throughout this production was well-conceived by Kari Doyle and Meg Kale and exceptionally well performed (especially by “Too Darn Hot’s” Brian Eggleston). The brassy score was illuminated by excellent Broadway-style belting, and an orchestra pit (conducted by Michael Deeringer) that was truly first-rate.

However, the true gem of this production is the incredible set designed by Liz Seibert. Built by the cast and crew, this set can be summed up in two words: truly professional. Massive in scale, this mobile set frames each scene exquisitely.

However, when all is said and done, “Kiss Me, Kate” is a traditional piece of musical theatre from the

Golden Age, which is not exactly my cup of tea. Ram's Head should strive to produce more current works, whereas at times, this script seems slightly antiquated. The cast, however, does more than its share to outweigh this inherent flaw, in my eyes.

As a student production, which receives no funding from the ASSU or Stanford University, this show must be praised for its resourcefulness. In a time when protests for special fees are as numerous as the number of freshmen looking for a "cool" party on a Friday night, Ram's Head should be lauded for its ability to produce first rate student theatre by financing its productions completely on its own. Not only is the show an artistic success, but a standard to which all student groups should hold themselves. So, this Friday night, don't be that lost freshman searching for a kiss at a party, instead support on-campus student theatre and go see a great production — "Kiss Me, Kate."

Tickets are available in White Plaza, or by emailing joliva@stanford.edu.

You will also have the opportunity to hear Intermission editor Tam Vo play hot xylophone licks every forty measures or so and put the "tam" in "tambourine." Woot.



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