

BY DUNCAN H. BROWN

THEATER REVIEW

William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*

produced and directed by Rodney Franz

The Taming of the Shrew as directed by Rodney Franz is a vigorous, energy-filled take on this classic tale of romantic conflict. Franz brings out the best from his ensemble cast. They speak the play's language clearly and naturally, and it's therefore generally easy to understand what they're saying. They also bring physicality to the play that gives the audience a much deeper feeling for the characters, their various conflicts, and the story of the play.

At base the story (set in Padua, Italy) is about a father (Baptista, played by Tom Terrien) with two daughters, Katherine (Michaela Terrien) and Bianca (Kirsi Marcus). Katherine is a disagreeable young woman with a sharp tongue and an unwillingness to "behave" in order to get married off. Younger sister Bianca is her polar opposite—sociable, outgoing and very desirous of finding her true love through charm and mildness. Fearing that his eldest daughter will remain single for the rest of her life, Baptista decrees that no man can court Bianca until Katherine has been married.

Orbiting about Bianca are a coterie of suitors, including Gremio (an elderly neighbor long on money and short on looks or youth, played with great gusto by Chris Busch) and Hortensio (Christian Farrier).

As the play opens, Lucentio (Steve Pappin) enters the city with his servant Tranio (Andrew Kennedy). He falls in love with Bianca at first sight, but runs head-on into Baptista's decree. He and the other suitors come across Petruchio (Ben Estey), also newly arrived in Padua with his servant (Grumio, played by Alexander Stone), determined to "wive it wealthily in Padua." Petruchio decides that he will accept the rich dowry offered by Baptista (plus the

active support of Bianca's suitors), and marry (tame) Katherine.

As often happens in Shakespeare comedies, there's a lot of business with mistaken identities, disguises, and plots and counterplots. Lucentio disguises himself as a teacher in order to give Bianca some lessons her father probably wouldn't approve of. Lucentio's servant Tranio disguises himself as Lucentio in order to keep up appearances, and so on. The cast shines in making all the business both interesting and funny.

Ben Estey is marvelous as Petruchio—physical, poised and confident. Michaela Terrien convinces us as Katherine that she is not simply disagreeable, but has legitimate reasons for feeling used by her father and mocked by her sister. Once together, Estey and Terrien go at each-other with wit and energy, and the conclusion's not certain until near the end of the play.

Terrien has an interesting take on the play's subtext that a woman should be subordinate and submissive to her husband; she says that Katherine learns during the play that being disagreeable isn't a viable solution in the battle of the sexes, but that in the end Katherine and Petruchio learn to live together harmoniously by transcending convention, and mock the "woman's role" that the play seems to extol.

As Bianca, Kirsi Marcus brings grace and liveliness and feminine wiles onto the stage. As the Widow, Jan Thatcher is a fun mix of charm and cattiness. As Grumio, Alexander Stone adds an entertaining New York accent.

This is a wonderful, lively, witty evening of theatre, professionally done. It's well worth your time. It's suitable for all audiences, though some of the romantic material will sail right over the heads of younger children.