

Memorable 'Kiss Me, Kate' sparked with fun

Farmington Players presents "Kiss Me, Kate," 8 p.m. Thursday, Saturday, May 18-20, and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 21 and May 27, at the barn, 32332 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills. Tickets \$15, call (248) 553-2955.

By VICTORIA DIAZ
SPECIAL WRITER

Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* has been selected by the Farmington Players as their final production at the aging barn theater on Twelve Mile Road, which they have occupied for 48 years. The musical comedy, directed by Emily McSweeney with musical direction by James Morais, couldn't be more fitting. Much of the time, it's sparked with fun. Some of the time, it's downright memorable.

First staged in 1952, *Kiss Me, Kate* may not be exactly politically correct these days (especially in the matter of wifely obedi-

ence), but surely most of its musical numbers are no less tuneful or engaging than those when the house lights dimmed and the curtain went up for the first time on the production 48 years ago.

Due to some frail voices and a rather shaky start to this version of *Kate*, playgoers may initially wonder if the music is going to be given short shrift. Not to worry, though. Eventually, everything seems to get better, and some of it morphs into sheer delight.

Kiss Me, Kate is a show within a show within a show. That is, it is the story of a group of 20th-century troupers putting together a musical version of William Shakespeare's early comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*.

If you're confused, you're probably not alone. Just remember that the point here is fun, not logic.

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Center of action

At the center of all the action are Lilli Vanessi and Fred Grubbin, two actors who play the willful Kate and the mercurial Petruchio in the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Shrew*. Both are "celebrating" the first anniversary of their divorce from each other, but it's soon apparent that these two still have eyes for each other.

Almost from the moment Nate Kaufman appears on stage as Fred/Petruchio, we just know we are in for some theatrical fun. He seems to be having so much of it himself in this role, and he has a way of milking every moment for all it's worth without

ever going quite over the top. While you may not catch him at the Met, he really does know a lot about putting across a song, and playgoers may especially enjoy his *Where Is the Life That Late I Led?* Besides all that, he cuts a dashing figure in tight, leading lady Angle Tyburaki in the role of Lillie/Kate starts out a little shakily, but gradually seems to really warm to her part. She's especially effective as the forever-frustrated, object-hurling Kate. Her body language and facial expressions lend a touch of the cartoonish to her "shrew," and sometimes you may imagine you can see little puffs of steam emerging from her pretty ears.

As Lillie/Kate, Lisa Muscio has her moments, especially when she croons *Always True To You In My Fashion*, clad in a black lace concoction, to her guy, Bill, played by Eric Henrickson. Jack Grulke makes his mark as the rich Republican in Lillie's future.

Special mention

Special mention should be made of Craig Forhan and Chuck Fisher who play a couple of gangster-gone who think they are looking for Fred, when who they are really looking for is Bill. Somehow, these two wind up in the cast of the Shakespearean musical, also, playing (rightfully) a couple of coxcombed fools. The *Irishman's Boy*, *Up Your Shakespeare* ("If she says your behavior is heinous - kick her right in the Coriolanus") is definitely one of the high spots of the evening.

A large supporting cast is a bit

uneven, but ultimately most contribute toward making this *Shrew* a happy occasion.

Costumes are as bright, be-ribboned, and be-feathered as a Venetian carnival, and really add to the eye appeal of the musical. In fact, they're an essential part of the fun, cleverly complementing all the dashing hullabaloo.

Next season

The Farmington Players will perform at a theater facility in the Barnes and Noble building at 6800 Orchard Lake Road in West Bloomfield Township during their 2000-01 season. They plan to open the 2001-02 season at their completely refurbished theater on the same site where the old barn is now located.

Victoria Diaz is a Livonia resident and writes about theater, books and movies for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

'The Marriage of Figaro' at the Hilberry invites laughter

The Hilberry, Wayne State University's graduate theater company, presents *The Marriage of Figaro* which runs through Sunday, May 21. The Hilberry is at Forest and Cass on the Wayne State campus in Detroit. For tickets and show times, call (313) 677-2972.

By SUE SUCHYTA
SPECIAL WRITER

The Hilberry Theatre closes its 1999-2000 season with the non-musical version of the comedy, *The Marriage of Figaro*. Ironically, the popular opera is better known than the play upon which it was based. French playwright Pierre Augustin de Beaumarchais also wrote *The Barber of Seville*.

Both plays are full of clever dialogue that satirize the privileges and foibles of the upper

class. At one point Louis XVI is so incensed by the potency of the satire that he banned *The Marriage of Figaro* from the French stage. However, the sheer comedy and verbal audacity of the play ensured its survival to the present day.

Beaumarchais, who was also a songwriter and musician, left a legacy even more profound than his plays - a glance at your wrist will likely reveal another of his clever machinations, for he developed a precise clock system that we now refer to as the wristwatch.

The Marriage of Figaro is a "bawdy farce of marital mishap and romantic intrigue." Two wise servants, Figaro and Suzanne, want to wed, but they have to prevent a randy Count from stealing the maiden's virtue. The Count, who seeks

the pleasure of his wife's maid, Suzanne, before her wedding to Figaro, must do so without inciting his wife's vengeful wrath. The Countess, not one to sit idly by in the face of her husband's dalliances, is encouraging a besotted pursuit by her husband's page. Amidst much contriving, lying, hiding and diving from windows, the clever Figaro and Suzanne find a way to keep the romantic wolves at bay and return the royals to their rightful bedchambers.

Professor Anthony Schmitt, the show's director, delivered a fast paced, tightly woven performance. Dallas Henry, as Figaro, and Emily Miller, as Suzanne, were well-matched. Fred Shahadi is a standout as the self-centered Count Almaviva. His movements were those of both a pampered prince and a devious

sneak.

Heidi Olson, as the Countess, was a strong foil to the Count, and kept the humor in the character well.

Orestes Arcuni, the full guy, is delightfully funny as the Cherubin, the page courting the Countess. His long suffering looks and puppy dog affections were funny. However, his attempt to disguise

himself as a bridesmaid was what caused the house to roar with unrestrained mirth. Quite simply, Arcuni's face is handsome on a man, but he was one ugly maiden!

Charles Moser's set design is elegant and versatile, with modular pieces easily rearranged for each of the three acts. He effectively used the ostentatious gilt

of the French aristocracy. Mary Leyendecker's costumes were richly appointed and appealing. The gowns were striking, and the colors accented the boldness and audacious of the show and its characters.

Sue Suchyta is a Dearborn resident who writes about theater for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

JET presents six one-act plays

The Day We Met, an evening of six one-act plays by award-winning playwright Kitty Dubin, will open for previews Wednesday, May 24, and continues through Sunday, June 25 at the Anren DeRoy Theatre at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. Performances: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday and Sunday; 8 p.m. Saturday; and 2 p.m. Sunday and Wednesday. Opening night is Sunday, May 28. Tickets \$15-\$25, call (248) 788-2900.

Presented by the Jewish Ensemble Theatre, *The Day We Met* will be directed by Geoffrey Sherman and features Henrietta Hermelin, Scott Crownover, Chris Howe, Chris Ann Voudoukis, Harold Hogan and Robert Lewis.

Three of the plays are about single people and the issues that

currently confront them.

Strictly Personal focuses on two people who meet through a personal ad. *Blockbuster* centers on a man and woman with radically different tastes in films who meet at a video store. *Tough as Nails* depicts a single woman who gets a manicure in an effort to pamper herself. She ends up pouring her heart out to the manicurist about the dead-end relationship she's been in for seven years, but is too afraid to leave.

The Joy of Sex and *Let Him In* are about people looking for ways to solve family problems. A troubled young couple, married less than a year, seek help from a marriage counselor in *The Joy of Sex*. Like many couples, they have difficulties expressing their needs to each other. A first meeting with a marriage counselor,

clearly in over his head, dramatically changes all that.

In *Let Him In*, a divorcee who is in the midst of a family crisis receives an unexpected visit from a mysterious stranger offering spiritual enlightenment. The last play, *Mimi and Me* is about a perky young volunteer at a nursing home who meets her match when she tries to cheer up a 90 year old woman.

This play, like the others, involves a first-time meeting which results in unexpected consequences when two people interact with each other in a meaningful way.

Hudson's Project Imagine is sponsoring *The Day We Met*. JET was selected as one of six metro Detroit arts and cultural organizations to receive a 2000 Hudson's Project Imagine grant.

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