

Water Works Tperforms *Taming of the Shrew*

Strategically-placed electric fans push muggy heat around a church basement in Royal Oak.

Director Mary Locker, dressed in a tee-shirt and shorts, watches intently as her actors walk through a scene from *Taming of the Shrew*.

"It's all coming along beautifully," she says when the action stops. "And I know it's hot in here."

Hot or not, members of Water Works Theatre Company are grateful for the temporary lodging. And they're committed to the two-year-old company and its summer production of Shakespeare in the park, which opens for a two-week run Thursday, July 25 in Starr Jaycee Park, on 13 Mile, east of Crooks.

"Water Works Theatre Company is comprised of people who share a common vision," says founder Ed Nahhat. "They're committing their talent and time to enhance our community life. That's what's gratifying to me — you can walk a few blocks or drive a few miles and enjoy professional quality entertainment."

Angela Armstrong drives in from Inlay City to play a servant, a relatively small part in the play, because she heard "great things about the new Royal Oak company."

Roy Sexton (Hortensio) of Ferndale, saw last year's production and "loved it," compelling

him to audition this year. Dax Anderson (Tranio) of Detroit returned to the company this year because of the "incredible experience" he had performing in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the company's first show. And Shoib Myint of Novi, a

professional actor with television, film and theater on his resume, enjoys the "spirit of a new theater" company. He plays Petruchio, the intended husband for Kate, played by Barb Coven of Whitmore Lake.

Locker's direction gives the comedy its contemporary spin, telling the story of sisters servative, post-Eisenhower era backdrop. By updating the setting to the early 1960s — when June Cleaver and Margaret Anderson (*Father Knows Best*) served as role models for femininity — the actors find the attitude and motivation that help modern audiences make sense of Shakespeare's work.

Blanca, a "lady" in her 1960s

pearls and heels, and her suitor, Lucentio, can't wed until older sister, Kate, marries. Kate, a tomboy in blue jeans and ponytail, is disinclined to become the Donna Reed version of a "perfect wife" or even consider a spouse.

"Kate isn't just a cranky woman. She is someone who can hold her own. She's just fed up with the whole lot of men," Locker explains. "To say that Kate is just bad-tempered and needs to be brought to heel — I don't think that would work for most people. We tried to find a time and place where Kate's crankiness would be understandable."

The girls' father arranges a marriage between Kate and Petruchio. Viewers might cringe at Kate's treatment by her husband-to-be, but under Locker's direction, it becomes a lesson to help her recognize love as a basic need.

"*Shrew* is a difficult piece for this day and age. So often it's done without looking into those possibilities with psychological underpinnings," Locker notes. "We're building choices that underpin the text. That's the glory of Shakespeare, his words are so malleable. You can say the words but then use double meanings — augment it with a set of circumstances or attitude."

Locker finds satisfaction in retelling the traditional tale from a women's point of view. Under her direction, Kate's final speech acknowledges partnership submission as it would in a traditional staging.

"Everyone needs to come to it with their own take and justify

the telling of the story. I can't live with the standard *Taming of the Shrew*."

Locker, a free-lance casting director and a Detroit resident, playing Titania, the Queen of Fairies, in Water Works Theatre Company's production, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, last year.

Nahhat, an attorney with a passion for theater, asked Locker to direct *Shew* this year.

"He's an artistic soul with a

producer's mind, a rare entity," Locker described the Water Works founder.

Nahhat is taking slow, methodical steps toward developing Water Works into a year-round theater that's known for its summer Shakespeare-in-the-park productions.

"I founded Water Works to build a professional theater company for this community, to complement other cultural offerings we have," Nahhat says. "I thought the best way was to have Shakespeare in the park as our signature series. We're Stratford on a budget and closer to home."

The company expanded its performance schedule this year, added two more professional Equity actors to its cast and created a children's Shakespeare workshop, KidShakespeare, for children age 6-18, runs from Monday-Wednesday, July 29-31.

The Boys and Girls Club of South Oakland County is accepting registration at (248) 544-4166.

A temporary, low-impact fence will separate the performance area from the rest of the park and nearby houses.

"One person came over last year. She was worried about what we were doing but after she saw what it was, she invited all her neighbors (to the play). It was neat to have that," Nahhat says.

Tickets for *Taming of the Shrew* are \$20 for adults and \$10 for children. Shows are Thursday-Sunday, July 25-26 and Aug. 1-4. Show times are 8 p.m., Thursday-Saturday, 3 p.m. Saturday and 7 p.m. Sunday.

Star Jaycee Park is located on 13 Mile Road between Crooks and Main.

Performance Times: Thursday-Saturday, 8:00 pm; Sunday, 3:00 pm. For more information call 848-588-1888.

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