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SERVING AMATEUR THEATRE SINCE 1899

**Bristol Amateur Operatic Society 'Kiss Me Kate' Victoria Rooms, Bristol
April '08**

Director – Hilary Marshall. M.D. – Kerrie Duce. Choreographer – Lizzy Westney

Inspired by William Shakespeare's 'The Taming Of The Shrew', 'Kiss Me Kate' was first performed 60 years ago and with music and lyrics by Cole Porter, is always sure to be a winner. This production was no exception. Characters were established quickly and the story unfolded with a good pace and plenty of action. Choreography for the dance routines were outstanding, particularly 'It's Too Darn Hot', which could easily have graced any professional stage. There were some excellent performances by Pete Jones (Fred), Charlotte Wheadon (Lilli) and Natasha Green (Lois), with hilarious portrayals of the Gangsters by Jake Chew and David Cain and strong support from the whole cast. Scenery, costumes, lighting and orchestrations were highly commendable, all coming together to give an impressive and accomplished production that was really 'Wunderbar!'

**Sharon Wood
NODA Regional Representative
District 13**

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

Patron: The Lord Lloyd-Webber

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Production:

'Kiss Me Kate'

Bristol Amateur Operatic Society

General Comments: This was an excellent production with good pace, excellent use of stage and tight direction. Characterisations were impressive, choreography was outstanding and musical direction was strong and reliable. There were a few sound gremlins, which lost some dialogue and lyrics, and the Centre Stage was completely obscured to me, as I was sat behind a very broad shouldered gentleman who, in turn, was sat behind a very tall lady, so no amount of craning of the neck was going to help, which was very frustrating!, but what I *did* see, was very enjoyable! The production was a little overlong and there were a few sections which could have been cut down to prevent this. However, I think that the audience were enjoying themselves far too much for this to matter!

Staging: This was a very accomplished aspect of the show in the sense of performances. The whole stage was used to good effect, the dressing rooms were nicely and simply depicted, the scenery was excellent, particularly the 'Taming Of The Shrew' sets which were beautiful, and on the whole, scene changes were slick, though there were one or two exceptions i.e. the curtain behind Bill and ensemble during 'Bianca' was going up and down like a yo-yo and was quite distracting! The opening scene was well devised and the whole production was imaginative and accomplished.

Lighting: In many instances throughout the performance, the lights just did not seem to be in sync with the rest of the show! Nearly every scene change was unnecessarily elongated by the fact that the lights just did not go back up quickly enough after the blackouts! The scenes were set and the actors were on stage, waiting for illumination. It must have been very frustrating for them, it certainly was for the audience! Having said that, there were some splendid effects and very good use of spots throughout.

Sound: Sound 'gremlins' seem to be insurmountable in this theatre and we lost a lot of dialogue and lyrics through an imbalance of sound levels between the orchestra and stage. Another instance was the duologue between Fred and Lilli before 'Wunderbar', when the volume levels were all over the place! Though the stage levels seemed to right themselves as the production progressed, the problem with the orchestra didn't and we lost some of the wonderful 'Brush Up Your Shakespeare', which was a real shame.

Music: Excellent orchestrations and powerful, impressive vocal performances from principals and chorus alike, gave us a wonderful production of Cole Porter's score. Apart from the sound levels mentioned before (particularly noticeable in the brass section), this was a very strong and obviously well rehearsed aspect of the show.

Choreography: Some of the best choreography I have seen in a long time, the routines were innovative and energetic, particularly 'Too Darn Hot' (which was inspired!), 'Wunderbar', 'Tom Dick or Harry', (loved the acrobatics), 'Were Mine That Face', 'Cantiamo D'Amore', 'Always True To You' (brilliant routine for Lois, if a little overlong?), 'Brush Up Your Shakespeare' and the finale reprise of 'Too Darn Hot' with the principals joining in. A huge and impressive achievement by Choreographer and dancers alike, this was one of the strongest aspects of the show. Superb!

Costumes and Properties: Costumes were excellent and must have been quite a headache to get the contemporary and period costumes together in one show! Colourful and practical, the costumes matched the characteristics of the players beautifully and a lot of thought and imagination had been used on this aspect. Props were in keeping with the action (apart from the stainless steel watering can, which I very much doubt would have been available in 14th century Padua!!!) and were handled with confidence by the cast. I presume that the 'unbreakable' plates were unintentional, though they certainly brought added comedy to the routine!

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Individual Performances:

Fred/Petruchio: This was a amiable and accomplished performance, starting off as a little *too* laid back for the director/star of an opening night, and perhaps not sarcastic enough with Lilli to begin with, but you seemed to grow into the role as the show progressed. Wonderful vocals (lovely notes held in 'Were thine that Special Face' and 'Where Is The Life', and strong stage presence with good facial expression and body language.

Lilli/Katherine: A strong portrayal with excellent vocals and characterisation. I loved 'I Hate Men' and really felt for you when the plates wouldn't break (though you certainly tried your hardest!). You really caught the essence of Katherine, though I fear you must have been black and blue by the end of the run, after your 'come uppance' scene with Fred!

Paul: Confident and engaging, you brought your character to life, particularly in the amazing 'Too Darn Hot' which was a show stopper. Good facials and movement.

Lois: A captivating and extremely energetic performance. You never lost your character and your vocals and dance ability were particularly impressive. You looked beautiful and wore all your gorgeous costumes well.

Bill: A good depiction of this character with excellent stage presence and vocals. 'Bianca' was particularly well performed as was 'Why Can't You Behave', your duet with Lois.

Hattie: A nice portrayal, you did much to set the opening scene and valiantly strove to get over the orchestra in 'Another Op'ning'! Good stage presence and facial expression.

1st Man & 2nd Man: I think it is such a shame that these two characters aren't named as they play such an important role in the show. These particular gangsters were superb portrayals that were played (quite rightly), perfectly straight, yet were hilariously funny! Lovely Bronx accents and excellent projection. 'Brush Up Your Shakespeare' was one of the highlights of the show and I loved the gun business during 'Kiss Me Kate' and your antics in 'From this Moment On' and the Finale. You worked well individually but also found strength in the wonderful partnership. Excellent.

Hortensio: Good stage presence and accomplished vocal and dance ability ('Tom, Dick or Harry' and 'Cantiamo D'more', in particular).

General Howell: An assured performance that caught the character exactly. Strong presence and acting ability.

Harry/Baptista: Confident characterisation and good use of facial expression and body language.

Ralph: A good depiction of the ever harassed stage manager, who was so busy, he even made a late entrance! Good body language and character.

Pops: A supporting role, but very well depicted, with good projection.

This was a very enjoyable production that held the audience spellbound at times! An impressive and very energetic show with which all those involved must have worked long and hard at, to bring to this standard. Thank you so much for inviting me and a big thank you to Stuart for the warm welcome and hospitality. My congratulations to all concerned, for another hugely successful production.

Sharon Wood

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