

Written by Mike Schulz
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If, at any point, you find your mind wandering during director Jeff Coussens' Genesis Guild presentation of *The Taming of the Shrew* – and trust me, that won't happen often – snapping back to attention is easy: Just check out the reactions of the men watching the show from stage right. You'll have no trouble spotting them, because one of the guys is drunk off his ass, and the other's wearing a dress.

Heaven knows the competition is stiff, but have any of Shakespeare's comedic inspirations paid off quite as handsomely as the Bard's structuring of *Shrew* as a play within a play? Certainly, with the on-stage action performed as an epic goof on drunkard Christopher Sly – who's made to believe that he's actually a nobleman, and that the male page beside him is actually his wife – the author must've known how funny this conceit would be. Yet there's no way Shakespeare could've known how smartly it would play for audiences hundreds of years after its debut, who might otherwise find themselves hopelessly entangled in the knotty sexual politics. (The subject of female subjugation isn't exactly the laugh riot it may have been in the 16th Century.) Many modern takes on *Taming of the Shrew* excise the character of Sly completely, and the show still works; in 2007, Coussens himself directed a Sly-less version at Augustana College. As Genesis Guild's offering proves, though, this confused yet contented sot's presence can yield magnificent benefits – at least if that sot is played by James J. Loula.

He's Come to Wive Her Stealthily in Padua: "The Taming of the Shrew," at Lincoln Park through June 26

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