

## Don't Miss "Kiss": Quad City Music Guild's "Kiss Me, Kate"

Written by Jill Walsh  
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Quad City Music Guild's *Kiss Me, Kate* boasts an ensemble of twenty-some gifted performers, including a tap-dancer whose photograph belongs alongside the likes of Gene Kelly, and singers that demonstrate excellent unity in rhythm. The musical is an entertaining, humorous, colorful, and energizing romp through the onstage and back-stage lives of performers in a Shakespearean play, and this production shouldn't be missed.

About half of *Kiss Me Kate* occurs "onstage," during a 1948 Baltimore production of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, while the other half focuses on the tumultuous backstage relationships of the "actors." We see lead actors Fred (who plays Petruchio) and Lilli (Katharine) sorting out their feelings backstage after a divorce. Lilli is also struggling to choose between art-loving Fred and General Harrison Howell, a U.S. Army leader who regularly converses with the president. Meanwhile, there's the foil relationship between Lois Lane (Bianca) and Bill Calhoun (Lucentio), who are very passionate about each other and about other members of the cast. Two unnamed gangsters after Bill, who has a gambling debt, also provide comic relief by trying their talent as extras on the Shakespearean stage. Finally, a handful of ensemble scenes pulls the storylines together and creates unity between the *Shrew* production and the *Kate* performance.

I was nothing short of astonished by the singing and tap-dancing in "Too Darn Hot," which features Zachary Villa (Paul) – one of the lesser-known characters in the musical – and also most of the stagehands and female dancers. This piece jump-starts the second half of the show, though I was a bit disappointed this was the only song-and-dance number that featured Villa center-stage. But equally intriguing and graceful were choreographed numbers performed by a chipper and seductive Melissa Anderson Clark in "Always True to You in My Fashion," a sophisticated Kristin Brummit in "Another Op'nin', Another Show," and a suave Tristan Layne Tapscott in "Bianca."

In musical terms, the performers were splendid, but I found dialogue-driven scenes to be a bit lacking. Kevin Pieper (Fred/Petruchio) has an amazing singing voice, and believe me, we were

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all lucky, considering he had eight songs. But there were a few moments during the slow-paced love scenes when I found his voice flat and lacking variety. Similarly, Sheri Brown (Lilli/Kate) demonstrated beautiful range during "I Am Ashamed That Women Are So Simple" and provided a humorous performance of "I Hate Men," but during her early scenes, her I'm-too-good-for-you attitude seemed a little too emphasized. But tiny flaws like these are greatly overshadowed by an excellent overall presentation.

The ensemble scenes in *Kiss Me Kate* are the highlights of the production. Both "Another Op'nin', Another Show" and "Too Darn Hot" demonstrate the intensity and energy the performers possess. These are moments when all the singers really belt out the words, dancers high-kick and sway, and the orchestra accompanies the presenters on-stage with precise tempo, volume, and grace.

*Kiss Me Kate* at the Quad City Music Guild is a funny and refreshing musical that celebrates love, Shakespeare, and people who have low-paying careers in the arts simply because they love the arts. (Hmmm ... that sounds familiar.) Anyway, whether or not you've read *Taming of the Shrew*

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*Kate*

is a joyful and extremely gratifying show.

*Kiss Me Kate continues this weekend, with performances July 17, 18, 19, and 20 in Prospect Park Theatre in Moline. For tickets or more information, call (309)762-6610 or visit (<http://www.qcmusicguild.com>).*