

Diversions

THEATRE REVIEW

'Kiss Me, Kate' is great

By Sara Stoner

DIVERSIONS EDITOR

"Kiss Me, Kate" is a play within a play. You've got lead actor Michael Ruehrmund playing Fred Graham in "Kate" and Petruchio in "The Taming of the Shrew, the Musical." Other actors play dual roles as well, and all pull it off marvelously.

The play is about Fred Graham and his ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi (Renata Wilson). They are set to star in "Shrew," opposite one another. Vanessi still loves Graham, but at the start of the show he is infatuated with Lois Lane (played by Julia Moss), who loves Bill Calhoun (Tony Gonzalez).

Vanessi is cast-iron and is perfect as Kate in "Shrew." Wilson does a great job in both roles, especially when, as Kate, she sings "I Hate Men." Vanessi is hurt that Graham sent flowers to Lois Lane, because Vanessi thought they were for her. Graham does his best to soften the blow, but it is difficult for him, especially since Vanessi reads the note attached to the flowers during the "Shrew" performance, which adds

some complications.

Of course, Graham truly still loves his ex-wife, as is evident once Vanessi's intended (General Howell, played by Sam Ross) arrives to save her from the theatre.

If it's not bad enough that Graham has to contend with an angry ex-wife during "Shrew," he also has two gangsters (Ray Auxais and Adam Workman) after him for a gambling debt that was actually incurred by Bill Calhoun.

Graham works this to his advantage by using the gangsters in the show to force Vanessi into remaining with the production. The gangsters steal every scene they're in, and their number in Act II ("Brush Up Your Shakespeare") is a scream.

The four leads (Wilson, Ruehrmund, Moss and Gonzalez) have amazing voices. I had to remind myself I was at a college production, but I can see these talents going far. Ruehrmund has a strong voice and I could have listened to him sing all day. Wilson's voice is beautiful and her inner struggle as Vanessi comes through every word.

Moss as Bianca (in "Shrew") sings "Always True To You In My Fashion" with such joy her voice filled the entire theatre. She was amazing.

The only bad thing about the production was that the orchestra was too loud a few times. I heard a few ladies during intermission saying the same thing. This is, unfortunately, a common occurrence with live orchestras, even for touring Broadway shows as I've witnessed at the Ohio Theatre. Luckily for the audience the actors have strong voices that projected above the orchestra.

The costumes in this show are gorgeous. The dresses and outfits for "Shrew" are colorful and detailed. The choreography is amazing as well. The big dance number, "Too Darn Hot" was fabulous.

What great dancers we have here at Otterbein.

Go see "Kiss Me, Kate." Otherwise you are truly missing out on exceptional theatre.

★★★★★

THEATER REVIEW | KISS ME, KATE

Cole Porter tunes, appealing leads sell Otterbein show

By Margaret Quamme
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Otterbein College's new production of *Kiss Me, Kate* is lavish and cheerfully frivolous. This version incorporates a few changes made in the 1999 Broadway revival of the two-act musical while retaining the 17 Cole Porter tunes of the 1948 original.

The action of *Kiss Me, Kate* jumps between a mid-20th century tryout of a musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew* in Baltimore and the parallel story of the conflicts between the two egotistical stars of that musical. The non-musical portions of the show, written by Bella and Samuel Spewack, aren't as witty as Pomeroy's lyrics, but under John Stefano's well-paced direction, they are diverting enough to sweep the audience along from song to song.

The two leads are particularly well-cast. As hammy Fred Graham, who plays Petruchio in the show within the show, Michael Ruehrmund is good-humored, delightfully smug and shows off a plummy burlesque in *Wunderbar* and *Were Thine That Special Face*. As Lilli Vanessi, the production's Kate, Renata Wilson combines aristocratic polish with a hint of earthy undertones. She seems equally at ease with the haunting *So in Love* and the raucous *I Hate Men*.

At Wednesday morning's student preview, Ray Auxais and Adam Workman tickled the audience's fancy as two gangsters roped into service as extras in the play to ensure that Lilli would continue on in her role. Their wry interpretation of *Brush Up on Your Shake-*

► Otterbein College Theatre will present *Kiss Me, Kate* at 8 tonight and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. Thursday through May 31 — in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$16. Call 614-823-1109.

peare makes the song one of the show's highlights.

Tony Gonzalez seems relaxed as Bill Calhoun, and his soft-shoe version of *Bianca* is a low-key pleasure. As Bianca herself, and as the seductive actress Lois Lane, Julia Moss has a rich voice but seems a bit stiff in what ought to be bawdier moments.

A 14-piece orchestra accompanies the singers. Connie Shafer's choreography, which often pulls in a good percentage of the 31-member cast, is bouncy, although not always as erotic as Porter's songs. The dancing in *Too Darn Hot*, for instance, is more strenuous than stirring.

Vince Rainey's sets, which include comically contrasting dressing rooms for the two leads, move smoothly through the many scene changes. Costumes help set the mood, as '40s-era beiges and browns alternate with detailed and primary-colored Renaissance apparel.

At the preview, a few rough edges still remained in the staging, including some jittery and oddly placed spotlighting.

Because of language and sexual innuendo, the musical is more suitable for high-school age and older than for younger children, but the show's sly wit, unpretentious humor and memorable melodies are as pleasing now as they were more than 50 years ago.

MUSIC REVIEWS | STEPHEN MALKMUS, THIRD EYE BLIND

Performance gives cl

By Curtis Schleber
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

With the 1994 album *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain*, California indie-rock band Pavement sounded on the verge of rewriting the vocabulary for underground pop music.

Alternately melodic and angular, cobbled together from simple riffs and unpredictable changes, and crudely recorded, the music contradicted the status quo for more than a few eras.

All the while, band members claimed a debt to thudding, blues-based 1970s rock, a fact that has become glaringly apparent with the release of *Pig Lib*, the second record by former Pavement lead singer Stephen Malkmus and his band the Jicks.

A haphazard, lazy affair, the album received a much-needed clarification during Malkmus and company's concert Wednesday in Little Brother's.

At first, it sounded like business as usual. The band performed the quirky *Do Not Feed the Oyster* like a loosened-up version of Pavement. Malkmus' "mistakes" during his guitar solo were purposeful and reassuringly off-kilter. *Jenny and the Ess-Dog* had all the hallmarks of Pavement's catchiest melodies.



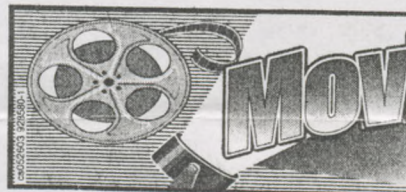
Stephen Malkmus

But *Sheets* began to reveal the influences that merely were distracting on the new album. A vocal and guitar line in unison was straight out of 1970s rock but was embedded

in an a-melodic tune.

With tunes such as *Animal Midnight* and *Dark Wave*, the arcane sound began to make sense. By the end of the set, when Malkmus began updating his stylistic influences somewhat to include the late-1970s band Television, the mix really clicked.

A common thread between Pavement, Malkmus and the 1970s emerged, not only elaborating on the recent album, but by proxy casting the previous band's work in a different light.



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