

The Taming of the Shrew

Review by Deborah McGee

Lane Community College's Production of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* would have pleased the groundlings.

In Elizabethan times, these were audience members with the cheapest, "standing room only" tickets. Tales have trickled down in sub-academic cloisters of wild times upon the ground floor before the stage of The Globe and other London theaters.

Fueled by much consumption of spirits, food-for-all and general enjoyment of play, the groundlings were very powerful critics. If not pleased, they tended to throw things. A man (for only males were actors then) whose performance did not please was likely to end up with a slobbery apple core in the eyeball.

They would have loved Patrick Torelle's direction of *Taming*. It's of Falstaffian proportions—rollicking along with generous doses of bawdiness and a bent for slapstick humor challenging silent screen greats with its variety of pratfalls.

Blocking is top-notch in LCC's very energetic and athletic production, most perfected in the "taming" scene, through clever use of a rope and a rolling pin when Petruchio (Ben Trotter) stoops to conquer Katherina (Robin Scheff).

This version of *The Taming of the Shrew* begins and ends in front of a side-by-side Western saloon and theater. Christopher Sly, town drunk effectively played by Jon Wilson, is discovered on the pavement early one morning by cast members from the stage theater house's current production.

They carry Sly's body inside the theater, awaken him and try to convince him he's a wealthy amnesiac, then they present for him the play-within-the-play. This is the story of one Baptista (Denny Guchler), a Renaissance noble of Northern Italy, who has two daughters.

Conflict arises because the eldest, Katherina, is very headstrong and has attracted no male. The younger Bianca (Carolyn DeFrance), having mastered feminine

wiles, has several suitors. But Dad says no marriage of younger sister until the elder also has a husband.

By assuming various farcical disguises and executing bizarre subplots, all of which points to hearty amusement at human nature, the characters work together to find someone willing to say "Kiss me Kate." Petruchio, a young man out to increase his fortune, happens upon the scene, marrying Kate at once and setting about to tame her, that is, make her subservient (at least on the surface). The play depicts no serious male vs. female opposition, but rolls along merrily tongue-in-cheek.

Everyone ends up happier in the end. Bianca finds a Romeo-type (Lucentio, portrayed by Brent Jasmier) devoted to following her, and Petruchio and Kate find themselves much attracted to each other because of their common feistiness. End of play-within-play. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Sly the drunk passes out again; the actors return him to the gutter, his fantasy world much enriched.

Nancy Julian has surpassed herself again in yet another collection of impressive costumes. Two time periods background the play: the American Old West and the Renaissance. Whether clothing the players in somber Edwardian tones or in the garb of Florentine-painting-school-come-to-life, the costumes are luscious. Luscious to touch, too, as you'll note if you fondle the fabric swatches on display in the theater lobby.

My less than positive response to the play as a whole may be due to a lack of appreciation for this side of Shakespeare's genius. I prefer drama which comes from a fuller sense, a melding of the two contrasting masks of comedy and tragedy. Lines retained from the original play were too ponderous. As a result, players often delivered them rapid-fire, so they could continue frolicking upon stage. Understandable. But I doubt the bard would mind if someone simplified and shortened the lines for this production.



Front row (l to r): Ellen Rice, Shari Duncan, Maxine Walton, Don Scorby; Back row: Michael Walker, John Duncan, all members of the comedy group SNAFU.

Sex ... in the Title

Ralph Twit is a Baby Boomer. He's also the central figure in a new comedy review, *Sex ... in the Title*, opening Friday, May 9 at Edison's Bar in the Factory Restaurant in Springfield. The comic review traces Ralph's life with skits that depict his passage from the magic of childhood in the fifties, through the anxiety of adolescence in the sixties, and to the confusion of adulthood in the seventies and eighties. Along the way he battles with older brothers, puberty, a variety of bizarre jobs, and the inevitable hunt to "find himself." He is surrounded in his endeavors by the strange and wonderful characters of our age: a deranged and over-sexed obstetrician, the high school fink, a man in a piano bar who can't decide if he's Humphrey Bogart or Yogi

Bear, a right wing political pusher, and of course, the boppin' Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. He falls in love; he fails in lust. But throughout it all he remains the quintessential Baby Boomer, marching foot first into situations that all seem so close to home.

Sex ... in the Title is the creation of a new Eugene comedy group called SNAFU. All seven members are veteran comedy performers around Eugene. Maxine Walton has acted and directed in many Eugene theater productions, most recently as director of *Footlight Frenzy* at the Very Little Theatre. In that production she also teamed up with actors Michael Walker, John Duncan, and Don Scorby. Duncan and Scorby are the co-producers of the Cascade Balzac Company, which

produced numerous comedies at the Brass Rail during 1983 and '84. The four comedians formed SNAFU in the early days of 1986 and soon brought in Ellen Rice from the U of O, and Shari Duncan, just returned from filming in Southern California. They are joined by stage manager Mary Barrios. All told, SNAFU. What about *Sex ... in the Title*? Well, it's true, isn't it?

Additional performances of *Sex ... in the Title* will be held May 10, 16, 17, 23, 24, 30 and 31, every Friday and Saturday night in May. Showtime is 8:30. Tickets are \$5.50 in advance, \$6.50 at the door. Ticket outlets are the Factory, 4740 Main St., Springfield (747-7900), Everybody's Records, 5th and Willamette (687-0761) and Valley River Center (683-8330), Eugene.

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