

Westside Theatre Reviews

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Experience Theatre Project Reaches for “Time’s Up” Moment



Picture of The Company by Casey Campbell

By Tina Arth

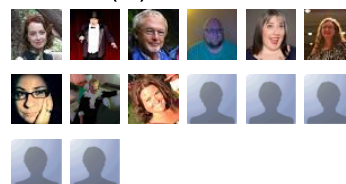
For rampant misogyny and sexism, few of Shakespeare’s plays can rival *The Taming of the Shrew*, yet it’s one of the Bard’s wittiest works, and its enduring comedy still has lots of audience appeal. How are enlightened modern theatre companies to produce a show like this without violating their own ethos of equality and inclusiveness? Alisa Stewart, artistic director at Beaverton’s Experience Theatre Project has chosen a novel approach – asking her director to develop an adaption called *The Taming and the Shrew* that includes most of the original dialogue and action, but is laden with lightning-fast gender-bending and open disdain for some of the original play’s most offensive passages. Director/Adapter Sara Fay Goldman sums up her hesitation at undertaking this task in her director’s note, explaining that she “was trained in a very conservative theatre tradition of professional protocols which values the ability to create personal boundaries and emotionally separate from our work.” She goes on to credit Shakespeare, who “publicly and professionally exposed a history of silenced women, perhaps taking a risk that his female contemporaries didn’t have access to.” Seen in this light, Experience’s lively, fun and very chaotic production makes sense – but probably only to an audience already familiar with the original work (or at least with the musical *Kiss Me, Kate!*)

A unique feature of Experience is that it delivers theatre without a theater – the current production will move from the south lawn of the Beaverton Library to a quartet of local wineries (Ardiri, A Blooming Hill, Helvetia, and Stoller). The outdoor venue offers enormous freedom of movement, but that brings challenges like the sun (bring sunglasses AND a wide-brimmed hat to be on the safe side), competition from traffic noise (perhaps not so much at the wineries, and still much better than dueling with last year’s MAX noise at the Beaverton Round!), and fluctuations in the weather (come with short sleeves, but armed with a jacket in case the wind picks up). Expect a lively, rollicking afternoon or evening, with a taste of audience participation facilitated by the “play within a play” nature of the original work.

The set-up, in a nutshell: drunken tinker Christopher Sly is tricked into believing that he is a lord, suffering from amnesia. To help him “recover” his supposedly lost memory, his deceivers present a play about the wealthy Baptista and his daughters, Kate and Bianca in Padua. Student Lucentio falls in love with the fair Bianca, but Baptista will not let her marry until he finds a husband for the foul-tempered Kate. Petruchio arrives in Padua in search of a rich wife, and determines that he will tame Kate (the shrew) and make her his bride. By this point in the Experience production, Mickey Jordan (playing Sly) has assumed the role of Petruchio to Kaia Maarja Hillier’s “Kate” – but only temporarily. When Petruchio begins to “tame” Kate, Hillier soon trades parts with Jordan and has him playing the role of the bride-to-be, she the suitor (just one of a series of role changes and reversals to keep us on

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our toes). I won't even try to explain the rest – just take my word that it's nothing like any *Shrew*, tame or otherwise, that you've ever seen before.

In an outdoor setting without microphones, vocal volume can be as critical factor as acting skill in telling the tale, and both Jordan and Hillier excel at making themselves heard. Jordan also makes a great drunk, and he falls well and often (not as easy as it might sound!). I was particularly happy with Catherine Miller's stolid yet wry portrayal of "Bartholomew" the page, and Emilie Landman's minstrel "Soto" was invaluable in setting up the initial story and keeping us more or less on track.

The trend of bringing live theatre out of the strict confines of formal theaters is one I welcome, as it makes productions accessible and attractive to a much wider group of people. Experience Theatre Project is a local leader in this growing movement, which will ensure robust audiences able to tear themselves away from their digital realities for another generation!

Shrew performances will remain at the Beaverton Library South Lawn through Sunday, July 15th before moving on to Helvetia Vineyards (July 10-21-22), Ardiri Winery (July 27-28-29), A Blooming Hill Vineyard (August 3-4-5) and Stoller Family Estate (August 10-11-12). See the Experience Theatre Project website for times, as they vary form venue to venue. All performances are "pay as you will" with the players passing the hat for donations.

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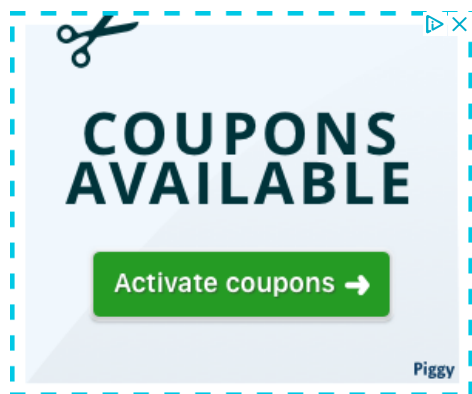
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