

the taming of the shrew

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The new production of "The Taming of the Shrew," which was added to the Repertory Theatre this weekend, is a director's show. Through clever staging and elaborate action only obliquely hinted at in Shakespeare's text, Tice Miller has illuminated the old play. The central conception is fresh, helpful, and fun.

"Shrew" is, of course, farce — but farce with a Shakespearean difference. This is the story of the bright young man who marries a beautiful shrew for her money — at least so he says — and then proceeds to "tame" her — that is, to cure her of her unhappy habit of mind. The fun is in the step by step method which Petruchio, very well played by Carl Beck, inflicts on Kate, played by the talented Susan Baer. (Susan Baer has possibilities of becoming a considerable actress; she needs an extended professional apprenticeship.)

Romping cure

The cure calls for all kinds of romping on the stage. When we first meet Kate the cursed, she comes dragging her coy sister Bianca, played by the appropriately pretty Stephanie Black. Kate roughs her up a bit. When a scene or two later Petruchio meets Kate, they engage in a kind of courtship dance in which words, frequently elaborate, are matched against action which is coarse. The result is one of the funniest scenes in the play.

Our pleasure in the whole thing comes from two sources. First, we see that the relationship between Petruchio and Kate is an eternally recurring one. A spirited wife requires a spirited husband, for the happiness of both.

Kate is miserable when she is selfishly asserting her own will; and she is paradoxically happy when she is mastered by a loving husband. Similar situations are not unknown offstage! Second, the play raises questions about what a shrew actually is. Is Kate, who acts what she feels, more or less a shrew than her flirtatious sister, who hypocritically maneuvers her suitors? The audience must choose Kate.

Play within a play

In this production Tice

Miller has placed this central action within a dramatic frame, a brief introductory story of Christopher Sly who, in his drunken stupor, is presented with a play by a troop of travelling actors. The story of the taming of the shrew is thus a play within a play, an exemplum, a Sunday School story with a funny moral.

Miller provides an epilogue scene borrowed from another Elizabethan play which points it up: for everybody's happiness shrews must be tamed by their husbands' strong hands. One is pleased to see the Sly story thus expanded. It adds a significant dimension to the central situation.

The play within the play is

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