

Wednesday, February 26, 2014

## “The Taming of the Shrew” by Shakespeare

Presented by The Tempest Ladies



Laura Borgwardt, Shubhra Prakash, Holly Hart,  
Nikomeh Anderson, Julia Giolzetti, Sheila  
Bandyopadhyay, Stella Berg - Photo:Paul Parrales

Review by Sydney Arndt

This all-female ensemble devises fresh perspectives of classic Shakespearean plays, proposes an alternative interpretation to the “taming” of the shrewish Kate, by her suitor, Petruchio. With the addition of original material, the ensemble along with director Ben Prusiner inventively used the play’s framing device of staging a play within a play to offer a feminist retelling.

The occasion is set as a book discussion of “The Taming of The Shrew” hosted at a library. The panel of women is made up of specialists from various fields: including sexology, classical literature, feminist and women’s studies, and political conservatism. They quickly spin into a heated argument about the inherent problems with the text and its representation of women. One Shakespeare-nerd panelist enthusiastically convinces the others to defend their perspective of the text by acting out the play as they see it. The cast of seven fearlessly dives into the material, that gives hilarious physicality to the characters, especially in Laura Borgwardt’s portrayal of the old man Gremio and Stella Berg’s commitment to drunkard beggar, Christopher Sly.

I applaud the ensemble for their fruitful creative process that enabled each member of the cast to create a character that was of interest to her before spending several weeks examining the play through their character’s eyes. Each individual perspective is what made this production original and fresh next to other adaptations of the classic. For example, in one scene Kate ties her sister, Bianca, to a table—for pain or pleasure we are unsure. Sheila Bandyopadhyay, who plays the sexologist, plays Bianca as wildly sexual with a ravenous libido. Actress Holly Hart, the feminist and women’s studies scholar, abruptly interrupts the scene out of disgust for the sexologist’s portrayal of a woman who is restrained against her will. The two debate on the possibilities of both portrayals, before the feminist convinces the sexologist to re-do the scene; this time as a woman who is being abused by her overly aggressive sister. They used this technique a few other times throughout the play and I found it to be an illuminating tactic in critiquing the role of Shakespeare’s leading ladies. These self-reflective scenes were the most accessible and effective. I only wish they would have used this tool more frequently for audience members who were unfamiliar with the plot and characters. At times it was as if the audience wasn’t included in the debates.

The play ends off on a strong note with Kate’s final monologue where she is either submitting to being tamed or acting as if she were submissive while she under-mines her husband’s domination with sarcasm. These fresh and diverse perspectives resonate into one clear thought: Kate is oppressed by her husband no matter how you look at it and this is an utter travesty.

*The Taming of The Shrew* ran thru February 23rd at The American Theater of Actors, 314 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor; [tempestladies.com](http://tempestladies.com).