

Review Surrey Mirror March 20th 2008

Kiss Me Kate

East Surrey Operatic Society (ESOS), The Harlequin, Redhill.
Reviewed by Tony Flook



ESOS's production delivered sheer entertainment from the moment the full cast hit the pace with *Another Opening, Another Show*, right thorough to the inevitable happy ending.

Admittedly, the story of the on and off-stage relationships between the two fictional actors touring a musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew* takes a bit of following in places but the journey is more than worthwhile just to hear some of Cole Porter's most enduring and memorable numbers – especially when performed as well as here.

Director Paul Longhurst and the team cast every key and supporting role without compromise. It would be difficult to think of a better Lilli than Jane Hogg. Celebrating the first anniversary of her divorce from Fred, she was vituperative in the dressing room and a virago as Kate in the play within a play. She demonstrated her ability to hold the stage in her solo *So In Love*, although her *I Hate Men* could have used a little more passion. Lee Power showed how fire fought fire as Fred and co-star Petruchio but recalled the good times in *Were Thine That Special Face* although later reflected wistfully *Where Is The Life That Late I Led*. Their voices were perfectly balanced on their duet *Wunderbar*.

Alys Dreux (Lois/Bianca) and Francis Radford (Bill/Lucentio) were equally well matched – she with a display of flighty; he portraying an amiable rogue. Stephen Bonnett and Terry Foster made the most of the scene stealing opportunities offered to the 'gangsters' – not only in their showcase *Brush Up Your Shakespeare* but also as tow unlikely actors, taking to the stage to ensure Lilli didn't skip town.

The opening to Act II was meticulously built by Jon Ford and the ensemble from a languid start to full throttle as they declared that it was *It's Too Darn Hot*. This was just one of choreographer Vanessa Chambers' many imaginative, often athletic routines. Kevin Stuart weighed in with his portrayal of a bone-headed General and Nick Rogers contributed many brief, perfectly-timed appearances as stage manager Ralph.

The sparkling, sometimes astringent dialogue, crisply delivered throughout, was always totally audible.

Stage manager Ross Savage and the crew seemed to change locations in a blink which, together with episodes played in front of the drapes, meant that action flowed continuously.

Musical director Susan Rowlinson's interpretation of the score was, itself, worth the ticket price.

Please don't close down the Harlequin

Once again I would like to sing the praises of the East Surrey Operatic Society, after seeing their recent brilliant production of *Kiss Me Kate* by Cole Porter. My daughter and I believe they get better and better each time we see their shows at the Harlequin. The music, acting and costumes as ever were fantastic. The singing, dancing and comedy were so good.

It is such a pleasure to be able to be taken into a world of music and laughter in a local theatre, and to be able to enjoy the facilities there. Many people would not be able to enjoy such entertainment if the Harlequin theatre is closed. It is one asset that we would not like to lose. It has a variety of entertainment to appeal to everyone.

There is such a wealth of talent in the area which will be affected if this is lost. Where will all the local societies be able to put on their wonderful shows? We appeal to the Reigate & Banstead Council, please don't close the Harlequin.

Sylvia Gammon
Mid Street
South Nutfield



Saturday, 22 March 2008

This was an excellent production of this recently revised Cole Porter classic. Whilst purists may object to "liberties" being taken, I felt that the show was at least as good as the original. There was plenty of life and humour, and constant but not excessive movement.

Director, Paul Longhurst delivered a very accomplished interpretation, helped by the talented cast (on and off!) he'd assembled. Lighting by Ian Fagg was complementary and accomplished throughout, and likewise the sound by Jeremy Covell. Stage Management under Ross Savage was very smooth & unobtrusive, and the Properties (Jenny Toye, Angela Terribile) wholly apposite. Wardrobe mistresses Sue Bracher and Elizabeth Elliott did a fine job in keeping everything very much in both periods,

while Make-up (Sharon Jeal, Nicky Crook, Michelle Ahearne) and Hair (Frances Street-Carter and Amy Playford) were both so good as to be unnoticeable!

Musical Director, Susan Rowlinson had obviously coached her singers very well, and kept the band well-controlled on the night. Choreography by Vanessa Chambers was lively and interesting, and the whole ensemble appeared well-drilled, with good integration of movement and dance.

A fine cast was led by Lee Power as Fred Graham/Petruccio, who played the aging egotist very convincingly, with powerful and effective singing allied to his strong stage presence. Jane Hogg was a fine foil to him as Lilli Vanessi/Kate, although she could perhaps have benefited from a little more fire when in character as Kate. The secondary couple of Lois Lane/Bianca and Bill Calhoun/Lucentio was charmingly put over by Alys Dreux and Francis Radford, who both played for comedy and yet made a convincing couple. Alys' performance was simply stunning – I couldn't take my eyes of her when she was on stage.

David Longes led the Shakespearean action as Baptista Minolta/Harry Trevor, with a very convincing delivery, while Kevin Wood and Michael Saunders (Gremio and Hortensio) completed the trio of lovers to good effect. Kevin Stuart was excellently cast as the dictatorial General Harrison Howell, although I think I prefer the gentle humour generated by Senator Harrison Howell in the original production.

Fiona Thompson as Hattie opened Act 1 very effectively; *It's Too Darn Hot* was a real showstopper as it should be and congratulations go to Jon Ford as Paul who fronted this masterpiece with artistry and panache. Colin Bousfield as Pops and Nick Rogers as Ralph also popped up with frequency and effect.

Terry Foster and Stephen Bonnet, First Man and Second Man (i.e. the Gangsters) performed very competently, but were far too low-key and naturalistic for my liking; I felt that much of the comedic potential was lost as a result.

Taken altogether, this was the best production of Kiss Me, Kate that I have yet seen, and I heartily congratulate the cast, backstage people, and production team for a very fine evening's entertainment. Thank you!

Joanna Silcox NODA Rep, District 8, SE Area