

The shrew tamed at Maynardville

By [John Cooper](#) 21 Jan 2011

My sometime theatre-going cat Thomas Marmalade (well he did [review Andrew Lloyd Webber's Cats](#) on this website - and liked it) occasionally catches a shrew in our shared garden in Rondebosch. They seem to be inoffensive enough little animals, so perhaps the European shrew that Shakespeare would have known has a somewhat different manner. I guess it must as my dictionary has as one of its definitions of shrew as "A person, now only a woman, given to railir or scolding or other perverse or malignant behaviour". This sounds about right for Shakespeare Katherina.

Open air equals wet shrews

So, to the theatre at Maynardville to watch Taming of the Shrew in the open air. I first went to Maynardville to see The Tempest in 1973 and have been going on and off ever since. I learnt early on to go prepared, so on Wednesday night I had cushions and rugs ready. It turned out that we needed the latter as it rained during the second half. No great matter, Cape Town theatre audiences are obviously made of stern stuff and I saw only one person get up to leave. But I did miss the entry of the lion while blanketing up.

This is not a play that I know very well, although I do remember Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton recapitulating the stormy reality of their several marriages by going hammer and tongs at each other as Petruchio and Kate in Franco Zeffirelli's 1967 film. Being pretty young at the time I think I was also impressed by glimpses of Taylor's rack, at times as akimbo as her arms!



"It was all a dream"

In Taming of the Shrew the playwright has used what is known as a "framing device" or an "induction". A drunkard named Sly (played by Grant Swanby) is thrown out of a bar (amusingly set in the Cape Flats), falls asleep on the kerb and then appears to dream (or is shown) the whole play. This year's presentation (the first "Shrew" at Maynardville since 1956) is directed by Roy Sargeant. He uses Petruchio as a lion tamer (hence the beast, ably operated by three puppeteers from the Little Marionette Company), so we see tumblers in circus get-up and Petruchio (also played by Grant Swanby) emerges towards the end in a red circus coat and cracking a whip to show his dominance over Kate.

Vespa-horses, yapping spaniels and a three man lion

I started off struggling a bit with the over-the-top Italian accents, especially of Darren Araujo as the servant Tranio, but ended up warming to his performance as he artfully switched back and forth from masquerading

as Lucentio (his master, played by Francis Choulter) with an amazingly camp English accent, even more, though hardly credible, over the top. Here, concentration was required because Shakespeare is adept at switching roles (and genders) to cause confusion on stage (and off) so as to milk the laughs in his comedies.

The set was pretty basic, allowing the natural beauty of Maynardville to act as a frame. Some great props though: I liked the Vespa-horses, Troilus the spaniel, and, of course, the three-man lion.



Bubbly Juliet Jenkin channels Jane Horrocks

This play must stand and fall on the two main protagonists of "The Taming Plot": Anthea Thompson as Katherina and Grant Swanby as Petruchio. They both gave good and strong performances, as did the members of the secondary "Bianca Plot", which included Tranio, as well as Daniel Barnett as Hortensio, who was a real hoot when disguised in late-Elvis kit as Bianca's (Alex Halligey) music tutor, Litio.

But for me it was the servant/clown Grumio, so well played by Juliet Jenkin, who was the highlight, irresistibly reminding me of Jane Horrocks as Bubble in BBC TV's Absolutely Fabulous, in costume, manner and voice.

So a great evening out, as it always seems to be at Maynardville Shakespeares. Go and see it, don't get hassled worrying whether it's misogynistic or not (it's just a farce after all), but do remember your blankie!

Taming of the Shrew runs at the Maynardville Open-Air Theatre till 19 February 2011.

Tickets cost between R100 - R150 and can be booked at Computicket, Artscape Dial-a-Seat +27 (0)2 421 7695 or at the Maynardville Box Office, an hour prior to the performance.

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