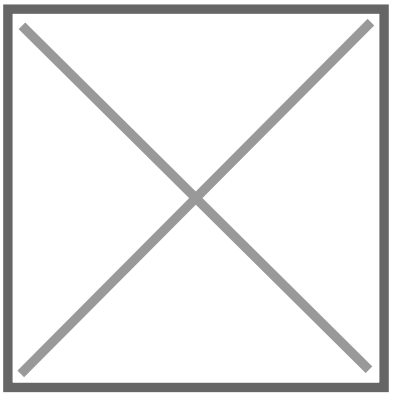


Shrewdly Hilarious: Campy Shakespeare at Its Best

Description

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CEDAR CITY, UT â?? Shakespeareâ??s *The Taming of the Shrew* is a complicated and often problematic play, particularly in its treatment of gender. Itâ??s all too easy for a production to come across as sexist or misogynistic, given that those elements are embedded in the text. However, depending on the approach, the play can also become a sharp and effective satire.

One of the most powerful tools for shaping that interpretation is the framing device Shakespeare wrote around the story, known as the â??Induction.â?• This sectionâ??rarely performed today because of the additional time it addsâ??sets up the play as a play-within-a-play, granting directors greater creative freedom in their staging choices. It also invites the audience to suspend disbelief for the duration of the performance.

The Inductionâ??s premise is simple but effective: the owners of an inn attempt to distract an aggressive drunk named Christopher Sly by enlisting a troupe of traveling actors to perform a play about another person in need of reformâ??Kate. This year, at the **Utah Shakespeare Festival**, Directed by **Valerie Rachelle**, you can see the full production, which is important to understand the satire in *The Taming of the Shrew*. This is an over-the-top and eccentric adaptation, which one audience member described as â??the most campy *Taming of the Shrew* I have ever seen.â?• However, it is also filled with heartfelt moments.

> Happy Opening graphic for The Taming of the Shrew at the Utah Shakespeare Festival, showing the 2024 production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2024.)

The plot centers on Petruchio, a fortune-seeker who marries the fiery Kate for her dowry and then sets out to â??tameâ?• her. While the premise can be difficult to navigate by contemporary standards, Rachelleâ??s direction offered creative and insightful solutions that reframed the story as a more equitable and truthful battle of the sexes.

A lively dance number signals the start of the play-within-a-play, ushering in an over-the-top, carnival-like atmosphere. Actors appear in bright, jester-inspired costumes against pink and yellow Dr. Seussâ??like backdrops, framed by a whimsical faux proscenium arch. With the departure from the

Induction, reality slips awayâ??something Rachelle makes clear through the fantastical transformation of both characters and stage. This shift grants the production license to explore more exaggerated and imaginative behaviors.

Caitlin Wise portrays Kate and is electrifying. She embodies the energy of a toddler, and at other times, she is somewhat reminiscent of a cat attacking a mouse, hissing at those around her. Her red-and-orange dress matches her fiery spirit. Wiseâ??s performance makes it clear that Kateâ??s transformation is necessary.

> Petruchio grabs a scowling Katherine from behind in a comic moment from Utah Shakespeare Festiv
> 2024 production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2024.)

John DiAntonioâ??s Petruchio brings confidence and humor to the stage. Despite his characterâ??s outrageous antics, it is hard not to like DiAntonioâ??s Petruchio because of his onstage charisma. The chemistry between Wise and DiAntonio is palpable, which makes a lot of sense because they are married. This is meant to be a physical show, and DiAntonio and Wise fully commit, with Wise even spitting on DiAntonio at one point in the show, garnering one of the most significant reactions from the audience all night.

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Rodney Lizcano (Hortensio) and **John Harrell** (Gremio) shine as the rival suitors, bringing energetic comedy to their roles. Lizcanoâ??s expressive face and hilarious â??music lessonâ?• scene with Bianca (played by **Valerie Martire**) were highlights of the evening. Martireâ??s Bianca, traditionally an innocent beauty, is reimagined as a trickster who has learned how to get her way, adding another layer of meaning to her character development. Her hair was hilarious.

> A suitor in a scholar's cap reads to Bianca in a polka-dot gown in The Taming of the Shrew.
> 2024 production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2024.)

Chris Mixon delivers a standout performance as Baptista, Kate and Biancaâ??s father. Mixonâ??s facial expressions and flawless delivery of lines turn even the simplest one-liners into comedic gold. **Blake Henri** is hilarious as Grumio as he gallops down the aisle to the stage with his master, Petruchio (DiAntonio), clapping coconut shells together in a **Monty Python** manner.

The Music Design by **Lindsay Jones** enhances the unusual Dr.Seuss world, with carnival music and sound effects, and **K.L. Albertsâ??** bright and imaginative costume designs bring Rachelleâ??s vision to life. Albertsâ?? use of neon colors, black-and-white checks, and stripes created a clownish atmosphere fitting of **commedia dellâ??arte** style that complemented the productionâ??s playful tone. The costumes also cleverly link characters through color, subtly reinforcing their relationships.

> A servant in a feathered turban rides on another actor's back in a slapstick scene from The Taming o
> 2024 production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2024.)

Rachelleâ??s direction brought a fresh perspective to the playâ??s conclusion. Instead of just ending with Kateâ??s controversial speech, the production added a poignant scene where Petruchio demonstrates his respect for Kate by kneeling with her when she tries to kneel in front of him and placing a shoe on her foot, in a nod to Cinderella. This act of mutual respect and partnership was

echoed by Christopher Sly (**Topher Embry**), the reformed drunkard from the framing device (play-within-a-play), reinforcing the theme of mutual consideration in relationships. Hopefully, Sly has also learned a thing or two from Kate.

Overall, the Utah Shakespeare Festivalâ??s *The Taming of the Shrew* is a vibrant, over-the-top, and highly physical comedy that connects with a wide range of audiences. Its inventive direction and standout performances make for an entertaining evening, though the material may be triggering for survivors of domestic abuse. After all, the play wrestles with problematic, outdated gender rolesâ??reframed here for contemporary sensibilities. In Shakespeareâ??s time, the work would have been performed entirely by men, a fact that casts the text in a markedly different tone and context than modern productions.

> An actor in a towering curled wig and mustache plays a comic character in The Taming of the Shrew 2024 production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2024.)

Further, I like to remind audiences that Shakespeare was writing for his own timeâ??and that he often collaborated with other (male) authors on many of his plays. Collaboration does not necessarily mean agreement with every idea expressed. As Farah Karim-Cooper, Professor of Shakespeare at Kingâ??s College London and Director of Education at Shakespeareâ??s Globe, observes:

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> â??Perhaps it is wishful thinking, but I like to imagine that Shakespeare himself saw these ideas as problematic even then. Why else would he stage them other than to be provocative, political, and at times, critical of his own moment?â?• (p. 247)

Staging Shakespeareâ??s more complex works, such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, comes with a responsibility to engage thoughtfully with their challenges. The Utah Shakespeare Festival meets that challenge by presenting the complete play while adapting it for contemporary audiences.

The Taming of the Shrew runs at the Engelstad Shakespeare Theatre on the campus of Southern Utah University on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 8:00 PM through September 7. Tickets range from $15 to $85. For more information, visit www.bard.org.

> An actor in an outrageous puffed-sleeve costume crouches mischievously in The Taming of the Shre 2024 production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2024.)

Tickets: $15 to $85.

Venue: 200 Shakespeare Ln, Cedar City, UT 84720

Sponsored by Jeremy and Amy Hanks Foundation

Address: 101-199 W University Blvd, Cedar City, UT 84720

Dates: Select dates until September 6, 2024, at 2:00 PM and 8:00 PM

Tickets: $15 to $85

Contact: 435-586-7878 or 1-800-PLAYTIX https://www.bard.org/

#thetamingoftheshrewusf

Learn More

Study Guide

Content Advisory

Shakespeareâ??s most often performed play at the Festival, with Kateâ??s character being one of his most memorable women, contains sexual puns, innuendo, and themes of domestic abuse and misogyny but is suitable for most audiences.

Sources

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Karim-Cooper, F. (2023). *The Great White Bard: How to Love Shakespeare While Talking about Race* (1st ed.). Penguin Publishing Group.

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Date
2026/11/04
Date Created
2024/07/29
Author
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