

KISS ME, KATE!



Cover Photo by Jake Chessum



**ROUNABOUT
THEATRE
COMPANY**

UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of

**EDUCATION AT
ROUNABOUT**

UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



KISS ME, KATE

Music and Lyrics by Cole Porter
Book by Sam and Bella Spewack
Directed by Scott Ellis
Choreography by Warren Carlyle
Music Direction Paul Gemignani

In the constellation of musical comedy masterpieces, *Kiss Me, Kate* shines as perhaps Broadway's most sparkling achievement. This is the winner of the first-ever Tony Award for Best Musical, alive with onstage romance, backstage passion, comedy high and low, a dash of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, and a stylish, sexy, sophisticated songbook that includes "Too Darn Hot," "So In Love" and "Always True To You In My Fashion." Once again, Roundabout catapults you to musical comedy heaven, with a brand-new *Kiss Me, Kate*.

A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES

Few musicals hold so cherished a place in the American canon as *Kiss Me, Kate*. Celebrated for its spellbinding cast of characters, its tantalizing dance numbers, and, of course, Cole Porter's unforgettable songs, *Kiss Me, Kate* presents a legendary power play between dueling performers Lilli Vanessi and Fred Graham. Their electrifying battle, reverberating from the pages of William Shakespeare, has both captured imaginations and sparked debate for decades.

Our remarkable director, cast, and creative team have created a *Kiss Me, Kate* that resurrects all the magic of its 1948 debut while rising to the responsibility of a 2019 revival. As exhilarating and hilarious as ever, Lilli and Fred's captivating combat stands as both a snapshot of its time and a continuation of today's largest conversations. *Kiss Me, Kate* comes back to masterful life with intensity, passion, delight—and perspective.

WHEN

A very warm day in June 1948

WHERE

The stage of Ford's Theatre, Baltimore

WHO

Lilli Vanessi: a star of stage and screen, former wife of Fred; plays Katharina, "the Shrew"

Fred Graham: Lilli's ex, an actor, director, and producer; plays Petruchio, Katherine's "tamer"

Lois Lane: a nightclub singer, featured in her first stage role as Bianca, Katharina's sister

Bill Calhoun: a Broadway "hooper" (dancer) and a chronic gambler; plays Lucentio, one of Bianca's suitors

Harrison Howell: a politician and Lilli's fiance

Two Gangsters: a pair of enforcers

Ralph: stage manager for *The Taming of the Shrew*

Hattie: Lilli's dresser

Paul: Fred's dresser

Harry: character actor who plays Baptista, Katharina and Bianca's father

Pops: stage doorman

Performers and Backstage Crew: for *The Taming of the Shrew*

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INTERVIEW WITH ACTRESS KELLI O'HARA

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Kelli O'Hara about her work on *Kiss Me, Kate*.

Ted Sod: You've played some major roles from the musical theatre canon (such as Anna in *The King and I*, Nellie in *South Pacific*, and Babe Williams in Roundabout's production of *The Pajama Game*). Why did you choose to do the role of Lilli Vanessi/Kate in *Kiss Me, Kate*? What do you find most challenging and exciting about this role?

Kelli O'Hara: I chose this role and show for the sheer fun of it. We did a one-night gala staged concert two years ago and had such a fun time that we decided to turn it into something. Thankfully, I have been playing some very rich characters in the past few years, but they have included some very dark storylines during a very dark political climate. So returning to this fun, feisty character on the stage, singing the way I love to sing, felt like a bit of a cleanser. I also love the people I am working with, and that is a huge factor for me right now as well. Finally, being able to choose that is something I am really grateful for.

TS: What kind of preparation or research did you have to do in order to play this role?

KO: As with every role, I deeply research the period, the material the piece is based on, and the text of the piece itself: its background, the score, and my relationship to all of it.

TS: Was reading Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* part of that preparation?

KO: Of course.

TS: Please give us some insight into your process as an actor.

KO: Hmmm. Processes vary according to the material and the circumstances for me, I suppose, but getting to the truth of a character and her journey is always very important to me. By that, I mean finding ways I can believe in her and make her human—both Lilli and Kate. This is (hopefully) accomplished in many ways, but, with this piece, mainly through the collaboration with my partners—like Scott Ellis, Warren Carlyle, Paul Gemignani, and especially Will Chase, among others—who, if all else fails, make my work joyous. I also take into account the time and political climate in which we are performing this piece, and how that will affect how to communicate it and how an audience might receive it. This process will be fun and challenging as we pay respect to its original form while adapting it to find its relevance today.

TS: What do you think *Kiss Me, Kate* is about?

KO: Well, I know it is about the wonderful world of theatre, putting up a show with a diverse, artistically colorful group of players, all bringing their personal histories to the table. It is about love and loss and love again. It is about desperation, baggage, and debt. It is about the one thing I love most in the world: being an actor in the theatre.

TS: I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your initial thoughts about who Lilli is with us?

KO: Lilli is an actress. She has been around the biz for quite a while. She is strong, but vulnerable in this moment. She is NOT a shrew. She



has great insecurities, but ultimately, she is fair. Maybe lonely. Fun. Funny. Complicated and good. She is human.

TS: How is Lilli relevant to you?

KO: I have to find relevance in every character I play, because I have to believe in her, but for Lilli in particular, I think she is a woman in a powerful position. How she uses or abuses that power will be in the spotlight, as if the world is waiting for her to fail as she is directed by a man, man-handled by greedy doofuses, and put in a box by a wealthy male politician—all in the name of money and power. Yet, in the end, she is the one who extracts herself from the chains, swallows her pride, and chooses what she wants for herself. As we will play it, she doesn't need to apologize for her choices, but instead, hopefully will help us all to recognize the occasional human failure to collaborate. She will ask for change and be heard.

TS: Will you talk about your understanding of the relationship between Fred and Lilli?

KO: My understanding is filtered through rose-colored glasses. I do these classic love stories because I believe in them. I believe Fred and Lilli love each other and always have. I believe it has been tumultuous, that neither has gotten over the other, that show business and stubborn egos have gotten in the way. I believe in them.



TS: Do you think of Fred as a real-life version of Petruchio? Or is Fred Lilli's Svengali?

KO: The actress playing Lilli could never believe that Fred is like Petruchio. Lilli knows Fred is just posturing; otherwise, how could she believe in him? I wouldn't give Fred that much satisfaction or credit to call him my Svengali. Fred and Lilli are equal players. Not every actress/starlet needs a Svengali seducing them, building them up, making them stars. Some women work their asses off right from the start, make their own careers, and fall in love on their own terms. They started together in the chorus. If Fred strayed after that, well, you can ask him why.

TS: What do you think binds them to one another?

KO: Chemistry. History. Love. Art. Fire. Love of ham.

TS: What do you look for from a director, choreographer, and music director when you are collaborating on a role?

KO: Consideration, teamwork, laughter, confidence.

TS: Where were you born and educated?

KO: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, raised mostly in Elk City, Oklahoma, finished high school in Edmond, Oklahoma, went to college at Oklahoma City University and acting school at The Lee Strasberg Institute in NYC, and the school of life.

TS: What keeps you inspired as an artist?

KO: Open communication, education, and understanding. And love.

TS: Public school students will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a very successful actress—what advice can you give young people who say they want to sing, dance, and act in the musical theatre?

KO: I would ask them to define "success" for themselves. If they love this work and get to do it at all and with some consistency, that is success. And if they truly love it, always be true to themselves within it. If they expect anything else from it or compromise themselves to get it, rethink. •

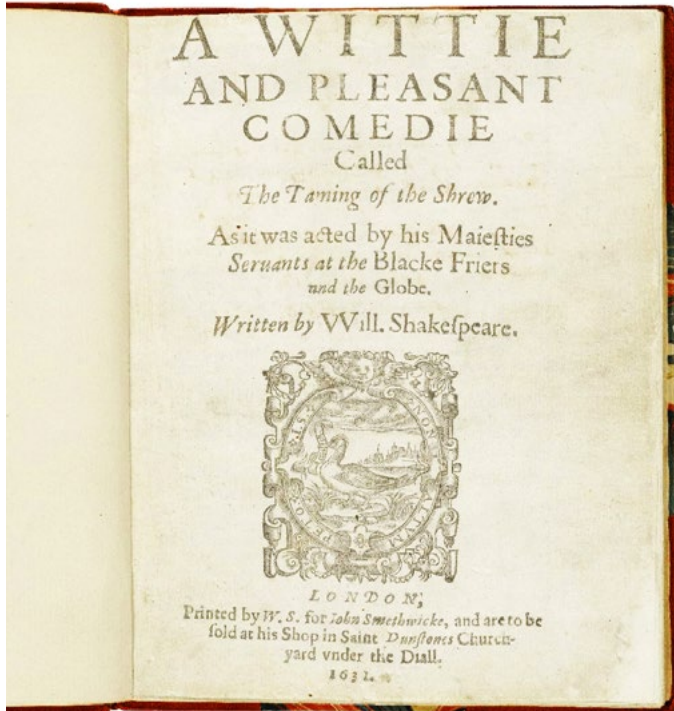


Kelli O'Hara, Will Chase and the company of *Kiss Me, Kate*



BRUSH UP YOUR SHAKESPEARE: FROM THE BARD TO BROADWAY

The Taming of the Shrew is an early comedy by William Shakespeare, written between 1590-1592.



THE ORIGINAL PLAY

In the prologue to *The Taming of the Shrew*, drunken tinker (a traveling tinsmith) Christopher Sly is found sleeping by a wealthy lord. The lord brings Sly back to his house and, upon Sly's awakening, convinces Sly he is nobleman who has slept for 15 years. Sly believes his real life has been a long dream. Then, a traveling troupe of players arrives to present a play about the taming of a shrew.

The play-within-a-play opens in Padua, Italy, where Lucentio, a student, arrives and falls in love at first sight with Bianca, the daughter of the rich merchant Baptista. Baptista forbids Bianca to marry until a husband is found for her older sister, Katharina, who is considered "a shrew" because she is willful and disobedient. Two of Bianca's other suitors, Gremio and Hortensio, join forces to find a husband for Katharina. Lucentio changes identities with Tranio, his servant, and gets hired as Bianca's tutor.

A **shrew** is a small, mouse-like rodent with a sharp bite. According to old superstitions, a shrew running across your feet caused lameness. Around the 13th century, people applied the term to spiteful men and women alike, and by Shakespeare's time, women who were nagging or ill-tempered were derisively called shrews.

Hortensio's friend Petruchio agrees to marry Katharina upon learning she has a large dowry. Their first meeting is a battle of wits, but he insists on marrying her, and her father agrees. Petruchio arrives late and badly dressed to their wedding; he behaves obnoxiously and refuses to let Katharina stay for the reception. He takes her to his country house and forbids her from eating, sleeping, or wearing nice clothes until she obeys him.

Back in Padua, Hortensio and Gremio see that Bianca has fallen for Lucentio, and they decide to give up their pursuit. Tranio persuades a passing schoolmaster to pretend to be Lucentio's father, Vincentio, and tell Baptista that their family is wealthy. Baptista signs a marriage contract with the fake Vincentio, while Lucentio and Bianca secretly elope.

On their return to Padua for the wedding, Katharina is forced by Petruchio to wear rags. She finally submits to his will, agreeing that the sun is the moon and that an old man on the road is a young virgin. The old man turns out to be Lucentio's real dad, Vincentio, who joins them on their journey. Upon arrival at Lucentio's house, Tranio and the schoolmaster accuse the true Vincentio of being an imposter and threaten to have him imprisoned. Lucentio and Bianca return just in time, and Lucentio reveals his identity and their elopement. Both fathers approve the marriage.

At a combined wedding reception, the three husbands, Petruchio, Lucentio, and Hortensio (who has married a wealthy widow) bet on which of their new wives is the most obedient. They call the women to come from another room, and only Katharina comes when called. She gives the women a lecture on the importance of wifely obedience. Then, the couples retire to their wedding beds.

THE SOURCE

Most scholars believe Shakespeare borrowed his central taming plot from the oral folktale tradition. Within the Aarne-Thompson classification system, which organizes stories from around the world according to their universal themes and traits, almost 400 variations of the "shrew-taming" tale were told throughout Europe.

SHREW ON STAGE AND SCREEN

While the play was popular in Shakespeare's time, it was rarely revived in the following centuries; the first American production was in 1887. The successful Alfred Lunt/Lynn Fontanne production (which inspired the backstage story



for *Kiss Me, Kate*) toured America in 1935-36. In 1967, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton starred in a well-received film, directed by Franco Zeffirelli. The 1999 high school comedy *10 Things I Hate About You*, starring Julia Stiles, was a loose adaptation of the play. Productions in the 20th and 21st centuries often brought critical interpretations to the play's gender and power dynamics. Notably, director Phyllida Lloyd has directed the play twice with all-female casts, both starring Janet McTeer (seen this season in *Bernhardt/Hamlet*) as Petruchio.

ON PLAYS-WITHIN-PLAYS

Shakespeare's use of the **play-within-a-play** device in *Shrew* allows the audience to watch Petruchio "tame" Katharina from a critical distance. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the hilarious play-within-a-play pokes fun at theatre by taking itself too seriously. In *Hamlet*, the play-within-a-play shows the power of drama to provoke a murderer's guilty conscience, while Hamlet's conversations with the players comment on how all human behavior is itself a kind of performance.

METATHEATRICAL MUSICALS

The term **metatheatre** was coined by theatre scholar Lionel Abel in 1963 to describe a philosophical, self-conscious, and self-referential type of drama, often featuring characters who are aware that they are performing—for each other, and sometimes for the actual audience. Abel pointed to Hamlet as a metatheatrical hero who remains "conscious of the part he himself plays in constructing the drama that unfolds around him."

Kiss Me, Kate is metatheatrical, portraying the daily workings of a theatre company while they perform their musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Lilli and Fred are professional actors who, like Hamlet, self-consciously perform offstage as well as on, and their personal relationship mirrors the Shakespearean battle of wills between Katharina and Petruchio. Meanwhile, the themes of money and mistaken identities figure in both Shakespeare's original and the gangster subplot of *Kiss Me, Kate*.

Kiss Me, Kate (1948) was the first show to feature an entire musical embedded within a musical. Rodgers and Hammerstein later used the same idea for *Me and Juliet* (1953), about a secret "showmance" between an actress and stage manager during a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. *The Producers* (2001) lampoons the creation of the

deliberately terrible show, *Springtime for Hitler*, while *The Drowsy Chaperone* (2006) imagines a fictional 1920s musical as seen through the eyes of a fan. Also In 2006, *[title of show]* found new levels of metatheatricality by portraying two musical writers in the act of writing a musical about the writing of a musical called—wait for it—*[title of show]*! •



This season, Theresa Rebeck's *Bernhardt/Hamlet* offered a metatheatrical exploration of how an actor struggles to play Shakespeare's most challenging role. (L-R) Jason Butler Harner, Janet McTeer, and Dylan Baker

COLE PORTER



"LET ME RIDE THROUGH THE WIDE OPEN COUNTRY THAT I LOVE"

Cole Albert Porter was born in Peru, Indiana, a town of 7,000 in the north-central part of the state, in 1891. He was named for his grandfather, J.O. Cole, "the richest man in Indiana," who had been born in modest circumstances in Connecticut, made money during the Gold Rush of 1849, and used that cash to invest in lucrative coal and timber industries.

Family wealth gave Porter the opportunity to develop as a musician: he began violin lessons at six, piano at eight, and by the age of 10 was composing operettas and waltzes with help from his mother. His grandfather, however, saw not music but law in his grandson's future, and Porter entered Yale University at the age of 18. At Yale, Porter composed over 300 songs, including the famous fight song "Bulldog," still used today, and six musicals.

"I'M ALWAYS TRUE TO YOU, DARLIN', IN MY FASHION"

After college, Porter entered Harvard Law School but soon transferred to the music department. (The decision led his grandfather to cut Porter out of his will.) In 1916, Porter made his Broadway debut as a composer with *See America First*, which was a flop. Porter left for Paris soon after, later claiming that he served in the French military in WWI, though he did not. In France, Porter sought the life of a socialite but was unable to fully afford it. Though Porter was gay and involved with men throughout his life, in 1919 he married Linda Lee Thomas, a slightly older woman who had

left an abusive marriage with \$1 million dollars, paid to keep her quiet about her ex-husband's affairs and behavior. With Thomas, Porter could afford a lavish life. They enjoyed traveling together as friends, and she was key to nurturing Porter's talent and career. Their unconventional relationship lasted until Thomas's death in 1954.

"BROADWAY RHYTHM, IT'S GOT ME"

It was through Thomas that Porter connected with songwriter Irving Berlin, who recommended him to the producers of a musical called *Paris*. Porter wrote several successful songs for the 1928 production, which re-launched his career. A string of well-received musicals followed, including *Gay Divorcee* (1932) and *Anything Goes* (1934), as well as several Hollywood films. At the time, Porter's sexually-charged lyrics were considered too risqué for radio.

In 1937, Porter was seriously injured in a horse-riding accident, and he spent the rest of his life enduring constant pain, infections, and operations on his legs. Despite this struggle, he would go on to write some of his most successful work, including *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948) and *Can-Can* (1953). He died in 1964 and was buried beside his mother and wife in his hometown. •

COLE PORTER IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF BROADWAY

The 1940s and 1950s are considered "Broadway's Golden Age," but in 1948 Cole Porter was out of the spotlight. With the breakthrough of *Oklahoma!* in 1943, audiences wanted a musical's dialogue, songs, and dances fully integrated to support the storytelling. Porter's sophisticated musical comedies and effervescent style fit perfectly in the 1930s but were now considered passé, so he turned his sights to Hollywood and wrote film scores. At first, he was reluctant to work on *Kiss Me, Kate*, but the Spewacks' book won him over. Although he did not (and would never) create a completely integrated score in the mode of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Porter did find musical inspiration in Fred and Lilli's romance and outsized egotism, as well as in Shakespeare's words and characters. *Kiss Me, Kate* gave Porter a Broadway comeback, and he followed it with two more hits, *Can-Can* (1953) and *Silk Stockings* (1955).



SAM AND BELLA SPEWACK



Perhaps it's no surprise that the book of *Kiss Me, Kate*—full of romantic discord and backstage shenanigans—was penned by veteran husband-and-wife playwriting team Samuel and Bella Spewack. And in a case of life imitating art, the couple, married 25 years but separated at the time of writing *Kiss Me, Kate*, reunited through their work on the piece, and remained married throughout their lives.

Bella Cohen was born in 1899 near Bucharest, Romania. By 1903, she and her mother had immigrated to the United States and settled on New York's Lower East Side. After graduating from Washington Irving High School, she worked as a publicity agent and reporter for several newspapers, including *The Call*, a socialist daily. Bella chronicled her impoverished childhood in *Streets*, a memoir written when she was 23 and published posthumously. *Streets* reveals Cohen's anguish as she and her mother struggled to survive as immigrants and women. It also shows early evidence of both her eye for character-revealing details and ear for colorful dialogue.

Samuel Spewack was likewise an immigrant, born in the Ukraine in 1899. He immigrated to New York City with his family and graduated from Stuyvesant High School before entering Columbia College (now University) and dropping out to pursue work as a reporter. Sam was working for the *New York World* when he met Bella. "Sam really fell in love with my writing," Bella told *The New York Times* in 1971. They married in 1922 and spent four years in Europe as foreign correspondents, including stints in London, Riga, Amsterdam, Moscow, and Berlin. In 1926, Bella broke the story of Anna Anderson, who claimed to be the last surviving member of the royal Romanov family.

When they returned to the U.S., the couple settled in Pennsylvania. Sam wrote novels, and Bella embarked on a career as a press agent. She was working for the Girl Scouts of America when she came up with the idea for Girl Scouts to sell cookies. Bella and Sam also began collaborating on plays. Their first success was *Clear All Wires!* (1932), a comic farce about a foreign correspondent. It was turned into a successful film (watch [HERE](#)) in 1933 and established the Spewacks as writers of madcap comedies with witty dialogue. A string of well-received work, including *Leave it to Me!* (1938), a collaboration with Cole Porter, the Cary Grant film *My Favorite Wife* (1940), and box office smash *Weekend at the Waldorf* (1945) followed.

During WWII, Sam (who was fluent in Russian) served as an information officer in Moscow. He also wrote and produced *The World at War* (watch [HERE](#)), a government-sponsored documentary that explained the causes behind the war to the public. After the war, Bella, working as a United Nations representative and ABC news reporter, covered the distribution of food in war-ravaged Eastern Europe.

Kiss Me, Kate, written in 1948, was the Spewacks' greatest success and won them the Tony Award for Best Author (Musical). A recent article in *American Theatre Magazine*, written by Anne Potter, highlighted Bella's work, noting that she was the primary writer of the book and that Sam's contribution was limited to revising some scenes. Cole Porter forced the inclusion of Sam's name in the credits, likely assuming audiences wouldn't want to see a show with a solo female book-writer. The article also noted an early version of the script in which Bella "attempted to change the narrative of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*... to create a more progressive Katharine." Her changes were edited out by her male collaborators against her wishes.

Sam and Bella continued writing through the 1950s. In 1960 they founded the Spewack Sports Club for the Handicapped in Ramat Gan, Israel. Sam Spewack died in 1971; Bella Cohen Spewack passed away in 1990. Their papers are held at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. •



INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR CORBIN BLEU

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Corbin Bleu about his work on *Kiss Me, Kate*.

Ted Sod: Where did you get your education and training?

Corbin Bleu: I started my dance training when I was two. They gave me my first pair of tap shoes, and I just fell in love. I was a Ford model when I was three, and I was cast in my first off-Broadway production when I was six. A lot of my training has been through experience over the years. I've been able to work with so many incredible performers. I ended up going to Debbie Allen Dance Academy, where I studied every form of dance you can think of. Then I went to LA County High School of the Arts, and I was part of the theatre department there. My junior year of high school, I was accepted into Stanford University thinking I would study psychology, but that was the same year that I booked *High School Musical*. *High School Musical* just propelled my career to another level, and I found myself working a lot more.

TS: What kind of discipline or routine does it take to stay in shape as a musical theatre performer?

CB: Sleep is key. Mondays are usually our dark days on Broadway, and I keep those sacred. I usually just stay in and I rest. I don't talk. As it is, even when I'm not doing a show, I sleep a lot. As far as food goes, my wife and I cook 99% of our meals. I know what I'm putting in my body. I drink a lot of water. That's pretty much all I drink all day long. And I have a green apple before every single show. I do that because they're healthy for you, and it also helps me with my diction and energy.

TS: What made you want to play the role of Bill Calhoun in *Kiss Me, Kate*?

CB: There are a lot of factors. First, I had the most marvelous time working with the Roundabout Theatre Company the last time I was here, doing *Holiday Inn*. When I found out Scott Ellis, whom I had worked with on *Holiday Inn* and I adore, was going to be directing, I knew I wanted to work with him. And Warren Carlyle is the choreographer. He is such a force in the tap world. For me, dance has always been number one, and knowing that I was going to be working under Warren's choreography was a huge part of my decision. Also, the character of Bill is a dancer, and I get to perform one of the iconic dance numbers, and the thought of that just tickled me like nothing else. *Kiss Me, Kate* is one of the beautiful, classic, American musicals. That is a genre I love and I seem to work well in. After *Holiday Inn*, I ended up doing *Singin' in the Rain*, and I'm currently playing Billy Crocker in *Anything Goes*, another Cole Porter musical, at the Arena Stage in D.C.

TS: What kind of preparation are you doing?

CB: By the time I get back to New York, I will have done *Anything Goes* for three months, so I feel like this production has been a part of the preparation for getting into *Kiss Me, Kate*. I will watch the film version, and I absolutely will be diving into *The Taming of the Shrew*. When I was doing *Holiday Inn*, in the role originated by Fred Astaire, and *Singin' in the Rain*, playing the role originated by Gene Kelly, I was constantly being asked questions like, "Aren't those huge shoes to fill? What are you going to do to stand up to those guys?" And I always said the same thing: "I am not them. I am me." I have learned that there is a specific essence that those iconic performers brought to their characters, and I will do my best to find out what that is. But at the end



Corbin Bleu

of the day, it's going to be my interpretation of that character, and it's going to be based on what we find in the rehearsal room. I'm looking forward to the discoveries we make and creating something new.

TS: Bill is a bit of a sketchy individual. Would you agree? And if so, how do you connect to this character?

CB: I appreciate that you see me as a healthy person, and I am. I do my best to be. But I've gone through my own things and lived many lives, and there are aspects of me that I know will inform Bill Calhoun's character. I think with the element of his gambling addiction, I am going to want to find what that dark side is within him, what compels him to do it. I know he has many redeeming qualities, too, especially with Lois. People like Bill have to be charming or they wouldn't be able to get away unscathed with the things they do.

TS: What do you think is going on between Lois and Bill? Does he really love her?

CB: I think he does love her "in his fashion," but he might also not truly know what the meaning of love is. I think it is absolutely possible to love someone and not be able to treat them with love.

TS: Tell us a bit about what you look for from your collaboration with the director and choreographer?

CB: I'm always really looking for specificity. I love when a choreographer is able to tell me exactly what it is that they want. I try to interpret that and give that to them as we collaborate and find it together. What drives me nuts is when we're doing a tap move, say a toe/toe/heel/heel and I ask, "Do you want me to drop the right or the



left heel?" And they say, "Doesn't matter, just do any one." Especially in group numbers, whenever there isn't specificity, that's when it ends up looking a bit sloppy. Don't misunderstand me, I don't go into rehearsals expecting the creative team to work in a certain way, but specificity means a lot to me. Perhaps because I am a Type A personality. I have already experienced working with Scott when we were talking about scenes and character during *Holiday Inn*. I already know his style to a certain extent, so I'm looking forward to experiencing his depth of knowledge again. I'm very happy that I'm working with a creative team filled with talented and intelligent heavy hitters.

TS: What about the music director?

CB: They are very important, especially with Cole Porter. Porter's music has wit and complexity. I think it's going to be that same aspect of specificity I mentioned earlier, in understanding what the words mean and how they pertain to what's happening on stage. Porter uses words that aren't being used much these days. He was a pioneer in pushing boundaries. He wasn't afraid to stir the pot.

TS: Do you consider the score of *Kiss Me, Kate* to be part of the American Songbook? What do you think is the modern audience's attraction to it?

CB: I definitely think Cole Porter's work is part of the American Songbook. There is always a levity I feel when I listen to these great American classics. It's hard to describe. It's almost ethereal. Every time I listen to the songs of that era, I feel as if I'm in a dream. I think part of the dream is being able to escape. There are elements of our modern times that are difficult to face, and I think audiences love being able to walk into the theatre and spend two-and-a-half hours experiencing joy. I think it is a reprieve for most people. I think it's dangerous to run away from your problems, but I also do not think it's healthy to live in that muck 24/7. You need time to rest, and the American Songbook gives us that.



TS: Is diversity in casting important to you?

CB: It's very important to me. I think the issue of diversity is something we all need to continue working at and talking about. We won't make progress unless we keep it at the forefront of our minds. I don't think every single project has to cast a certain quota of black people, or Asian people, or Latino people, because when you approach it that way, it just becomes obvious. I do think that when you look at the talent in our community, it is varied from race to race and color to color, and because that variation reflects who lives in the country, it makes sense to cast a talented and diverse cast. I grew up watching all the old musical films, and there weren't really people who looked like me playing the leads in them. I wondered what it would've been like if somebody like me was playing those roles. Now that I am getting to play some of these roles onstage, I hope there are kids of color who are seeing these shows, seeing someone who looks like them and perhaps thinking that they can do it, too.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who say they want to be in the acting profession?

CB: It's hard work, and you have to remember that. Continue reading, continue learning, and don't forget that part of our job is to play other people, to live the lives of others onstage. If you don't allow yourself everything that life has to offer, you are cutting yourself short. You need to live life fully in order to understand who these people you are attempting to play really are. I acted in a film entitled *Sugar*, and I played a guy who was on the spectrum and was homeless. The director wrote the project based on his own personal experience. I spent a few nights sleeping outside among that community.

So many of them came from families who shunned them for various reasons. They didn't have any support system and found a new family of sorts on the streets. Because of that experience, I found myself understanding aspects of human life that I never would have understood otherwise.

Also, don't forget to have fun. Acting is perfect yin and yang, a perfect balance of hard work and play. The second you start to view it solely as work or as a grind, you will lose all the joy that's in it. •

GENERATIONS OF GENDER NORMS

Roundabout's production of *Kiss Me, Kate* is shaped by creative decisions that were made during three distinctly different eras, each with its own understanding of gender. Knowledge of these contexts can help make sense of moments in the show that can feel limited in their understanding of gender politics.

The Taming of the Shrew 1590

The family and social structures of Elizabethan England confined women to domestic servitude and restricted them from engaging in public life, including the theatre. As such, in the first productions of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, the female characters of Katharina and Bianca were played by young boys.

The dominant ideology of the day viewed women as belonging to their fathers until the time of their marriage, when they became their husband's property. They were rarely allowed an opinion about whom they married and were instead given to the suitor their father selected. As marriage was seen as a contract, fathers were also expected to pay a dowry of land or money to the husband to seal the union.

While there is debate as to whether Shakespeare intended to critique or to reinforce these gender dynamics, the original play concludes with a monologue from Katharina that accurately summarizes the dominant ideology of the day:

*I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love and obey.*

KISS ME, KATE

1948

Despite a powerful surge of women in the workforce during World War II, the conventional family model sprung back to that of "male breadwinner/female homemaker" shortly after the end of the war. In an eerie parallel to the Elizabethan Era, women were once again expected to be subservient, and their opportunities were limited to the domestic sphere. Popular culture of the time portrayed women as simple-minded and easily pleased by material comforts. It was not uncommon for corporal punishment to be used to maintain the social order of the day.



Advertisements like this one for Chase & Sanborn Coffee reveal how common and unquestioned spousal abuse was in the 1950s.

KISS ME, KATE!

2019

Today, these past norms are shocking, and it's recognized that they were oppressive, objectifying, and abusive. Additionally, the formerly popular concept of the "war of the sexes" featured in *Kiss Me, Kate* has grown outdated with the modern understanding of gender equality and acknowledgement of gender as a spectrum rather than a binary.

While it is gratifying to look back and recount the distance we've come, it is equally pressing to consider how far there is to go. Current reports approximate that one in three women in the U.S. has experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner, and women who choose to work outside the home still make between \$0.54 to \$0.80 on the dollar compared to their male counterparts, depending on their race. While revivals can be used as a lens to inspect our social history, they also provide an opportunity to reflect upon the period in which they are performed and the challenges of the current moment.



LUNT AND FONTANNE: A LIVELY LEGACY

The heavens aligned when Alfred Lunt (1892-1977) and Lynn Fontanne (1887-1983) met in New York in 1917. Fontanne, an established actor from England, had made her Broadway debut the previous year; Lunt was building an impressive résumé of smaller parts on Boston and Manhattan stages. Introduced by mutual friends, the two formed a close friendship, working together for the first time in 1919's *Made of Money*. They were married in 1922.

Enamored of each other's talents, the two resolved never to work apart again. For the rest of their lives, they negotiated joint contracts and appeared in 27 plays together over four decades. Perhaps the duo's most beloved performance, and certainly their most enduring, was in the 1935 production of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The play, in which a suitor tries to "tame" his boisterous soon-to-be bride, was a perfect fit for Lunt and Fontanne's large personalities. Arnold Saint-Subber, a young stage manager working on their production, became fascinated with the pair, and he took meticulous note of how Fontanne shouted and smashed instruments and crockery while in character, and how she and Lunt would snipe at each other off-stage, critiquing each other's performances as though they were the bitterest of rivals. As he dodged dishes and helped settle skirmishes, an idea grew in the stage manager's head: in 1947, having successfully become a Broadway producer, Saint-Subber worked the famous actors' squabbles into a musical.

Saint-Subber and partner Lemuel Ayers approached Sam and Bella Spewack, another creative couple known for fiery tempers, to write the book. Bella brought Cole Porter to the team as composer and lyricist, and the rest was history:

opening in 1948, critics hailed *Kiss Me, Kate* as "the best [musical] in the world," and it became the recipient of the first ever Tony Award for Best Musical.

Mirroring Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne's lives, *Kiss Me, Kate* follows the making of a production of *Shrew* by actor and director Fred Graham and his co-star and ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi. The musical is littered with references to the on- and-off-stage foibles that inspired it: in the 1935 production, Fontanne opened the show by shooting a bird with a blunderbuss gun, echoed in *Kate's* Act 1 finale. At one point, Lilli shoves sausages down the front of her dress, just as Fontanne did in *Shrew*. And of course, Lunt and Fontanne's infamous spanking scene in 1935's production has become a pivotal moment in the musical.



Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne seated on the steps at Ten Chimneys, their home in Genesee Depot, Wisconsin. By Warren O'Brien from the O'Brien Family Collection at WHS ©Ten Chimneys Foundation

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne brought once-in-a-lifetime charisma and energy to the stage. One moment, they'd be screeching; the next, kissing to make up. This frenetic and inspirational pacing, forever immortalized in *Kiss Me, Kate*, has had tremendous and lasting impact, and its shining, slapdash spirit is a fitting gift from two of America's treasured theatre artists. •



HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE KATE?

KATE!

In the years since its 1948 Broadway debut, *Kiss Me, Kate* has become one of the most celebrated works in the musical theatre canon, but has also spawned controversy. The debate around *Kiss Me, Kate* centers on the relationship between the show's principal characters, ex-spouses and musical co-stars Lilli Vanessi and Fred Graham. As Lilli and Fred channel an offstage conflict into their onstage performances on the opening night of their latest show, Fred takes it upon himself to "tame" Lilli's improvisational behavior in ways that verge on aggressive and even abusive. After episodes of fighting, spanking, and manipulation, Lilli reconciles with Fred and apologizes on behalf of all women for such disobedient behavior as her own.

It is the show's apparent approval of Fred's more troublesome actions—and furtherance of the idea that women should be subservient to men—that, for many, puts *Kiss Me, Kate* on questionable moral footing. So why revive a musical that seems to espouse outdated and potentially dangerous views of gender roles?

REVIVALS AND RESPONSIBILITY

The job of an effective revival is not to deliver a carbon copy of a show's original production or necessarily reiterate its original message. Rather, it is to contend with the truths of the past through the lens of the present. *Kiss Me, Kate*'s status as a landmark "Great American Musical" with a story and songbook that are woven deeply into the fabric of our art form makes the truths of its past particularly important to address.

A classic show like *Kiss Me, Kate* can tell us a lot about the time in which it was created. Prevailing attitudes and beliefs of the 1940s can be deduced from how the show treats its characters, stages its comedy, and frames its musical numbers. These attitudes and beliefs, as distant or contentious as they may sometimes be, remain a part of our history and are therefore in conversation with the major societal questions of today. As in any conversation, perspectives may clash, but together all can help us achieve a greater understanding of our present moment.

As written, the message of *Kiss Me, Kate* may very well be problematic. But, in conjunction with some other shows in Roundabout's 2018-2019 season that disavow the traditional gender roles that *Kiss Me, Kate* may affirm—namely, Theresa Rebeck's *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, Alexi Kaye Campbell's *Apologia*, and Ming Peiffer's *Usual Girls*—*Kiss Me, Kate* can contribute to current dialogues about misogyny by investigating the cultural norms that drove it decades ago and that persist today.

NEW PRODUCTIONS, NEW APPROACHES

Roundabout's current revival of *Kiss Me, Kate* dives into these dialogues by exploring the ways in which both Fred Graham and Lilli Vanessi wield power in their passionate and often explosive relationship. In the words of director Scott Ellis, "These are two extremely strong people, who are jockeying throughout the show. How do we keep strength on both sides?"



HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE KATE?

KISS ME, KATE is far from the only show that has been revived recently that must grapple with material many find unsavory. How have others approached the challenges of these kinds of productions?

THE ONLY SENSIBLE SOLUTION

UNIVERSITY of North Carolina professor Tim Carter, author of a book about Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1945 musical *Carousel*, on the show's infamous number in which a main character defends a man's right to hit a woman:

"It is almost impossible to rescue the show from Julie Jordan's apparent acceptance of domestic abuse. The only sensible solution — in my view — is to accept the problem and then engage with it, rather than, say, sanitizing the work to remove the problem in the first place. Otherwise there's no end to it."

"A LOVE SONG TO A WOMAN & HER WORK"

Actress Melissa Errico, on playing Lilli Vanessi in *Kiss Me, Kate* in a production at Bay Street Theater:

"Immersed in the part [of Lilli Vanessi], I came to see the musical as a love song to a woman and her work. Lilli, like most other middle-aged actresses I know, longs to reconnect with her profession. With her former husband, Fred, involved with another woman, she does what all actors do — transfers her fury and fire into performance, speaking her truth through the words of her character. By her final monologue, she reclaims her power by reclaiming her identity as an artist. (Of the rear-slapping, I will add that these roles are written as two mature performers with an excess of ego and bluster, and Lilli isn't exactly unafraid to throw things, including chairs and punches. An actress and actor keeping that in mind can play it with consensual relish.)"

"A CURIOUS EQUATION"

Director Phyllida Lloyd, on directing Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* with an all-female cast at Shakespeare in the Park:

"[T]here's something about doing Shakespeare with a single gender, whether it is all-male or all-female that opens up certain possibilities...Petruccio behaves appallingly, and really abuses Kate by torturing her in order to force her into submission. I suppose we are able to push those themes slightly harder, and take them slightly further than maybe we would were this a man and a woman playing it. It would be maybe hard to embrace the horror of his behavior without losing complete sympathy for Petruccio. There is a curious equation by which we are able to commit quite boldly to it."

FANTASTIC BATTLE OF THE SEXES

DIRECTOR Lucy Bailey, who directed *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2012, on Petruccio's abusive behavior toward Kate in the play:

"[The conflict between Petruccio and Kate is] all foreplay to one event, which is to get these two people into bed...[T]he play quickly becomes odd if Petruccio starts to lecture, becomes the educator, or takes any moral position. It becomes punitive, and you start to think, 'This is dead and ghastly.' It is a fantastic battle of the sexes: it's because they won't allow each other to win that the game continues."

INTERVIEW WITH MUSIC DIRECTOR PAUL GEMIGNANI

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Paul Gemignani about his work as Music Director for *Kiss Me, Kate*.

Ted Sod: Were you born in California? I read you were educated in San Francisco.

Paul Gemignani: I was born in Albany, California. It's across the bridge and west of Oakland. It's almost on the water. And I was educated at San Francisco State University because the music staff was incredible. On the faculty teaching you your instrument were Laszlo Varga, Earl Bernard Murray, and the entire San Francisco Symphony. Roland Kohloff taught me percussion. Several of us gave up scholarships to other colleges in the area because of the collective talent in that music department.

TS: Will you talk about the teachers or other professionals who had a profound impact on you?

PG: Jewel Lord was a high school music teacher who let me do everything. He let me conduct, he let me write, anything I wanted to do. I must have played four or five instruments in high school before I made up my mind. He didn't care. He was a professional French horn player who taught school, and he was fantastic. The other influential teacher in high school was Arley Richardson, who was a woodwind player. They were both very open. They weren't dictatorial. That's totally unheard of in the music business. Lenny Bernstein, even though I never took lessons from him, taught me every day of my life. And Steve Sondheim, too. Those people have influenced my career the most.

TS: On *Kiss Me, Kate* you're going to be music director and conductor. Can you tell us what those job titles are responsible for?

PG: The music director is responsible for teaching the score and teaching it in a way that will make both the composer and director happy. The conductor conducts the orchestra every night as part of the performance. On Broadway, they hire someone called a "contractor" and that person hires the band. I don't like to do it that way. The guy who first hired me on Broadway didn't do it that way, and I thought it was a great idea, because I can hire people who I know will make the orchestra sound the way I want it to, which is my responsibility. In *Kiss Me, Kate's* orchestra, there are three new people, out of a total of 16, who have never played at Studio 54 before. It's similar to what a director does with a cast, only I am casting musicians.

TS: Larry Hochman is doing new orchestrations, correct?

PG: Yes, because the revival I worked on in 1999, with Brian Stokes Mitchell and the late Marin Mazzie in the leading roles, was so specific. Don Sebesky was the orchestrator then, and we did a whole different thing on that.

TS: Is it a challenge returning to a piece you've already music directed?

PG: I erase everything; it's like an Etch-a-Sketch. I think there's a hundred different ways of doing something. The most important thing is to remember that you are working with different people who are gifted in different ways. Kelli O'Hara is not Marin Mazzie, and Will Chase is not Brian Stokes Mitchell, and vice versa. They don't approach things the same way. I like starting with a clean slate. That's part of the reason we're doing new orchestrations.



TS: So, there are 16 in this orchestra. How many were in the '99 version?

PG: I think there were four more. It's not about Roundabout being cheap. I can get four more, but I can't fit them into the stage left and right boxes at Studio 54—which is where the orchestra is situated. I love Studio 54's set-up, because the orchestra can see the action instead of being underneath it.

TS: I'm curious how you decide which instruments will be in the house left boxes and which will be house right?

PG: Well, it's funny you ask that. I've changed it. I need the strings by me this time around, because they need the most attention. That's why I put them in front of me on the house left side. Why do I sit on house left? Because it's a better view of the stage. I can see more if I sit there. In terms of which instruments go where, you think about families. The string family goes in one place, the rhythm family goes in another, the woodwind family goes in another, the brass goes in yet another. The rhythm section in a 1940s show always incorporates guitar, drums, and bass, so I put the rhythm section upstairs house left, above my head. I moved the keyboard player to the house right side, since he's not playing rhythm. The woodwinds are sitting below, and up above that we have a bigger brass section than usual (two trumpets, a trombone, and a French horn). They are actually building a platform and fixing that area in order for this band to fit. We've had more people playing shows at Studio 54 before, but not this particular instrumentation. That's why we have to change it.



TS: How different is it to music direct a revival like *Kiss Me, Kate* as opposed to a new show?

PG: With a new show, you don't know what's going to work. You know "So in Love" is going to work. You know "Too Darn Hot" is going to work. All you have to do is do a fantastic job of putting it together. At the first preview of *Sweeney Todd*, we had no clue. We did the first act of *Sweeney Todd*, and when I came back at intermission, half the audience had gone away. When we did the first preview of *Sunday in the Park with George*, we sang "Sunday" at the end of the first act, and when we came back after intermission, there was no audience there because they thought the show was over. With a revival, all you need to do is a superior job of putting this score together. You use everything you've learned about the score since that show's original production.

TS: What are the challenges for performers singing a Cole Porter score like this one? Is there part of the show that you especially love?

PG: Well, I think "So in Love" is fantastic. I think all of Porter's songs are extraordinary. The challenge in this score becomes working with somebody for whom the whole world portrayed on stage is different from what they know and understand. They need to explore the style of this music to the point where they can do it justice. Not for the audience, but for them, for their characters. To hold on to the beauty of the period and the Shakespearean language can be difficult for some people. It is sometimes a challenge for actors who were born long after the show was first written, because nobody hears music like that on a daily basis anymore. Which is, in my mind, all the more reason to do it.

TS: Why do you think Cole Porter's work has staying power?

PG: I think he is a complete artist like Steve [Sondheim] is. I'm not comparing Porter to Sondheim, but he did write both music and lyrics. And when anybody writes both, their material is unmistakably intertwined. Kander and Ebb sounds like Kander and Ebb; it sounds like two people. With Cole Porter, the tune and lyrics come from the same soul and passion. I think Porter's work has longevity because it wasn't just frivolous. Yes, he's funny and witty, but he also wrote a lot of poetry that has lasting power. If you read the lyrics to "Were Thine that Special Face (available [HERE](#))," you'll understand what I am saying.

TS: You have been working with Warren Carlyle, the choreographer, and Scott Ellis, the director, for years now, and I'm wondering what you think makes this a successful collaboration?

PG: Scott and I have been working together since he was a performer in *The Rink*. Ever since he became a director, we've collaborated. We've done a lot of television together, we've done two productions of *A Little Night Music* at City Opera when it was going. He understands collaboration. I mean, when the choreographer can stand up and say to the director, "What would happen if we did it this way?" without getting his head bitten off or fired— that's true collaboration. Warren and Scott take it one step further. Anyone sitting in that room can suggest things. It's what makes their work great. It is why I'm here. It's why I keep coming back.

TS: Scott says that you are absolutely the best at working with actors.

PG: The three of us care about each other and what we're doing. Everyone working on a show of ours has a voice, which is what it's always been about for me. That's how I was trained by Hal Prince for 12 years in his office with Sondheim and other artists. I learned that collaboration means "speak up!" The ironic thing is that it doesn't happen very often. I can count on my left hand the times Scott and Warren and I have disagreed, and we have, heatedly, but it is because we don't want the audience to see a mediocre production. We want them to leave the theatre thrilled.

TS: You and your son Alex are going to be music directors on Roundabout's two musicals this season. *Kiss Me, Kate* and *Merrily We Roll Along* will be running simultaneously. What did you teach him?

PG: He's got many talents, and I always say to him, "You can do all these amazing creative things, and I can only do this one damn thing." But, it's true. Alex can do anything. He's orchestrating *Merrily*, too. I taught him nothing. He learned by example. He was in the theatre with me a lot. I always answered the questions he asked about the theatre. When he was at Michigan and decided he wanted to be a performer and not a musician, I simply said, "Do what you want. Follow your heart."

TS: Are there any musicals that you'd like to music direct or conduct that haven't been revived lately?

PG: I would have liked to conduct *Carousel*. And funnily enough, I wouldn't mind doing *A Little Night Music* again. Anything Steve Sondheim writes, I will do. •



ARTIST STATEMENTS

DAVID ROCKWELL, SET DESIGN

When designing a show-within-a-show, the first challenge is to create a distinct stylistic demarcation between “reality” and “the show.” In *Kiss Me, Kate*, “reality” is backstage at a historic Baltimore theatre in the late 1940s, which we wanted to portray with equal parts industrial realism and showbiz romanticism. Because of the number of locations and the need for several quick changes, our representation is intentionally abstracted and fragmented, with hanging line sets and drops and flats obscured by shadow. Three attached wagons travel up and down stage and are clad in dimensional brick with applied pipes, stairs, and backstage details. Two identical dressing rooms—one for Fred and one for Lilli—are also three-dimensional and track in. Because Studio 54 is such a nontraditional theatre space, we built a false proscenium to suggest the older-style playhouse where the action takes place. While we pulled countless research images, there was one shot in particular that Scott Ellis, the director, loved, and so much of our backstage is based on a single photograph. “The show” is a musicalized version of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, set in Padua, which we’ve given an unmistakably theatrical, two-dimensional style, typical of stage productions of the era. Cut drops feature painted pastoral and Renaissance scenes in a naturalistic, loose, sketchy style. The hand-painted sets were manipulated digitally and reproduced to scale by scenic painters, making sure that the sketchiness of the linework was retained in the process. The ultimate goal was to create two very distinct worlds designed to complement but never compete with one another.

JEFF MAHSHIE, COSTUME DESIGN

This show takes place in the late 1940s, as well as the 16th century. Scott likes to approach revivals with a new take, so when we began the conversation about the costumes, we discussed how the show had been handled in the past. Most productions have used a traditional musical comedy approach when designing the clothes. During this time period, America was becoming highly sophisticated and cultured. Cole Porter’s music and lyrics have urbane wit and, given the fashions of the time, we feel our production should lend itself to a chic interpretation without sacrificing comedy. This era was truly a revolutionary time in fashion. The postwar “New Look” by Christian Dior swept the fashion world. Kelli O’Hara’s character, Lilli, even references her “New Look” wardrobe in the script. The fashion designs of this era are quite luxurious, in direct response to years of wartime fabric rationing. This new extravagance sets the

tone for my designs. Many leading ladies during this time period went to their favorite fashion designers to create their stage costumes, so even the 16th-century garments will be created through the lens of the late 1940s. I’ve worked very closely with David Rockwell, the set designer, so our color choices harmonize. I have consulted with Warren Carlyle, the choreographer, so the clothes move with the actors and enhance his work on the dancing. It’s been a lot of hard work, but with Scott Ellis at the helm, we are always guaranteed to have tremendous fun.

DONALD HOLDER, LIGHTING DESIGN

Kiss Me, Kate is a hilarious romantic comedy, filled with classic Broadway showtunes and graced with an irreverent and at times brazen sense of humor that’s derived from a unique convergence between the writings of Cole Porter, Bella and Sam Spewack, and William Shakespeare. There’s a love for the spotlight and an over-the-top performance style both onstage and off that imbues the proceedings with a larger-than-life sensibility. The musical seamlessly navigates between the gritty yet glamorous backstage environs of a Baltimore theatre and the whimsical Elizabethan settings of “the show.” The lighting will underscore the unique qualities of these two worlds. The behind-the-scenes environs will feature a golden and sepia-toned palette, referential to the incandescent lighting sources that were common during the time period of the play. The sense of light streaming through theatrical rigging and theatre infrastructure, casting interesting and unexpected patterns of light and shadow, will also be a dominant part of the backstage lighting vocabulary. The light for the play within the play will feature a richly hued and layered color palette, rendered much like a three-dimensional version of the painterly scenic backgrounds that David Rockwell has created for the production. *Kiss Me, Kate* is energetic and jubilant, revered for its ability to entertain and delight. The lighting will deliver this energy to the production on a visceral level, revealing sparkling and vivid stage pictures that allow the audience to lose themselves in a show that seems from another time, but feels just as vital and intoxicating as it did the day it premiered.

BRIAN RONAN, SOUND DESIGN

My first exposure to *Kiss Me, Kate* was the wonderful revival in 1999. I was still mixing sound as an operator back then and was beginning to dabble in my own sound designs. At the time, I was mixing *Rent* on Broadway and had that driving rock score flowing through my veins. From



the moment the *Kiss Me, Kate* overture began, my ears reopened to a traditional Broadway score. With Brian Stokes Mitchell and Marin Mazzie singing the leads, the music reminded me that this classic sound had a firm place in what I thought to be contemporary music's landscape. My old friend, sound designer Tony Meola, had done his usual magic, and the show had a pure sonic quality that I knew one day I'd emulate. That this current revival is playing at Studio 54 allows me as a designer to harness the room's classic architecture to compliment the pure orchestrations played by these musicians and sung by this insanely talented cast.

DAVID BRIAN BROWN, HAIR AND WIG DESIGN

My research for the hair and wig design is based on two distinctly different time periods: the late 1940s and the 16th century. I consulted numerous historically authentic paintings, films, photographs, books, yearbooks, fashion magazines, retail catalogs, and press/newspapers of those respective periods. My collaboration is mainly with the costume designer, whose work will dictate who these characters are. I also take into consideration the director's take on individual characters, the actor's take on her/his character, and Warren Carlyle's choreography, which is very energetic. When a wig dances, you want it to swing back into place when the movement stops! After receiving and processing all the above information, I choose colors and styles for each character, which I then share with the costume designer. Hair colors need to compliment the colors of the costumes. The wigs are then made, which takes about eight weeks, and there are approximately 24 wigs being made for this show. All the wigs are custom made, with lace fronts, and are completely hand tied. Once the wigs have been made, they are cut and styled, followed by a final fitting with the actor.

NIKKI DILORETO, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

My first introduction to *Kiss Me, Kate* was through my 99-year-old grandmother, a fan of Cole Porter and a regular Broadway audience member during the 1940s. As a new play director, I am thrilled to be working on a giant revival of a beloved 70-year-old musical and to be assisting someone who possesses the mastery exemplified time and again by Scott Ellis. Musical revivals prompt different questions than new musicals for the directing team, namely: how does a company take on a piece from a different perspective than before and make it relevant for a modern audience? We are in a transformative moment in America for gender stereotypes; people are looking more deeply now than ever before at relationships between men and women and at the meaning of gender identity itself. Where we are today in the United States is not where we were in post-WWII America, and it is up to this skillful team to build that link between the cultural milieu of 1948 and 2019 America. Warren and Scott have a history of amazing collaborations, getting inside the pieces, and conveying fluid storytelling throughout. As rehearsals approach, I'm excited to see how Scott, Warren, this unparalleled cast, and the rest of the creative team will penetrate the meaning of this theatrical moment. •



Costume sketches for *Kiss Me, Kate*



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR
EDUCATORS

HOW DO ACTORS AND DIRECTORS MAKE CASTING CHOICES TO EXPLORE GENDER AND POWER DYNAMICS IN SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7)

Before seeing *Kiss Me, Kate*, students explore Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and analyze the play's sexual politics.

PREPARE Ensure your students are familiar with the background of *The Taming of the Shrew* summarized on page 6-7, and lead a discussion on "Generations of Gender Norms" on page 12. Remind them that in Shakespeare's time, men played all male and all female roles. Next, do a group reading of this *The Taming of the Shrew* scene (found [HERE](#)) and provide a glossary on vocabulary and unfamiliar expressions in the text.

CASTING Tell the group you will be exploring how casting choices affect the interpretation of this play. Break students into groups of 3, attending to the gender identification of students, so that there is a mix of all-female, all-male, and mixed groups. One student in each group will be the director and the other two will play KATHARINA and PETRUCHIO.

REHEARSE Have students rehearse the scene, working on their feet and exploring basic staging. Encourage the directors and actors to explore the power dynamics in this scene. Set clear ground rules about how students should handle the "striking" action (if at all) based on their maturity.

PERFORM Choose a few groups to show their scenes, looking at a diverse range of gender casting (female/male, female/female, and male/male or cross-gender). As they watch, students should pay attention to how the gender of actors impacts the meaning of the scene.

REFLECT How do the interpretations differ, based on the gender of the actors? What do they think Shakespeare's play says about power dynamics between men and women?

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HOW DOES A COSTUME DESIGNER CREATE COSTUMES FOR A SHOW-WITHIN-A-SHOW THAT REFLECT BOTH LAYERS OF A CHARACTER?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9)

Before seeing *Kiss Me, Kate*, students explore the characters in both the musical (which takes place on a very warm day in Baltimore in 1948) and in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and discover the design challenges and possibilities of the production.

PREPARE As a class, read the "Spotlight" on page 2 of this guide, and the summary of *The Taming of the Shrew* on pages 6-7. (You may also read the Artist Statements on page 18-19). How are Kate and Shrew connected? Are there similar characters in each?

DESIGN Assign each student one major character in *Kiss Me, Kate* (found [HERE](#)) on the *Kiss Me, Kate* Activities Character List and have them design two costumes (using the figure templates found [HERE](#)) for that character: one that shows them in their 1948 street clothes, and one in the costume of their *Shrew* character.

SHARE Host a gallery walk. Have students display both of their designs, and discuss: What do we know about this person based on their street clothes? What is their personality and their status in life? How has this designer carried those ideas over into their *Shrew* costumes?



POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DOES AN ARTISTIC DIRECTOR ANALYZE A SHOW IN ORDER TO MAKE PRODUCING CHOICES?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1)

After seeing *Kiss Me, Kate*, students analyze the work from an artistic, economic, and social justice perspective.

BRAINSTORM Distribute post-it notes to all students. On one (or several), ask them to write something they liked about the production; on another (or several others), ask them to write things they didn't like. Have students add their post-its to "Pro" and "Con" areas on the board.

DISCUSS Give the class time to read and process both lists. Then introduce the concept of the Artistic Director of a theatre, the person who (among other responsibilities) has final say in choosing the plays, or the season, that a theatre produces. Have a student read Todd Haimes's, Artistic Director/CEO of Roundabout, note from page 2 of this guide. Why did Todd choose to produce this show?

WRITE Ask students to imagine they are Artistic Directors of their own theatre companies. Would they choose to produce *Kiss Me, Kate*? Have students write a persuasive statement, arguing why they would or would not produce the show in their theatre. Address at least one counter-argument while defending their decision. If desired, have several students deliver their arguments to the class.

REFLECT Why do theatres produce shows that challenge audiences? What else can make a show challenging to produce? Is the role of theatre to entertain, to educate, to activate, or some combination of the three?

SHARE Education at Roundabout wants to hear from your students, so please consider sharing students' responses with us [HERE](#).

HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT ADAPT THE BACKSTAGE RELATIONSHIPS OF *KISS ME, KATE* FROM A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B)

After seeing *Kiss Me, Kate*, students create and write their own scenes for an updated version of the show.

DISCUSS Read about "Generations of Gender Norms" on page 12. How do the characters and relationships in the backstage story in *Kiss Me, Kate* reflect values and stereotypes of the 1940s? How have gender norms changed in the 70 years since the original production? (Consider the impact of feminism, #MeToo, changing attitudes about LGBT people, and marriage equality.)

BRAINSTORM What contemporary backstage dynamics might we see in a contemporary version? How would gender and sexuality be expressed backstage today? How might a contemporary group of actors interpret *The Taming of the Shrew*? (For example: what if it were an all-female production?)

WRITE Students may work individually or in pairs to write one "backstage" scene about dynamics between actors who are performing *The Taming of the Shrew* today. How does the backstage relationship relate in some way to Shakespeare's original? Try to write at least 20 lines of dialogue. (Optional: if students are inclined, you may have them write lyrics for their own song relating to the backstage relationships.)

SHARE Allow a few students to read their scenes aloud.

REFLECT How are these backstage scenes different from what they saw in *Kiss Me, Kate*? How do their backstage scenes relate to Shakespeare's play? Which elements of the show are universal, and in contrast, which are specific to the historical period?



GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES

- CHIROPODIST:** A doctor who specializes in care for the feet. The word is an outdated synonym for the word podiatrist
Lois tells the cast that Bill is missing because he is visiting a doctor for back pain, but she mixes up a chiropodist with a chiropractor.
- AGA KHAN:** The title for the Imam, or spiritual leader, of the Nizari Ismaili sect of Muslims
Fred guesses that Lilli's new fiance might be the Aga Khan because he has immense wealth and the ear of the President of the United States.
- MAGNUM OPUS:** The greatest achievement of an artist or writer
*Fred tells Lilli that performing in *Cyrano de Bergerac* was his magnum opus.*
- BARTER THEATRE IN VIRGINIA:** A regional theatre known for permitting audiences to pay for tickets with their leftover produce and livestock from their farms. They advertised this option with the slogan "ham for *Hamlet*"
Fred and Lilli reminisce about their early days, when they worked at the Barter Theatre and were paid in ham.
- MAGNESIA:** A household term for magnesium oxide, commonly used as a laxative
The two gunmen incorrectly diagnose Fred with having magnesia, when they mean amnesia, or loss of memory.
- COXCOMB:** A vain and conceited man; a fool or jester
*Kate calls *Petruchio* a coxcomb for considering striking her.*

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ABOUT ROUNDABOUT



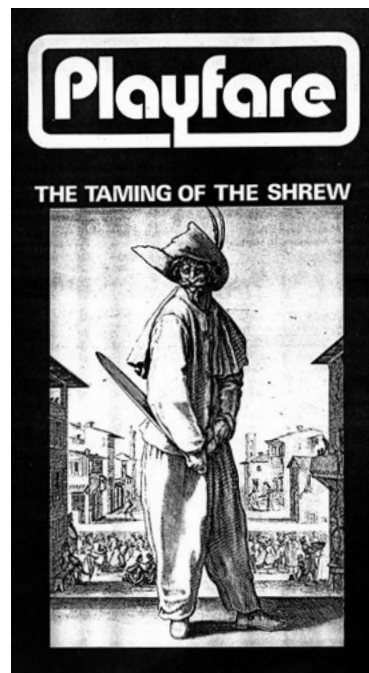
ROUNDABOUT ARCHIVES

PEEKING THROUGH THE CURTAIN: STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Kiss Me, Kate is a musical that uses the dramatic device of the play-within-the-play. Shakespeare's play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, which is embedded in this romantic comedy, was staged at Roundabout in 1972 at a time when the company regularly staged works by Shakespeare.

Plays within plays have been seen a few times lately in Roundabout's productions. Most recently, Theresa Rebeck's *Bernhardt/Hamlet* had Sarah Bernhardt working with her fellow players to stage *Hamlet*. Later in the show, some of those same players would perform Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (a play that Roundabout has staged twice in our 53-year history: first in 1997 and again in 2012).

In 2015, Roundabout staged a production of *Noises Off*, which follows a theatre troupe working on a staged production of a play called *Nothing On*. The audience watches the actors playing actors during rehearsals and then watches them once the show "opens." All of these are wonderful examples of metatheatre that can be discovered through our production archives. •



(L-R Clockwise) Playbill from the 1972 Roundabout production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Frank Langella in the 1997 Roundabout production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*; Production images of Roundabout's productions of *Bernhardt/Hamlet* (2019) and *Noises Off* (2015)

For more information on the Roundabout Archives, visit <https://archive.roundabouttheatre.org> or contact Tiffany Nixon, Roundabout Archivist, at archives@roundabouttheatre.org

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINA PEZZELLO, MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATE

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the Management Associate?

Christina Pezzello: I was born in Brooklyn and grew up in New Jersey. I went to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and received a business degree. Although I wasn't in the theatre department, I was part of student-run theatre and worked on all aspects of the productions. It was during that time I decided I wanted to pursue a career in theatre management. I was part of the first apprentice class at Roundabout. After my management apprenticeship was over, I got a job as Assistant to the Managing Director. In 2014, I moved over to General Management.

TS: Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

CP: I work with Roundabout's General Managers getting our shows from the script to stage, working primarily with Sydney Beers on the productions at Studio 54. This entails contracting everyone associated with the production, sorting out various logistics before rehearsals begin, and working with the artists to make sure they have all the resources they need.

TS: What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

CP: I love standing in the back of the theatre, watching the audience watch what we've been working on for months, especially for the first

time. It's exhilarating and feels like the first drop of a roller coaster. You just hold your breath and wait to see how an audience responds. It's a great moment for reflection and for learning. We are letting the world in, and it guides how the remaining rehearsal time is spent. The hardest part is working through a situation in which we have little or no control. There are several times throughout a production when a problem presents itself and, at first glance, seems impossible. It takes some creative problem-solving to find a solution. An example of that is travel for artists. If we are flying someone in from out of town, we work on their travel plans for weeks or even months ahead of time. We can plan as detailed and accurately as possible, but if that day comes and a snow storm is on the horizon, all that planning is re-evaluated, and the results are up to chance.

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

CP: I've always admired the breadth of the work Roundabout does. You can see a reimagined classic on one stage, walk a few blocks away, and experience a brand-new play by an emerging playwright all in the same day. That variety is also reflected in the work I get to do. One day I'll be writing contracts for a show that is happening several months away, and the next day I'll be at the theatre in tech rehearsals for a show that is about to have its first preview. The days are sometimes unpredictable, but it keeps me on my toes! •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

As a student participant in an Education at Roundabout program, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

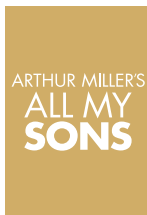
PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the restroom for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY • 2018-2019 SEASON



Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO), a not-for-profit company founded in 1965, celebrates the power of theatre by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present, and educating minds for the future. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting roundabouttheatre.org.



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