OLD VIC
NEW VOICES
EDUCATION



KISS ME, KATE

Music and lyrics by **COLE PORTER**
Book by **SAM & BELLA SPEWACK**

Teaching resources researched and
written by **SIMON POLLARD**

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THE OLD VIC THEATRE COMPANY

KISS ME, KATE

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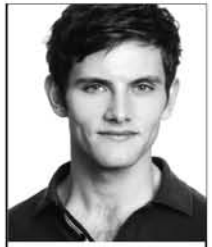
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Tim Walton
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OFF STAGE SWING



Stuart Winter
OFF STAGE SWING

COLE PORTER HIS STORY

Cole Albert Porter was born on 9 June 1891 in Peru, Indiana. His father, Sam Porter, was a local pharmacist and his mother, Kate Cole, was the daughter of James Omar 'J. O.' Cole allegedly 'the richest man in Indiana'. Porter proved a talented musician from an early age, learning the violin and piano from the age of six, and he composed his first operetta with the help of his mother when he was just ten years old. In 1905, he enrolled at the Worcester Academy in Massachusetts, where his musical skills made him very popular and he was elected class valedictorian. He went on to study English, Music and French at Yale University, where he wrote a great deal of music including songs for the football team and six full-scale musical productions, and was elected president of the Glee Club.

In 1913, at his grandfather's insistence, Porter left Yale to train as a lawyer at Harvard Law School. However, in his second year, he transferred to Harvard's school of arts and sciences to study music instead. Before long he began to enjoy moderate success as a composer; his song 'Esmerelda' is used in the Broadway revue *Hands Up*. He abandoned his studies and moved to New York to focus on his burgeoning musical career. His first Broadway show *See America First* opened on Broadway in 1916, but was a critical and commercial flop, closing just two weeks later. In 1917 he moved to Paris telling people that he was going to serve in the French Foreign Legion (a unsubstantiated story he continued to tell throughout his life). He actually lived a life of leisure among the French aristocracy, frequently hosting decadent parties.

In 1918 Porter met Linda Lee Thomas, a rich divorcée eight years his senior who had left her abusive husband. The two became great friends and, despite Porter's sexuality, married in 1919. It was a marriage of convenience that suited them both allowing Linda to retain her social status while presenting Porter as heterosexual to a world still hostile to the notion of homosexuality. Although Porter had several gay relationships over the course of his life, he and Linda remained devoted to each other until her death in 1952.

Porter continued to compose music in a variety of styles, with Linda encouraging him to focus on classical music rather than Broadway songs. However, in 1928, a musical for which Porter wrote the majority of the music – *Paris* – opened on Broadway and was widely considered a hit. It was made into a film the following year, and Porter continued writing for stage and screen to varying degrees of success over the years that followed. In 1934, Porter cemented his reputation as one of the most prolific songwriters of his generation, when he collaborated with P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton on *Anything Goes* which starred the Broadway legend Ethel Merman.

In 1937, Porter was involved in a horse-riding accident in which his legs were crushed, leaving him wheelchair-bound for the rest of his life. Although the accident affected his physical health and knocked his confidence socially, he continued to write. On the back of his recent success Porter wrote several more shows for Merman, but although each featured songs that would go on to become classics, none of the shows themselves were anywhere near as successful as *Anything Goes*. In 1948, after initially turning it down, he agreed to write the music for *Kiss Me, Kate*, which is now widely considered to be his masterpiece. It ran on Broadway for 1,077 performances and won the first ever Tony Award for Best Musical. The production transferred to London in 1951, and was made into a film in 1953.

In 1958, much to Porter's dismay, his deteriorating health led him to having his right leg amputated. From this moment on he stopped writing and became something of a social recluse. He eventually died of kidney failure on 15 October 1964 in Santa Monica, California. His fellow songwriters in the American Society of Composers and Authors paid the following tribute: 'Cole Porter's talent in the creation of beautiful and witty songs was recognised as unique throughout the world. His brilliant contributions in the field of musical theatre made him an international legend in his lifetime.'

Since his death, Porter's presence continues to be felt with frequent revivals of his most popular shows, with many of his songs being recorded by a variety of artists. In 1991, the centenary of his birth, an album entitled *Red Hot and Blue* was released, featuring contemporary artists such as U2 and Annie performing their versions of Porter classics. In 2004 a Porter biopic called *De-Lovely* was released, starring Kevin Kline, which featured Porter songs performed by Robbie Williams and Alanis Morrisette among others. His work continues to influence composers to this day, with Sondheim in particular owing a great deal to Porter's lyrical ingenuity. Sondheim himself wrote that 'Technically, in both music and lyrics, no one is better than Porter and few are his equals.'

SAM & BELLA SPEWACK
THEIR STORY

Samuel Spewack was born in the Ukraine on 16 September 1899, and Bella Cohenwas born in Bucharest on 25 March in the same year. They both immigrated to New York with their families when they were children. Upon leaving school, they both began to pursue careers as journalists, and their paths first crossed in 1921. They got married the following year and began working together as foreign correspondents, moving to Moscow for four years.

In 1926, they moved back to the USA and settled in New Hope, Pennsylvania. They began to write comedy plays together, many of which were performed on Broadway including *The Solitaire Man*, *Boy Meets Girl* and their most popular play *My Three Angels*. In 1938, they worked alongside Cole Porter adapting another of their plays, *Clear All The Wires* into a musical entitled *Leave It To Me!* It starred Gene Kelly and Mary Martin, and was directed by Sam Spewack himself. The couple continued to write plays and screenplays together, earning an Academy Award nomination for *My Favourite Wife* in 1940.

When Bella was approached by producers Arnold Saint Subber and Lemuel Ayers to write the book for *Kiss Me, Kate*, she and Sam were separated following a major marital dispute. She worked alongside Cole Porter on the structure of the script, but felt that it was lacking something and so called on her estranged husband and writing partner for help. With life imitating art, the couple put aside their differences and rekindled their relationship when the show opened in 1948.

Although they continued to write, both as a team and individually, they never achieved another success to rival *Kiss Me, Kate*, and they stopped writing in the mid-1950s. After Sam's death on 14 October 1971, Bella spent her time travelling the country to see regional productions of *Kiss Me, Kate*, and she died on 29 April 1990.



CHRONOLOGY
COLE PORTER'S CAREER

1891 – Cole Albert Porter is born on 9 June in Peru, Indiana.

1913 – Porter enrols at Harvard Law School before transferring to study music instead.

1915 – Porter's song 'Esmerelda' is used in the Broadway revue *Hands Up*.

1916 – Porter's first Broadway show *See America First* opens on Broadway, but it is a critical and commercial flop, and closes two weeks later.

1923 – Porter composes a short ballet *Within the Quota*, in collaboration with Gerald Murphy.

1924 – After the songs he has written for the revue *Greenwich Village Follies* are cut during its Broadway run, Porter considers abandoning his songwriting career.

1928 – *Paris*, which Porter writes most of the songs for, including 'Let's Misbehave' and 'Let's Do It', opens on Broadway and is considered a hit.

1929 – *Paris* is made into a film by MGM.

– *Wake Up and Dream*, a revue, opens in London, before transferring to New York.

– *Fifty Million Frenchmen* (Broadway)

1930 – *The New Yorkers* (Broadway)

1932 – *Gay Divorce*, featuring the song 'Night and Day' opens on Broadway starring Fred Astaire.

1933 – *Nymph Errant* (West End)

1934 – *Anything Goes*, starring Ethel Merman, featuring the songs 'I Get A Kick Out of You' and 'You're The Top', and with a book by P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton, opens on Broadway and is an immediate hit.

1935 – *Anything Goes* opens in London.

– *Jubilee* (Broadway)

1936 – Porter composes the music for the MGM film *Born To Dance*, which includes the songs 'You'd Be So Easy To Love' and 'I've Got You Under My Skin.'

– *Red Hot and Blue* (Broadway)

1937 – *Rosalie* (film)

1938 – *You Never Know* (Broadway)

– *Leave It to Me!* (Broadway)

1939 – *DuBarry Was a Lady* (Broadway)

1940 – *Panama Hattie* (Broadway)

1941 – *Let's Face It!* (Broadway)

– *You'll Never Get Rich* (film)

1943 – *Something for the Boys* (Broadway)

– *Something to Shout About* (film)

1944 – *Mexican Hayride* (Broadway)

– *Seven Lively Arts* (Broadway)

1946 – *Around the World* (Broadway)

– Cary Grant stars in the semi-biographical film *Night and Day* which featured many of Porter's classic hits.

1948 – *Kiss Me, Kate* opens on Broadway and runs for 1,077 performances. It wins the first Tony Award for Best Musical.

1950 – *Out of this World* (Broadway)

1951 – *Kiss Me, Kate* opens in London, where it runs for 400 performances.

1952 – *Can-Can* (Broadway)

1953 – *Kiss Me, Kate* (film)

1955 – *Silk Stockings* (Broadway)

1956 – *High Society* (film)

1957 – *Les Girls* (film)

1958 – *Aladdin* (TV)

1964 – Porter dies of kidney failure on 15 October in Santa Monica, California.

KISS ME, KATE
NOTABLE PRODUCTIONS

1948 – After an initial short run at the Shubert Theatre in Philadelphia, *Kiss Me, Kate* opens at the New Century Theatre starring Patricia Morison as Lilli and Alfred Drake as Fred.

1951 – Sam Spewack restages the production at the London Coliseum, with Patricia Morison reprising her role as Lilli, and Bill Johnson as Fred.

1953 – Howard Keel and Kathryn Grayson star in the film version of *Kiss Me, Kate*.

1970 – English National Opera revival at the Coliseum starring Ann Howard and Emile Belcourt.

1987 – Royal Shakespeare Company revival at The Old Vic starring Nichola McAuliffe and Paul Jones.

1997 – Revival at the Open Air Theatre in Regent' Park starring Louise Gold and Andrew C. Wadsworth.

1999 – Major Broadway revival at the Martin Beck Theatre starring Brian Stokes Mitchell and Marin Mazzie, winning the Tony Award for Best Musical Revival and Best Actor in a Musical.

2001 – The Broadway production transfers to the Victoria Palace Theatre in London, with Marin Mazzie performing opposite Brent Barrett.

2012 – Sir Trevor Nunn directs *Kiss Me, Kate* at Chichester Festival Theatre. The production transfers to The Old Vic.

ANOTHER OP'NIN', ANOTHER SHOW

The story behind *Kiss Me, Kate*



In 1935, Arnold Saint Subber was working as a stagehand on the Broadway production of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Katherina and Petruchio were played by husband-and-wife acting team Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne (most commonly referred to as 'The Lunts'). The Lunts were famous for their vow to only ever perform alongside each other, and over the course of their career they played lead roles in plays by Coward, Chekhov and of course, Shakespeare. According to Laurence Maslon, 'The stage was their temple and the stardust they threw off past the footlights enchanted several generations […]They were famous for their meticulous preparation, overlapping dialogue and near-neurotic obsessions with stage business and its effects.' However, what struck Saint Subber most of all, was that during *The Taming of the Shrew*, the couple would allow their on-stage arguments to spill over into their real lives, and they would carry on fighting backstage.

Years later, when he was working as a producer alongside set designer Lemuel Ayers, he decided to use his experiences with the Lunts as the basis for a musical. They approached Bella Spewack to write the book, who in turn approached Cole Porter who was at first resistant to the idea, thinking that Shakespeare was too highbrow a source for a musical. However, Bella persisted and eventually managed to convince him. In a recent interview with The Old Vic Trevor Nunn said;

What fascinated Cole Porter about the idea of the book was that it could exist on two different levels of reality: there is the backstage story of what happens to a group of actors in real life, their relationships, their temperaments, their flaws and failings; but then an onstage life as they transform themselves into Shakespeare's characters as part of a musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. What's enthralling, of course, is that a lot of the onstage events start to reflect or influence behaviour offstage, and vice versa. Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello, in his *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), was the leading playwright of his generation to really explore the crossover between art and life. He was completely fascinated by the limits of where reality ended and acting began. I think this interface engrossed Cole Porter too, as he began to consider how much the roles of Katharine and Petruchio influenced and motivated the offstage lives of Lilli and Fred, and vice versa.

Lilli and Fred ultimately ended up being very different from the Lunts. They were divorcées rather than a happily married couple, and Fred as actor-director-producer was more reminiscent of Orson Welles than Alfred Lunt. The resulting show is as much a love-letter to the vibrant backstage world that Porter knew so well, as it is a hilarious and moving exploration of the complexities of human relationships. The show opened on Broadway in 1948 to great acclaim, wowing critics and audiences alike, and giving all involved their biggest hit to date. In 1949, *Kiss Me, Kate* was the recipient of the very first Tony Award for Best Musical, with Porter, the Spewacks, Ayers and Saint Subber each also picking up awards for their respective roles in the show's creation.

KISS ME, KATE SYNOPSIS

ACT I



It is 1948, and at the Ford Theatre in Baltimore, a theatre company are preparing for the opening night of a new musical based on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. They are led by impresario Fred Graham who is not only directing and producing the show, but also starring as the romantic lead Petruchio. Controversially he has hired his ex-wife Lilli Vanessi to perform opposite him as the titular 'shrew', Katherina. Both have seemingly moved on, with Fred having an affair with the young actress Lois Lane, who is playing Katherina's sister Bianca, and Lilli recently engaged to war veteran General Harrison Howell. The estranged couple fight constantly, but as they reminisce together in their dressing room, it becomes clear that they still have feelings for each other.

Meanwhile Lois's other love interest Bill Calhoun, who plays the role of Lucentio, has got into a spot of trouble while gambling with a gangland boss, and has signed an IOU for $10,000, using Fred's name instead of his own. When two gangsters show up at the theatre to collect the debt from Fred he claims to have never signed the IOU and so they leave. When a bouquet of flowers from Fred is delivered to Lilli's dressing room, she realises that she is still deeply in love with him. Little does she know that the flowers were in fact intended for Lois.

The performance of *The Taming of the Shrew* begins and seems to be running smoothly. However, after reading the gift-card that came with the flowers, Lilli realises her mistake and storms onstage to confront Fred. The rest of the cast try and keep the play going as they fight each other in character, ending with Fred violently spanking Lilli. Offstage Lilli threatens to leave the show, but when the gangsters return, Fred tells them that he'll only be able to pay them if the show is a success, and that it certainly won't be if Lilli leaves. The gangsters threaten Lilli at gunpoint and decide to chaperone her throughout the rest of the performance to ensure she doesn't get away. To this end, they put on costumes and try to blend in with the members of the ensemble as Katherina and Petruchio are married onstage.

ACT II

As the play restarts, General Harrison Howell arrives looking for Lilli. He and Lois recognise each other as former lovers, which upsets Bill when he overhears them talking. Lois promises Bill that she's always faithful to him, in her own way. Howell refuses to believe Lilli's protestations about the gangsters, and tells her that he has moved their wedding forward to tomorrow afternoon. The gangsters in turn, discover that their boss has been killed and that the IOU is therefore void. With no reason to stay, Lilli leaves the theatre.

The gangsters, who by now are quite enjoying themselves, perform an impromptu tribute to Shakespeare as Fred tries to work out how to continue the show without Lilli. As the curtain goes up on the final scene, with everybody expecting an understudy to be playing the part of Katherina, Lilli returns and delivers her final monologue declaring her love for and submission to Petruchio. With the lines between their onstage and offstage personas blurring, Lilli/Katherina and Fred/Petruchio kiss.

KISS ME, KATE
CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

LILLI VANESSI
Lilli is a prolific Hollywood actress, who is currently playing the lead role of Katherina in a new musical based on *The Taming of the Shrew*. She divorced her director and co-star Fred Graham exactly a year ago, and has recently become engaged to General Harrison Howell. Lilli is passionate and demanding, her fiery personality mirroring her onstage persona, but she reveals her softer side when she realises that she cannot escape her romantic feelings towards Fred.

FRED GRAHAM
Fred is the 'Actor-Manager' of the new musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and also plays the role of Petruchio. Having divorced his leading actress Lilli a year ago, he is now having a secret affair with another actress, Lois. His last theatrical project was unsuccessful and he is determined to make this show a success. Like Lilli, he is incredibly passionate and clever, manipulating events in his favour, but resorts to physical violence when all else fails.

LOIS LANE
Lois is an attractive young actress, who plays the role of Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Formerly a performer in nightclub, she is not particularly experienced at performing Shakespeare, and gets frequently confused. She is romantically involved with her co-star Bill Calhoun, but is also having an affair with the director Fred. She despairs at Bill's gambling addiction, and reveals to him that although she may not be 100% faithful to him, she is in love with him.

BILL CALHOUN
Bill is an actor, who plays the role of Lucentio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. He enjoys gambling, but frequently loses, getting himself into trouble. He is dishonest, signing an IOU for a gambling debt using Fred's name instead of his own. He is in love with his co-star Lois, but worries about her flirtatious behaviour.

THE GANGSTERS
The two gangsters are sent to the theatre by the unseen Mr. Hogan to claim the $10,000 dollars apparently owed to him by Fred. Although they carry guns and are clearly dangerous men, they both behave politely and enjoy using long and complicated words. They are committed to doing whatever it takes to get the money even dressing up in costume and becoming a part of the show.

GENERAL HARRISON HOWELL
Harrison Howell is Lilli Vanessi's fiancé. He served as a military general in the Second World War, and now that the war is over he is pursuing a career in politics. He is close friends with the current President Harry S. Truman although his political allegiances are unclear, as he is also asked by Republican presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey. He is very keen to marry Lilli as soon as possible, although his motives are questionable.

HATTIE AND PAUL
Hattie and Paul are dressers, whose responsibility is to help Lilli and Fred in and out of their costumes. They are the only African-Americans employed by the theatre and both put up with being treated like servants, frequently going above and beyond their call of duty. They are an important part of backstage life and are popular with the rest of the cast and crew. Hattie is world-weary and tired, whereas Paul is keen and excitable. They are clearly fond of each other, and behave flirtatiously around each other.

THE BACKSTAGE CREW
We are introduced to several members of the backstage crew involved in staging the production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, including Ralph the call-boy and the friendly doorman Pops.

THE PLAYERS
Also engaged to perform in *The Taming of the Shrew* are the elderly Harry Trevor who plays Baptista, Riley who plays Hortensio, and the other actors who play suitors to Bianca and various ensemble roles.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

Kiss Me, Kate contains some of Cole Porter's most witty and memorable songs, referencing a variety of musical styles in order to reflect and differentiate the various plots happening on and offstage. Trevor Nunn noted in a recent interview with The Old Vic; 'for me, Porter is a precursor of Stephen Sondheim in terms of his linguistic wickedness and lyrical dexterity. What is particularly clever in *Kiss Me, Kate* is his use of certain modern references in his *Taming of the Shrew* work to make us aware that we are watching a contemporary musical version of a Renaissance story. So there are wheels within wheels within wheels.'

ACT 1

'Another Op'nin', Another Show'
The company and crew of *The Taming of the Shrew* sing about their trepidation and excitement that it is the opening night of the show. It is a traditional big and bold full company number, which reflects the audience's own experience as they themselves are about to watch 'another show'.

'Why Can't You Behave?'
Lois chastises Bill over his gambling habit in an upbeat love song that introduces the personalities of both characters, and includes some great comic lines such as "There I'll care for you forever / Well, at least till you dig my grave."

'Wunderbar'
Lilli and Fred reminisce about one of their first acting jobs together – "a little British makeshift of an operetta that was laid in Switzerland" - and sing one of the songs from the show, which Porter has written as a deliberate pastiche of the operetta style.

'So in Love'
Upon receiving a bunch of flowers from Fred, which she presumes are for her, Lilli realises that although she wishes she wasn't she is still in love with him. It is a 'torch' song – traditionally a musical theatre song about unrequited love and uses a tango rhythm to heighten the romantic but dark lyrics: "So haunt me and hurt me, deceive me, desert me. I'm yours till I die."

'We Open in Venice'
This is the opening number for the musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and is performed by 'The Players'. Like the rest of the songs written for the play-within-the-play, it has a very different musical style from the songs sung backstage.

'Tom, Dick or Harry'
Bianca (played by Lois) is being wooed by three suitors - Gremio, Hortensio and Lucentio (played by Bill) - who each try to persuade her that she should choose them. She replies that she would happily marry any of them, or in fact anyone.

'I've Come to Wive It Wealthily in Padua'
Petruchio (played by Fred) arrives in Padua and tells Bianca's suitors that he is looking for a wife. He doesn't mind what she looks like, or how she behaves as long as she is rich. Porter has fun using various 'Shakespearean' exclamations such as 'Zounds', 'Gadzooks' and 'Good gad.'

'I Hate Men'
Katharine (played by Lilli) delivers a comic number about her hatred for all men. In a nod to Shakespeare, the song is written using an iambic rhythm, the first line of each verse using the iambic pentameter (which features five iambs in a line), and the rest of the verse using the iambic heptameter (which features seven).

'Were Thine That Special Face'
Petruchio attempts to woo Katherina, telling her wryly that if she possessed all of the ideal qualities he was looking for, then he would love her. During the song, he claims to realise that actually she is the woman he is looking for. The majority of the song is written in a minor key, but it modulates to major at the very end. To add complications to the dynamic of the song, Lilli has just discovered that Fred had intended the flowers for Lois.

'We Sing of Love'
An upbeat number sung by The Players, with lyrics switching from English to Italian, that serves as an introduction to Petruchio and Katherina's wedding.

'Kiss Me, Kate'
The title song is sung as an argument between Petruchio and Katharine, immediately following their wedding. As the lines between onstage and offstage blur, the lyrics are given added venom by the unresolved tension between Lilli and Fred.

ACT II

'Too Darn Hot'
Backstage during the interval, Paul (Fred's dresser) and the rest of the cast and crew of *The Taming of the Shrew* complain about the heat. Unlike the majority of the other songs in the show, it adds little in terms of plot, but allows the opportunity for a thrilling dance number. The lyrics are full of innuendo and refer to the Kinsey report regarding American attitudes towards sex.

'Where is the Life That Late I Led?'
Back onstage, Petruchio bemoans his current married state, reflecting back on his promiscuous single life. It is an example of the 'list' song that Porter became renowned for, and is full of playful double entendres such as 'You gave a new meaning to the leaning Tower of Pisa.'

'Always True to You in My Fashion'
When Bill overhears Lois flirting with General Harrison Howell, Lois mischievously protests that she will always remain faithful to him, in her own way. She references various romantic conquests including the real-life actor Clark Gable, who was apparently delighted to have been referenced by Porter.

'From This Moment On'
This song was not in the original production, but was added for the 1953 film. Lilli and General Harrison Howell proclaim their love for each other, although there is a sense that Lilli is doing it to make Fred, who is also present jealous.

'Bianca'
Lucentio rehearses his declaration of love for Bianca, in a song that he has purportedly written for her himself. The lyrics are deliberately puerile, and the main focus of the number is a tap dance break.

'So in Love' (Reprise)
When Lilli leaves the theatre, Fred reflects on his own feelings for her in an echo of Lilli's earlier torch song.

'Brush Up Your Shakespeare'
The gangsters get lost on their way out of the theatre and find themselves thrust into the spotlight in front of the curtain. They advise the male members of the audience to "Brush up your Shakespeare, and the women you will wow." Another prime example of Porter's 'list songs,' the song references many Shakespeare works, and is laced with not so subtle innuendo. The song is a real crowd-pleaser and features not one but two encores.

'I Am Ashamed That Women Are So Simple'
As part of a bet with Lucentio and Hortensio to see whose wife is the most obedient, Petruchio summons Kate, and to everyone's surprise she goes to him, and when he tells her to "tell these headstrong women what duty they do owe their lords and husbands," she replies with this song. The lyrics are lifted directly from Katharina's final speech in Shakespeare's play. Adding to the dramatic tension in the moments leading up to the song, is the expectation that Lilli has left the theatre and so will not appear onstage.

'Kiss Me, Kate' (Reprise)
In a reprise of the Act I finale, Petruchio once again asks Katharine to kiss him, and this time she agrees, in a moment that also suggests an offstage reconciliation between Lilli and Fred.



THE TAMING OF THE SHREW
A SYNOPSIS



The play opens with a short 'Induction', which frames the main story as a play-within-a-play, and serves as a prologue to the action. A lord visiting an alehouse decides to play a trick on a sleeping drunk man named Christopher Sly and employs a troupe of actors to perform *The Taming of the Shrew* for Sly when he awakes.

Baptista, a gentleman of Padua has two daughters. The youngest Bianca is beautiful and polite and has several suitors eager for her hand in marriage. However Baptista refuses to let Bianca marry until he has found a husband for his older daughter Katherina, the 'shrew' of the title. Katherina is aggressive and rude bullying her sister and insulting any man who comes near her. When Petruchio arrives from Verona in search of a rich wife, Bianca's suitors persuade him to woo Katherina promising to pay him any costs necessary. Petruchio accepts the challenge, but when he meets her she subjects him to a torrent of abuse. He tells her that he will marry her whether she likes it or not, and arranges the wedding with Baptista.

On the day of the wedding, Petruchio arrives late and dressed inappropriately. He forces Katherina to leave before the wedding feast. Once they have arrived back at his house Petruchio tries to 'tame' his wife by depriving her of food, sleep and new clothes, but constantly praising her and telling her how much he loves her.

Meanwhile, back in Padua, Bianca has fallen in love with one of her suitors, Lucentio, a student who has disguised himself as a tutor in order to get close to her. Despite working out a complex plan with his servant Tranio, involving multiple disguises, in the end he and Bianca elope together. Another of the suitors Hortensio agrees to marry a local widow instead.

Petruchio and Katherina return to Padua, and on the way he constantly disagrees with everything she says, forcing her to say that the sun is the moon and that an old man is a young woman. Finally worn down, Katherina agrees to everything her husband says. At the feast following Hortensio's marriage Petruchio, Lucentio and Hortensio have a bet that each can make their wife come to them when they are sent for. To everybody's surprise Bianca and the widow refuse but Katherina comes when she is called, she delivers a speech about the duty women owe their husbands. Having won the bet Petruchio and Katherina leave the banquet to go to bed.

I HATE MEN

Gender politics in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Kiss Me, Kate*



The Taming of the Shrew is widely thought to have been written around 1590, making it the second play that Shakespeare wrote (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was the first). According to the Oxford Shakespeare, it 'has always been popular on the stage, but its reputation as a robust comedy verging on farce has often obscured its more subtle and imaginative aspects.' Placing a volatile relationship between a man and a woman at its heart, ending with the woman submitting to her husband, modern theatremakers and audiences alike often struggle with the tone of the piece, particularly regarding its depiction of domestic abuse, and the seemingly sexist final speech. Reviewing Michael Bogdanov's 1979 production, the critic Michael Billington wrote that he couldn't see the sense in staging a play 'that seems totally offensive to our age and society'.

What are we to make then of the scenes in *Kiss Me, Kate* in which we see Fred/Petruchio and Lilli/Kate fighting with each other? And what of Kate/Lilli's final submission to Fred/Petruchio? In 1948, when Cole Porter and the Spewacks were writing the show, the role of women within American society was undergoing a period of change. Following the women's suffrage movement of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, a change to the Nineteenth Amendment in the United States Constitution gave American women the right to vote in 1920. During World War II, many women took on jobs in industries that would have previously been dominated by men. When the war ended, many employed married women were encouraged to return to being housewives, or take alternative lower-paid more menial jobs. However, many resisted this and the modern feminist movement began to gather force.

When questioned about the gender politics of both *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Kiss Me, Kate*, director Trevor Nunn said:

> 'Social change has always made for new and different emphases in the presentation of Shakespeare's plays and so, overwhelmingly obviously, the period of the feminist revolution inspired some very new and different approaches to *The Taming of the Shrew*. But in whatever age the play has been done, the clues that Shakespeare provides highlighting what the *Shrew* is *really* about, have always been there. The clues, if they are picked up, show us that between Kate and Petruchio, it's love at first sight – they 'get' each other immediately. For the rest of the story, they are fighting each other over what the terms of their relationship will be, but their togetherness is never in doubt – they are two against the world. The same reading holds good as far as Lilli and Fred are concerned, as the song 'So in Love' makes so abundantly clear.'

In reference to the song 'So in Love,' Lori Burns - a professor specialising in gender studies and music – discusses the implications of Lilli singing a 'torch song':

> 'The general theme of the torch song is submission, but there is also an underlying implication of masochism. The performance of such a song (traditionally by a beautiful and seductive woman) provides additional layers of meaning that signify the singer's vulnerability. For the patriarchal observer […], the torch song confirms conventional societal gender roles – the woman is subordinate to the man, who is in control of the love relationship; she wants to be joined with her man, no matter what the cost.'

Although singing this song may put her in a potential submissive position, the song is reprised using the same lyrics suggesting that their roles have reversed, or at least that they are now both in the same position. When Lilli finally returns after walking out of the theatre, although she sings lines from Katherine's speech about a wife's duty to her husband, her decision to return to Fred is based on feelings of love rather than duty. Thus in their conclusion of *Kiss Me, Kate*, Porter and the Spewacks suggest an alternative reading of the seemingly outdated conclusion of Shakespeare's play.

'BREAKING THE COLOR LINE'

Integrating the theatre in 1940s America



Despite the fact that many African-Americans had served in the U.S. military during the Second World War, racial equality was still a long way off for in America in 1948. The Jim Crow laws, which had been introduced in 1876 still enforced segregation in schools, public places and on public transport. There was general unrest, and people were beginning to push for change, and although the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was growing in force, the Civil Rights movement was still in its very early stages.

If there was one area of American life which seemed slightly more forward-thinking when it came to equality, it was the theatre industry. In 1927, Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern wrote the musical *Showboat*, which dealt with racial prejudice in Mid-West America. Although opinions are now divided as to whether the show is racist in itself, Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, in their book *Changing Stages*, claim that it is a case of 'evolution rather than revolution' in its sympathetic depiction of black characters. It also featured a racially integrated cast, marking a step away from the theatrical tradition of 'blacking up.' However, despite this advancement, and the growing popularity of jazz performers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, black performers onstage were still few and far between and it was only appropriate that Porter and the Spewacks should reflect that in their writing.

In 1946, a protest began outside Ford's Theatre in Baltimore, where black theatregoers were only allowed to sit in the balcony. Many producers and actors refused to work at the theatre because they disagreed with this outdated segregation policy. The protest lasted for seven years, and drew considerable attention from the national press. High-profile figures such as composers Rodgers and Hammerstein and the opera singer Paul Robeson lent their support. When the theatre became fully integrated in 1953, it staged its first interracially cast production – a version of the popular operetta *The Merry Widow*. Writing about his experiences on the picket line in the Baltimore Sun newspaper, A. Robert Kaufman writes:

> 'Breaking the color line at Ford's accomplished two very important things. It demonstrated to the prejudiced white majority that fear of what might happen was nonsense. More important, it proved that the time was right for determined interracial groups to move forward. Picketing, boycotts, sit-ins, jail-ins and freedom rides eventually ended the rigid segregation America had known the entire century.'

As it was initially intended, *Kiss Me, Kate*, which is set in the same Ford's Theatre in Baltimore, features only two African-American characters; the dressers Hattie and Paul. However, in this production Gangster Number 2 is played by black actor Clive Rowe. Colour-blind casting has been used in various productions, including the 1999 Broadway revival, in which Fred Graham was played by the African-American actor Brian Stokes Mitchell. However, in the original production, the only black characters were the two seen in the 'offstage' scenes, and it is no coincidence that none of the Players in *The Taming of the Shrew* are black. With the action taking place during the Ford's Theatre protest, references to the fact that there would be 'deer running around the balcony' and Hattie's unhappiness at living in Baltimore are given added resonance.

It has been suggested that Paul and Hattie were named after Paul Robeson and his co-star in the film version of *Showboat*, Hattie McDaniel, the first African-American actress to win an Oscar. In showing the backstage world in which African-Americans were permitted to be employed, the writers of *Kiss Me, Kate* were actually providing two black actors the opportunity to take featured roles in the integrated ensemble of a Broadway show.

IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE...

Musicals based on Shakespeare plays

The Taming of the Shrew is not the only Shakespeare play to have inspired a musical version. Not only have there been several major operatic reworkings of the great tragedies such as *Macbeth* and *Othello*, for year's musical theatre composers and lyricists have sought inspiration in the plots and characters of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies, although not all have been quite as successful as *Kiss Me, Kate*.





Romeo & Juliet
Perhaps the most famous Shakespeare adaptation of all-time, Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* (1957) relocates Shakespeare's tragic tale of 'star-cross'd lovers' to New York with American-Italian Tony and Puerto Rican Maria members of opposing street gangs; the Jets and the Sharks.

Hamlet
Hamlet The Musical (2010) premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to much critical acclaim, and subverts Shakespeare's tragedy into a comedy verging on pantomime. In the rock musical *Hair* (1967), the central character Claude compares himself to Hamlet and sings lines taken from Hamlet's soliloquies in several songs. *Hair* also features some lyrics from *Romeo and Juliet*. *Hamlet* also provided the inspiration for Disney's film and musical *The Lion King* (1994), written by Elton John and Tim Rice.

The Comedy of Errors
There have been several attempts to turn The Comedy of Errors into a musical. Most famously, Rodgers and Hart wrote *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938) which is widely regarded as a classic, and has been revived several times. Sir Trevor Nunn adapted *The Comedy of Errors* (1976) into a musical himself, in a production for the RSC which starred Dame Judi Dench. *The Bomb-itty of Errors* (2000) was an irreverent hip-hop 'ad-rap-tation' of the play that achieved great success in New York and London.

Twelfth Night
Joe di Pietro wrote *All Shook Up* (2004), taking the unlikely idea of using the songs of Elvis Presley to tell a story based on *Twelfth Night*.

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Swingin' the Dream (1939) was a Broadway musical that featured an all-black cast in a telling of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* using original swing music, and starred Louis Armstrong as Bottom. *Were the World Mine* (2008) is a musical film, which – like *Bare* – uses the convention of a school production of the play as a backdrop for the main plot, and features Shakespeare's words set to contemporary music.

IN CONVERSATION WITH HANNAH WADDINGHAM *(Lilli Vanessi)*



What attracted you to the role of Lilli?
Two years ago Trevor Nunn and I did Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* together, and it was my most beloved job to date. We had a really wonderful time together and we have such utter synchronicity, to the point where he'll go to give me a note about my performance and I'll finish his sentence because we're just on the same page. After we'd done that show, he said that we should do something else together, and I said to him off the cuff that with his knowledge of Shakespeare, and my vocal range and love of comedy, then surely we should look at *Kiss Me, Kate*. He literally just looked at me at that point and said 'Hmm. OK, leave it with me,' and here we are! I suggested it to him, not just because of the vocal capacity of the part, but also because through my career, I like to take parts that have comedy and pathos in spades. Unless I've moved the audience in some way , whether I've made them really laugh, or cry or question something in themselves , then I don't feel that I've done my job properly, so I get bored. This has both for me. She is what you would call 'a diva' in many ways, but she's also had her heart broken by Fred Graham so she has a veneer that's 'Lilli Vanessi' with her surname attached, but behind that is 'Lilli' who is desperately in love with Fred, and barely lets anyone including him see it, for fear of being hurt again.

Why do you think that Lilli is in love with Fred, when we see that their relationship is so violent?
Their relationship is only violent because it's misplaced energy and frustration. They were fine at first because when they got together they were both theatre actors. She then has a Hollywood career, and my take on it would be that he had a problem with that. Alex [Bourne, who plays Fred]'s take would probably be that Fred found that she had changed. Like in any relationship there are two perspectives and then the fact of the matter. So you already have that interesting dynamic at the start of the play. At the end of 'Wunderbar' Lilli has a moment of softness and says "Whose fault was it?" which is a very 'open-book' moment. But then he says "It could have been your temper," and straight away she says "It could have been your ego." She's put the barrier up again, and then of course she goes into 'So In Love,' which is one of those songs that says 'I don't want to be in love with you, but I am,' and that's why I love the song, because it's not just a schmaltzy ballad.

How did you the rehearsal process help you prepare for the show?
Trevor got us to improvise a lot during rehearsals which helped all of us, because firstly it helps to get rid of inhibitions because you're all in the same boat. And secondly, improvising a bit on Shakespeare means that if you come unstuck, you at least know what you're talking about to get yourself around the subject. He also gave us a Shakespeare workshop, which I said we should have been paying him for, because he was just brilliant with all of us. He sat the whole company around a table – whether people had lines in the show or not – and got different people to read different passages, and there is nothing intimidating about him. He couldn't be more encouraging, wanting you to get the joy that he does out of it, so it was really thrilling.

You've achieved a great deal so far in your career. Are there any particular roles that you still want to play?
Trevor wants me to do a Shakespeare. I'm mildly terrified by the idea. We don't have a date yet, but we keep saying that it will happen. But on the whole I don't really think about dream roles, because I'm quite a realist and I'm quite a fatalist, and I just think that whatever I'm meant to do will come my way, and that is how my career has gone so far. I would like to do some more television next, because I like keeping my CV balanced in terms of credits, and then maybe I'd like to do this Shakespeare with Trevor!

IN CONVERSATION WITH ADAM GARCIA *(Bill Calhoun)*



Were you familiar with *Kiss Me, Kate* before getting involved in this production?
I knew the show, but only from seeing it. I saw the Michael Blakemore production which was at the Victoria Palace Theatre in 2001. My friend Michael Berresse played Bill in that production and he did an amazing job. At one point he had to flip up the scaffolding, he's an immensely acrobatic and athletic man, and that's all I remember!

What attracted you to playing the role of Bill?
It's a really fun role, but mainly it was the attraction of the team more or less that made me say 'yes' to doing the show. I'd worked with Stephen Mear [the Choreographer] before and I'd worked with Gareth Valentine [the Musical Director] before and I'd always wanted to work with Trevor Nunn, so with that combination it's pretty hard to say 'no'! Working with Trevor was fantastic. He's a very passionate man, very energetic, unbelievably knowledgeable, and he just knows exactly what he's doing. As a director, he lets you feel quite liberated, allowing you to try different things. He certainly knows Shakespeare and he certainly knows musicals. It was a real joy, everything I expected it would be and a lot more.

What can audiences expect from the show?
I think that the majority of audiences that come to see *Kiss Me, Kate*, even if they don't know the show, they know that it's going to be a big old brassy battleship of an old-school musical. But I think what people maybe don't expect is the comedy. Even the Shakespearean comedy, which has been around for hundreds of years is really funny. I don't think audiences expect it to be such a comic ride.

What's the highlight of the show for you?
I do love singing 'Bianca' because it's got a nice tap routine, but I worry about it a bit. So I think my favourite to perform is 'Tom, Dick or Harry.' It's a phenomenal number and it's so much fun to dance to. I always have a good time – I can't stop myself!

You're originally from Australia, and still work a great deal out there. What is it that keeps you coming back to perform in London?
The prestige. This is the place to work and compete. All the best people are either here or on Broadway. There are brilliant performers in Australia and there are really great shows but there are 32 theatres in a square mile in London, so the opportunities are just immense. With the history and character of the West End, I feel that it's a real privilege to work here. The Old Vic itself is a beautiful building. I'd been here before to see stuff, and it's a real treat to stand on that stage and look out into the house. It's an exquisite looking house, and it's really spacious backstage! Plus it's got a real history and prestige to it, and a commitment and integrity towards putting on quality shows.

What advice would you give to young people hoping to pursue a career in theatre?
More than anything you have to really love it, and enjoy the fact that although at times it looks very glamorous there's actually a great deal of hard work involved in training your voice, and improving your dancing and acting. While you're doing a show there's a lot of discipline involved. You can't go out partying all the time! When I was working as a judge on *Got To Dance*, I got to see how good people are at what they do. And it's not what they do as a profession, but in their own time and for their own enjoyment. It made me think that I should probably get on my feet a bit more! There's always new talent coming up, and theatre in particular has got a real honesty of talent. You're onstage performing live in front of people, and if you're not good, you're very quickly found out! But it's a fascinating and heightened world, so the best advice I can give is that if you love it, then pursue it.

IN CONVERSATION WITH CLIVE ROWE *(Gangster Number 2)*



What was it that made you want to be a part of this production?
Trevor Nunn. Gareth Valentine. Stephen Mear. The quality of the company. The piece itself. It was almost one of those 'golden ticket' things, it would be more surprising for it to go wrong than for it to go right.

What's been the biggest challenge you've faced during the process so far?
I play Gangster Number 2 and laughingly I would call myself 'the muscle' in the partnership! The gangsters are both enforcers, almost like bailiffs for the mob. We don't have actual character names, which I think is quite clever in a way because it makes you understand that what's important is that they are gangsters. Who they are personally is not important, but what their function within the piece is, is very important. We don't need a name, it gives us that little bit of mystery! The biggest challenge for me has been that the writing of the part leads to a much more 'variety' based performance, and in the rehearsing of it Trevor wanted very specifically to keep it within the realms of reality. He wanted to get the idea across that the gangsters were actually a physical menacing force within the piece, but also keeping that comedy element with it as well, which is a difficult thing to do. I think that out of the two, my gangster character is the one that actually by the end of it wants to be in theatre – he's the one that wants to act.

You've performed at The Old Vic several times now. What is it that you like about the space?
Performing on The Old Vic stage is wonderful. It's a space that has been created for great pieces of theatre to be performed in, and it really lends itself to that. The auditorium's very deep though because the circle and balcony are further back than in some theatres. You feel like you have to throw yourself into that space, and yet it's a very easy space to fill vocally.

You've performed several of Cole Porter's songs over the course of your career. What do you think it is about his writing that has made his songs become such classics?
Up until doing this show, I would have said that Cole Porter wrote great tunes. But after doing this show I would say that Cole Porter wrote great tunes AND incredible lyrics. I always thought that 'Brush Up Your Shakespeare' was just a comedy number, but once you really get into the rhymes, and understand that it's absolutely filthy, you realise that the man was a bit of a genius really, who happened to write brilliant lyrics to amazing tunes.

How have you balanced the Shakespearean and musical theatre elements of the production?
It's been a treat and a learning curve. There's a line in the piece that goes "Give a Broadway hoofer a chance to play Shakespeare and what happens?" We may not be Broadway hoofers but we're definitely hoofers when it comes to performance, and we have been given the chance to play Shakespeare, which some of this cast have never done before, and I think that the work is astounding. Trevor's brought more of Shakespeare's text in than was in the original show, so now you've got these wonderful lyrics by Cole Porter with the incredible depth and layers of Shakespeare himself. It would have been nice maybe to have seen the two of them having coffee together – maybe that should be a play: 'Porter and Shakespeare'!

What's the best piece of advice you've been given as a performer?
That's a really difficult question to answer, because with great directors, you're always being given good advice that's relevant to the piece of work that you're on, so there's not one piece of advice that stands out. What I've learnt as a performer is 'Work, work, work.' That's the only tool you need – to have the ability to get your head down and to never stop. David [Burt, who plays Gangster Number 1] and I never stop. Literally, I walked in today, and I was absolutely knackered and the first thing he said to me was 'I've had an idea about this scene,' and we've been doing the show all summer! We don't stop. As a performer, there are no easy options – explore, push your boundaries, don't just try and stay safe and cosy with what you're doing.

What do you hope the audience will take away from having seen this particular show?
I hope that they'll feel that they've got their money's worth. And hopefully in some way, that just one or two people a night will feel inspired and go 'I want to be a part of that.' If we can do that, then I'm more than happy.

IN CONVERSATION WITH GARETH VALENTINE *(Musical Director)*

What does being a musical director entail? What are your responsibilities throughout the rehearsal and performance process?
A musical director (MD) is responsible for every musical aspect of the show. He is appointed by the director to the creative team and endorsed by the producers. In the early stages, he or she will attend auditions to cast the show. The director wants the best actors, the choreographer will want the best dancers and the musical director listens for the best voices. These days, candidates for top end musicals need to be a 'triple-threat'; they need to be adept in all three disciplines. In a process of elimination and discussion between the creative triumvirate, a cast is duly assembled.

In rehearsals, the MD (having gathered his own team of assistant MD, dance arranger and pianist) will teach the score, sometimes shoulder to shoulder with the composer. In the case of *Kiss Me, Kate*, the MD will teach and put the music together in accordance with the style of the piece. Musical theatre is a broad church encompassing rock and roll, pop, jazz, swing, classical music and any combination of dance music you can think of.

Then, the orchestra come along at the late rehearsal stage. The MD works with the orchestrator to get the best out of the band. The special rehearsal where the cast first join and sing with the band is a very exciting one with a special name - the "Sitzprobe," (from the German to sit and discover.)

Did you always want to be a musical director? How did you get involved in the profession?
I wanted to be an opera singer and studied with this goal in mind at the Royal College of Music. The RCM was then a very conventional, conservative institution to which a career as a musician in musicals would have had little encouragement. Things have changed now but, at any rate, my career fell accidentally into becoming an MD in commercial theatre partly because I had all the skills at my fingertips.

What challenges have you faced working on this production?
The challenges on KMK are many and various. From a day to day standpoint it is important to try and keep each performance fresh by tweaking a tempo here and there, keeping the musicians on their toes with dynamic and interesting conducting (in this case, from the keyboard which in itself is a demanding skill.)

Why do you think musicals are such a popular form of entertainment?
Musicals will always draw crowds since, at their very best, they give so much pleasure. Nothing can compete with a first rate song delivered by a top division voice, or a comedic scene played at full tilt, or a dazzling dance number that boils over into great excitement (as in 'Too Darn Hot' in *Kiss Me, Kate*.) The lights, the set, the theatre itself and the audience too add up to a scintillating whole. The show you'll watch is a one-off event; that show will never be repeated in quite the same way and you are party to it. You can't say that about cinema or TV!

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