

The Taming of the Shrew

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Stephen Burdman

New York Classical Theatre

Central Park -- West 97th St. and Central Park West (252-4531)

Equity showcase (closes Aug. 25)

Review by David Mackler

Shakespeare, summer, outdoor productions, well ... yes, yes -- but New York Classical Theatre got it right with their production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Director Stephen Burdman used the park -- not just for its trees as backdrop, but for its geography. It was a good thing they were doing Shakespeare, possibly the only playwright who can stand up to New York's man-made natural oasis. Olmstead and Vaux were not credited, but they deserved second billing.

And *Shrew* was a terrific choice. At its center, the play can be a rollicking farce, and that's how it was played -- subtlety was not called for. The actors' diction was precise, and their voices were superbly clear, even over cheering crowds at nearby ball fields. Since the audience followed the production from scene to scene in different settings, it was actually a shame that the beginnings of some scenes were lost to those who weren't fleet of foot. But then that became part of the game, and part of the overall plan -- oddly, it gave the proceedings a heightened sense of reality. The audience wasn't merely observing the action; it was eavesdropping -- coming upon a fight, a plot being hatched, a reconciliation, all overheard in the great outdoors. Many scenes were just happened-on by unaware passersby who stopped to watch and then moved on (just like life...) but it was worth being there from the beginning and following this troop of strolling players as the tale unfolded.

The tale is familiar, but the players were exactly what was called for. A strong-voiced and handsomely virile Petruchio (**Garth T. Mark**); a dynamic Kate (**Nikki E. Walker**), who didn't lose her strength even as she struggled against being tamed (in fact, her confused emotions at being wooed were very funny, but not at the character's expense); a feisty Bianca (**Suzy Myers**), who enjoyed the attention of the men who made fools of themselves over her; a great scene-stealer of a Tranio (**Michael Nathanson**), even better when he masqueraded as Lucentio. The costumes (production designer **Jessica Gaffney**) were colorful and just Elizabethan enough to make the point, and when darkness fell, flashlights spotlighted the scene (lighting designer **Gwen Grossman**).

And surrounding it all were the hills and rocks of the park, practically another character in the play. At the wedding, from which way would Petruchio make his entrance? (Comings and goings had surprised the audience before.) When Kate angrily stormed away she was really leaving, not just going offstage. How could a real affection *not* develop between them in such surroundings? "Of all bad matches, never was the like" -- well, Shakespeare and the park finally found a way to work together.

With **Andy Waldschmidt, James DiBiasio, Robert Wilson Hancock, Robin Bloodworth, Evan Zes, Jeffrey Emerson, Michael J. Karp, Joris Stuyck, Kathleen Ferman.**