

## **MICHAEL GRAY'S ARTS BLOG**

### **KISS ME KATE**

**WAODS at the Public Hall, Witham**

**03.11.12**

**It starts and ends with a dead stage – something Witham Public Hall does well – making a satisfying frame for this ingenious meshing of backstage drama and Shakespearean comedy.**

**In the imaginatively choreographed opening, the stage is gradually invaded by life, colour and youth for Another Opening, Another Show. We meet the characters, in the Shrew and out of it, who will keep us entertained for the next three hours; notably the actor manager, a great actor and a gentleman, [David Slater's assured Fred] and his leading lady and erstwhile wife, Miss Vanessi, cursed with the worst temper in showbiz, [Julie Codling]. Excellent performances, both dramatically and vocally, from this pairing, and very easy to believe in their past careers understudying in operetta. Superb too was Robyn Gowers' Lois – a wonderful sense of comedy in the scene where she's wooed by the chorus boys [lively, snappy choreography here], and in her clothes rail exit for Always True to You in my Fashion.**

**Not everyone reached these heights, it's true, but a word for the two Gangsters, Michael Mundell-Poole and George Jordan, doing their front-cloth Brush Up with a selection of showbiz hats, and Ben Huish's Paul, confidently leading the company in an energetic Too Darn Hot.**

**The chorus worked well together, giving a real back-stage feel to the corridor, and obviously enjoying being Shrew extras.**

**Nikki Mundell-Poole's production was crammed with such delights – some well-delivered Shakespeare, too – the sparring lovers separated only by a thin [and wobbly] connecting door, the picture frame, the tap routine for Bianca, the use of the Hall's architecture for Where Is The Life, the leapfrog, the destination placards.**

**And the cheesiness of provincial Shakespeare is gently suggested, with one number looking like a number three tour of The Gondoliers.**

**Susannah Edom was the Musical Director, skilfully keeping the score moving along, aided by some excellent musicians in the Public Hall pit.**

**Another classic favourite next spring, Oklahoma, the Rodgers and Hammerstein hit which inspired Porter to try his hand at fully integrated musical comedy ...**