

Stage

Real Meyer 2 in 2
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Musical is Cole Porter — and GeVa — at its best

It's everything you could hope for in a musical — wonderful voices, memorable songs, big, splashy production numbers, and great costumes.

And in musical-happy Rochester, audiences should flock to GeVa Theatre's current production of the Cole Porter classic, "Kiss Me Kate." Simply put, it's terrific. You will love every minute of the show — and go home not only thoroughly entertained but also smiling.

The show's opening number, "Another Op'nin', Another Show," was particularly poignant the opening night of the run, Saturday, May 20, because the production is the swan song for producing artistic director Howard Millman.

At the artistic helm of GeVa since 1982, Millman is also director of this show — and has pulled out all the stops, with the help of a highly talented creative team and cast of 19, for a grand send-off. In June, he heads back to Florida to resume a leadership position at the Asolo Theatre (where he began his impressive career).

He got deserved standing ovations both at a pre-show tribute and at the end of the beautifully done production.

As a play-within-a-play, "Kiss Me, Kate," a musical comedy, sandwiches the backstage bickering of an actor, Fred Graham, played by Mark Hardy, and his ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi, played by Ann Kittredge, with their on-stage scrapings as the newlywed couple in William Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew." Hardy is Petruchio and Vanessi the shrewish Kate in the latter.



The leads in "Kiss Me, Kate" are played by Mark Hardy and Ann Kittredge.

Thrown in for good measure are the actor's current interest in the show's ingénue, Lois Lane; the ex-wife's companion, a dull politician; and two hilarious gangsters pursuing an indebted gambler.

From that opening number, belted out with style by Kimberly Harris who plays Hattie, a dresser and member of the chorus, the not quite three-hour show rolls along with stunning solos, wonderfully inventive production numbers, and no

less than 17 songs, some of which — like "Too Darn Hot" and "So in Love" — you may recognize.

Kudos have to go to choreographer Diana Batta-Brill for the spectacular dance numbers; to designer Polly J. Byers for the stellar, and often delightfully outrageous, costumes; and musical director Corinne Aquilina, who more than did justice to the Porter score — and all in an incredibly small space.

The revolving set is something audiences don't see often at GeVa, and is another treat. Set designer was Miguel Romero.

Every member of the cast was outstanding, from the leads to Steven Petrillo as Bill Calhoun and Raymond C. Harris (what a dancer!) as Paul, the other dresser, and all the other supporting players. But the two gangsters, played by Larry Cahn and Howard Samuelsohn, practically stole the show — and got the loudest cheers, other than the leads, at the curtain call.

The production is Millman's last gift to the community in his role at the helm of GeVa — and what a special gift it is. "Kiss Me, Kate" will be remembered fondly for a long time to come.

It continues at GeVa Theatre, 75 Woodbury Blvd., through June 21.

Shows begin at 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays; 8:30 p.m. Fridays; 4 and 8:30 p.m. Saturdays; and 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sundays. Tickets start as low as \$5, on up to \$33. Call 232-4382.

— Linda Quinlan