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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for Marie Christine

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IT'S TOO DARN HOT

Like their characters in Kiss Me, Kate, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell set off fireworks in a sizzling new production of the Porter/Spewack classic

by Sheryl Flatow

[[image: color photo of man and woman embracing]]
[[photo credit]]JOAN MARCUS [[/photo credit]]

[[boxed text]]When Cole Porter was first approached about writing the score for a musical based on The Taming of the Shrew, he was less than receptive to the idea. He felt that his style was incompatible with Shakespeare and believed there was little commercial potential in musicalizing the Bard. But Bella Spewack, who would co-author the show with her husband Samuel, coaxed, cajoled and ultimately convinced him to write the words and music. Kiss Me, Kate proved to be the greatest success of Porter's illustrious career, "a smash hit of epic proportions," as one critic put it following the premiere on December 30, 1948. The show ran for 1,077 performances and won five Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

The Spewacks' superb book is a play within a play, which takes place at a theatre on opening night of a troyout of a musical version of Shrew. The stars of the show are Lilli Vanessi and Fred Graham, a divorced couple--inspired by the (married) stage legends Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne--whose offstage battles mirror the behavior of the characters they're portraying, Kate and Petruchio. Porter's score is witty, sexy and poignant and includes such gems as "Brush Up Your Shakespeare," "Wunderbar," "So In Love," and "Too Darn Hot"--a song considered so risqué when it was introduced that radio stations refused to play it.

Kiss Me, Kate is one of the few great musicals of the 1940's and 50's that has never had a full-fledged Broadway revival--until now (Kate did run briefly in 1952 at the Broadway Theatre and enjoyed two limited runs at City Center, one in 1956 and the other in '65). This new production at the Martin Beck Theatre is directed by Michael Blakemore (City of Angels, Noises Off) and stars two of the theatre's most luminous artists, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, Tony nominees for their work in Ragtime.

Although Kiss Me, Kate has long been a staple of regional theatre and summer stock, it is a difficult vehicle to pull off with panache (made painfully clear in the 1953 MGM film). Mitchell, in fact, had twice seen the show in regional theatres [[boxed text]]
[[page number]] 12 [[/page number]] WWW.PLAYBILL.COM [[image: cursor arrow]] PURE THEATRE ONLINE [[end page]]

[[start page]]

[[full page ad]]

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[[image: black and white picture of short-haired beautiful woman, in a white trouser suit, sitting, her chin on her hand, smiling, looking diagonally upwards. Behind her is a large color image of a bottle of ALLURE perfume. Around the cap of the bottle is the brand name

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EAU DE PARFUM

THE IRRESISTIBLE FRAGRANCE FROM CHANEL

CHANEL HOUSE OF PARFUMS
60 EAST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK, CITY

CHANEL]]
[[image credit]] (c)1999 CHANEL (R), Inc. ALLURE (R)[[/image credit]]

ALLURE
THE IRRESISTIBLE FRAGRANCE FROM CHANEL

CHANEL BOUTIQUE
N°15 EAST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

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