

OUR TOWN

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YORKVILLE EDITION

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KIDS PICK OF THE WEEK

Shakespeare and Cole Porter, Too

Inside Broadway's public performances of "Kiss Me, Kate," which opened at the Lucille Lortel Theatre in Greenwich Village May 1, presents more of a challenge than most of the recent productions mounted by this estimable children's theater company.

For one thing, prominent among the ingredients of "Kiss Me, Kate" – unlike, say, "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" – is Shakespeare. For another thing, so is Cole Porter. Thus, even in one of Inside Broadway's just-right 50-minute adaptations, "Kate" demands of

its young audience some work. Yet the show offers commensurate rewards. After all, we're talking about Shakespeare and Cole Porter.

The 1948 musical, you may remember, contains a play within a play, Shakespeare's 1594 comedy "The Taming of the Shrew." That gives "Kate," for which the book was written by Bella and Sam Spewack, romance and wit aplenty.

The plot otherwise centers on a traveling troupe's director-actor-Lothario, Fred Graham (the Petruchio of "Shrew"), and his efforts both to win the heart of an actress, any actress, and to elude a pair of thugs seeking payment of a large gambling debt that Fred actually did not incur.

The most delectable part of "Kiss Me,



The Inside Broadway cast of "Kiss Me, Kate."

"Kate" is surely the Porter lyrics. He rhymed "puberty" with "Shuberty," "brassy" with "Lassie." And he constructed verses like this one:

"I'm a maid who would marry
And will take with no qualm
Any Tom, Dick or Harry,
Any Harry, Dick or Tom,
I'm a maid mad to marry
And will take double-quick
Any Tom, Dick or Harry,
Any Tom, Harry or Dick."
And lines like these:

"From China he will bring you jade and perfume from Araby,
But don't forget 'tis he who'll have the fun and thee the baby,
Oh I hate men."
And couplets like this one:
"If my wife has a bag of gold,
Do I care if the bag be old?"

And this one:

"Just declaim a few lines from 'Othella'

And they think you're a helluva fella."

As usually is the case with the offerings of Inside Broadway, which are staged, under Executive Director Michael Presser's leadership, both on school tours and in public performances, the acting and singing by the six cast members, who play multiple roles, are uniformly strong.

When I saw "Kiss Me, Kate," Fred's part was played by a substitute, Matt Witten. He and his co-star as Kate

and Lilli, Gaelen Gilliland, both have versatile and lovely voices. Francis Kelly, a veteran of three previous Inside Broadway productions, and Rob Rokicki are indefatigable and engaging as the gangsters, and in less rich roles Chris Fuller and Zakiya Young prove to be standout dancers and appealing actors.

As usual, too, the Inside Broadway venue, the Lucille Lortel, is ideal, because its intimacy gives the audience the opportunity to savor every character's every move and every expression. And Stage Director and Choreographer Brett Smock's close-in choreography made the most of the space and the performers' talents, providing the visual equivalent of the ingenious Porter lyrics.

(The Inside Broadway series is supported by the company that publishes this newspaper, Manhattan Media.)

— Kenneth Paul

"KISS ME, KATE"

Lucille Lortel Theatre

121 Christopher St.

May 8, 9, 15, 16, at 10:45 a.m.

\$15

239-6200 for tickets