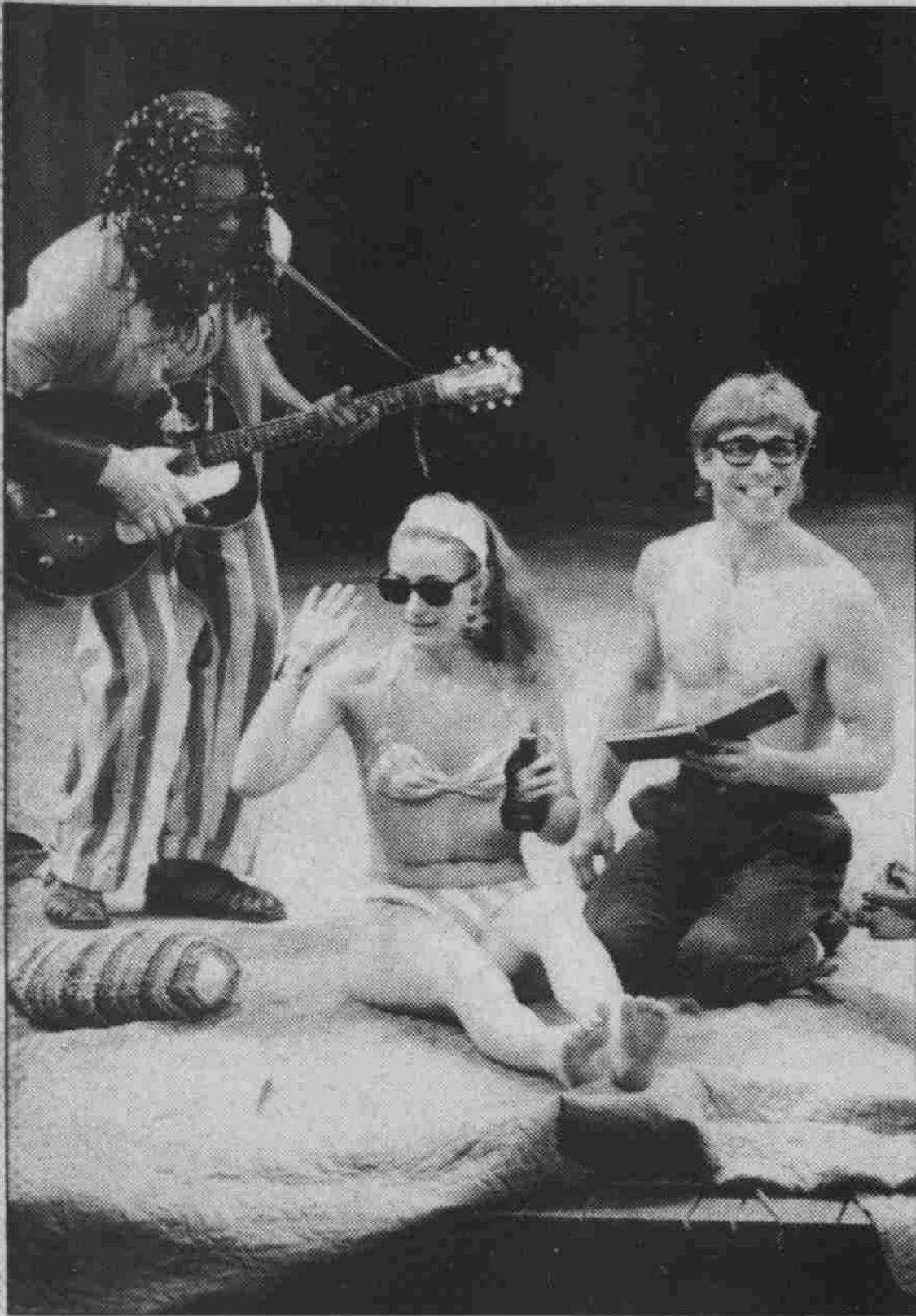


# PlayMakers presents daring battle between sexes



Bernard Addison (left), Lisa Benedict and Matt Ryan.

And the groom wore bicycle shorts. Or at least that's what Petruchio, professional shrew tamer extraordinaire, dons as wedding-day apparel in PlayMakers Repertory Company's (PRC) production of Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew," which opened this weekend.

And such costuming is only one of the liberties taken with the Bard's classic romantic comedy in the hands of director David Hammond. But while it tends toward overkill in places, Hammond's contemporary approach to the play is surprisingly effective, finding a comic '80s angle on almost every aspect of the play while still giving the playwright his due. If nothing else, the production is commendable for its daring.

The action begins with Christopher Sly, a drunkard who is tricked into believing he's a lord through the elaborate machinations of a mischievous Italian count. This induction scene, which is usually omitted, establishes the play-within-a-play structure Hammond uses — with great success — to set the main plot within the framework of a dream.

And so, with a mystical dream-sequence transition, we find ourselves in modern-day Italy, where the ladies wear miniskirts and the young lords cruise in on roller skates. No, William, we're not in the 19th century anymore: Here the servants range from denim-appareled tough guys to old-family hit men complete with sunglasses and dark, tailored suits. Instead of carrying rapiers, these gentlemen pack Berettas.

Enter Petruchio (played by guest artist Nick Kaledin), the classic good-looking guy with an attitude. His goal is simple: He has come "to wive it

## Cara Bonnett

### Theater

wealthily — if wealthily, then happily, in Padua." When he hears of the notorious Katharina, his curiosity is peaked, despite the scare tactics of his pals. Here is a man who appreciates a challenge.

But Katharina, played by guest artist Leslie Hicks, is not your ordinary shrew. Hicks refuses to rely on farcical cliché for her depiction of the sharp-tongued Kate, and instead plays her with the conviction of a strong, multi-dimensional woman.

Especially helpful in the development of Kate's character is the production's perspective on the father-child relationship between Baptista and his daughters. Tobias Andersen plays a concerned — if somewhat browbeaten — father who can't hide his glee when he finally finds a sucker who's willing to marry his oldest daughter.

And we gain new insight into Kate's shrewish behavior when we realize she has been forced to compete with her sister Bianca, the epitome of feminine shallowness, all her life.

But the focus of the play is the interaction between Kate and Petruchio. The leading lovers' introduction is charged from the first, with an unhurried, hostile silence crackling between them from the moment Kate makes her entrance. Once they find their words, the exchange escalates quickly into sporting verbal sword-play, the skillful thrust and parry of two aptly-matched opponents.

Nowhere is Petruchio's tenderness

toward Kate more apparent than in this first encounter. Kaledin's Petruchio is a smooth but devilish seducer, alternating gentle words with biting sarcasm, but never overplaying the macho "I'm going to tame you, woman" image.

Unfortunately, Kaledin does not fare so well in the second act. The hint of tenderness from the pair's initial encounter disappears with the unveiling of an unreasonable, harshly demanding Petruchio, whose efforts to prove his own shrewishness to all of Padua, as well as to his own new bride, seem rather too extreme.

Kate, on the other hand, appears to have lost much of her spirit somewhere between the first skirmish and the altar. It's a role reversal of the least explainable sort, for by the time Kate delivers her oft-debated final speech, it's completely up in the air as to who's doing the taming and who has been tamed. But then, isn't that the story of every modern romance anyway?

In pointed contrast to the enticingly adversarial relationship of

Petruchio and Kate is the conventional boy-chases-girl, boy-gets-girl, boy-doesn't-realize-what-he's-gotten-himself-into relationship of Lucretio (Matt Ryan) and Bianca (Lisa Benedict). The enamored Lucretio finagles himself into a position as Bianca's tutor. Despite competition from half the eligible bachelors in Italy (and the geeky intellectual persona he adopts to get past her father), he manages to both woo and win a bikini-clad Bianca during an afternoon at the beach, where the two alternately spend their time reciting Latin and rubbing suntan lotion on each other.

Also notable in the production is Pilar Herrera as the Whoopi Goldberg-esque Biondello. Her rapping, jammmin' version of the usually long and drawn out "Petruchio's coming" speech in the wedding scene is successful if only for its shock value.

PlayMakers Repertory Company will present Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* through April 30. For more information, call 962-1121.

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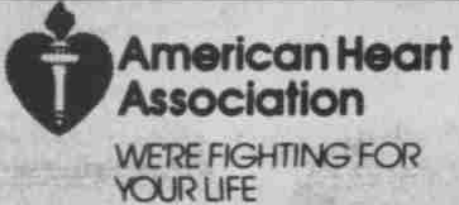
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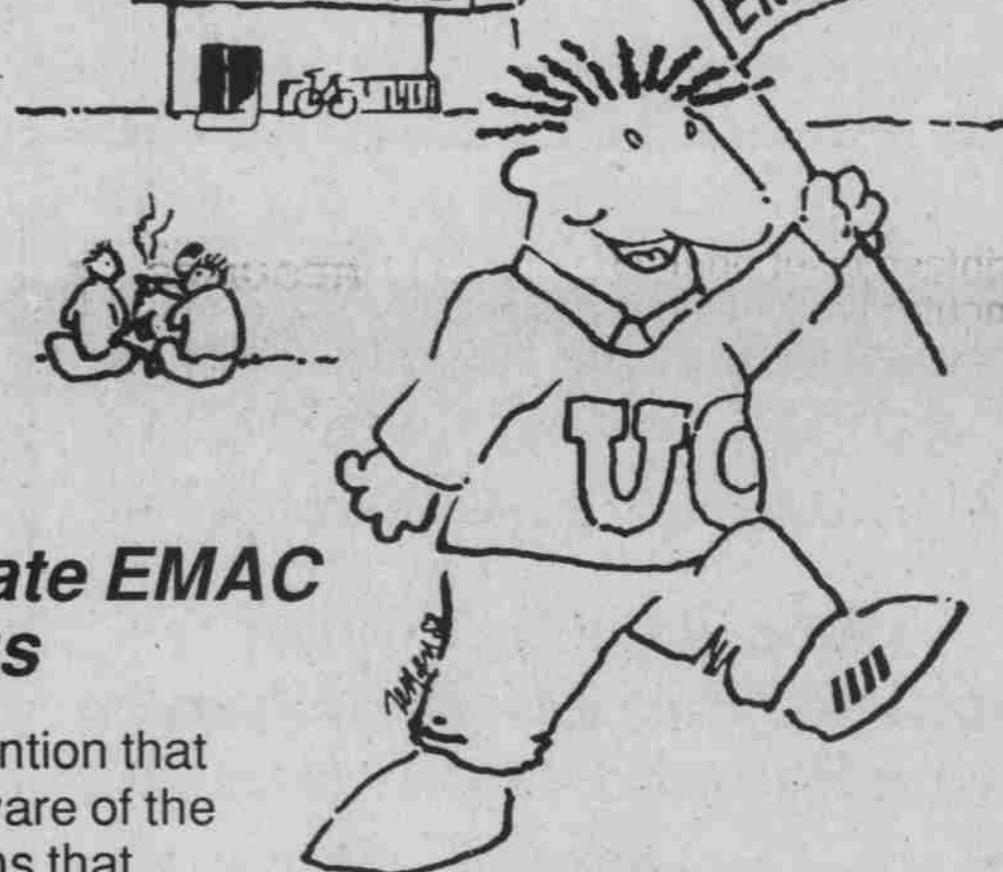
Flags should not flown at half-mast or displayed prominently on public buildings. Rather they should be waved in a large circular motion while the celebrants sing "Hubba hubba, gotta Mac, got EMAC." The traditional meal of Twinkies® and lima beans is then served at small get-togethers around the blazing PRES-TO-LOGS®.

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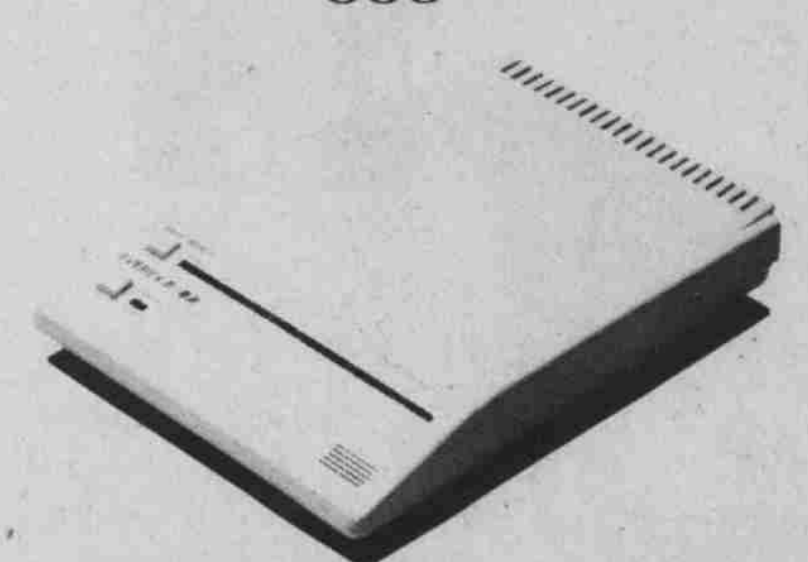
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