

## Robert F. Hall CCS taking this year's production to Stratford

By Constance Scrafield

What happens when a creative team with a penchant for off-the-wall productions mixes Shakespeare with pop stars and hits from the 1980s?

You get Hall Drama's production of *Taming of the Shrew* at Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary School in Caledon East.

What a blast this rendition is: Shakespeare's own words, combined in some measure with 21st Century dialogue and cell phones, '80s hits, all blended into the ancient plot. Does that describe it?

Wait, we have not mentioned the wild costumes, the wigs, the stars: three of the student actors have the dual task of impersonating an '80s star and delivering their roles with Shakespeare's clever, funny, difficult dialogue, songs, action and dancing! Challenging, surely, for the most seasoned of performers.

So, Billy Idol is presented as Petruchio; Annie Lennox takes on Katherine (or Kate, as she is called familiarly and we all know how she felt about that) and Madonna (who else) plays the beautiful and much lusted after Bianca. So, for instance, imagine the task involved for the young actor playing Billy Idol playing Petruchio.

Naturally gifted with plenty of talent and wild youthful enthusiasm, led by a couple of well-seasoned mentors, Rob Ciccotelli and Frank Adriano, who have been putting these shows together for several years, the Hall Drama students are having the time of their lives, while storing up indelible memories and invaluable experience. Heading this multi award winning Dramatic Arts Department, Ciccotelli and Adriano have travelled with lot, stock and personnel to the Winter Garden Theatre in Toronto; to the U.S.A., including off Broadway, New York; to London, England; and to Macerata, Italy.

We had the chance to sit in with the cast and co-director Ciccotelli. Primarily, we were interested to talk the actors to get their take on the whole experience of working with this hilarious marriage between Shakespeare and the 1980s with 21st century sidebars.

It was with real sadness that we learned, as a confirmation, that Shakespeare is no longer part of the set curriculum in high schools (a disaster, in our opinion, of short-sightedness that might very well reflect on the future of theatre programming, to the overwhelming loss for future audiences) and that very few of these young thespians have even read anything by Shakespeare. They seemed to know about the tragedies and were glad to be doing one of the Bard's comedies.

They have rehearsed four to five nights a week, reduced somewhat during exam time, since November.

So, we asked them about doing Shakespeare on stage. They admitted the difficulties but laid claim to the joy.

'It's not the understanding (of the language), but delivering the lines,' one told us.

Another explained, 'The hardest thing is to keep what's already been done so often, but yet to give it your own interpretation.'

There was praise for the two teachers who sacrifice so much of their time to make these events happen.

'The foundation is here at Hall ? I just want to thank Chico and Adriano. They are encouraging us ? we went to off-Broadway and, now, to Stratford,' claimed one tall young man.

One of the others mentioned, 'Their productions are always really professionally done; the standards are very high.'

One of the girls told us, 'Everyone works hard. They inspire us to do our best.'

Reflecting back on the challenges of acting the Shakespearian dialogue, a student said, 'It's . . . exciting to get to learn the word play ? getting to learn how to rattle off all his lines ? it's really fun.'

'We're so used to reading tragedies but reading comedies is fun . . . ?

Although it was noted: '(Shrew) is a comedy, but it deals with some serious issues ? it's really dark.'

A student, now in his fourth year with Hall Drama, talked about the friendship of this cast: 'This group is a well formed group ? I'm just loving it here every day ? there's so much joy and a lot of camaraderie.'

Another young lady echoed the sentiment: 'I really enjoy working with this cast ? it's so much fun to learn off each other.'

We had heard this theme of bonding within an acting cast so often before that we asked them to compare theatre to sports activities.

'It can be the same because in sports, you're all playing as a team,' one of the girls told us.

Another contrasted the comment by offering the view of individual sports, where competition is all. 'Sport is all about competition,' she said, 'but this is a lot more sharing, learning off each other



Tausha Hanna, James Amadei and Victoria Sigismondo are playing Annie Lennox, Billy Idol and Madonna in Hall Drama's production of *Taming of the Shrew*, An 80's Musical.

her.?

Another added, "As a dancer outside of school, there's always competition and judging but here, no one's judging me. I love the atmosphere? no one's scared to ask for help? the younger kids ask me how this or that is done. It's really good."

"We're not afraid to take constructive criticism from each other," was the assurance from yet another enthusiastic student.

Ciccotelli supported their remarks by agreeing. "These guys are pretty nice with each other; it hasn't always been like that with every group . . ."

Asked why people will want to come and see this production, they had plenty of answers.

"It's really funny."

"All the clever word play by Shakespeare."

"A lot of people might not get Shakespeare but the '80s music is great."

"The costumes are really bold."

"It's really new? really different!"

Hall Drama is participating in the Dufferin Youth Festival of the Arts with a 15-minute segment of the show.

They are performing shortened versions at St. Cornelius Elementary School in Caledon East today (Thursday) on May 15 at 1:10 p.m.; St. Andrew Elementary School tomorrow at 12:30 p.m.; the full version at the Stratford Studio Theatre May 23 at 1 p.m. and Robert F. Hall May 27 at 7:30 p.m.

Next year, they have been invited to Las Angeles, where they will perform a well known British Farce. We can hardly wait for the details.