

C. Where do we go from here?

Most Broadway musicals are thinner in their second acts than the first. Much of the remaining story can be handled in dialogue, and many of the musical numbers are inserted as a plum for the performers or to add showstopping routines regardless of pretext. We see how this plays out in *Kiss Me, Kate*, and the very different ways in which a film and a stage production can address the problem.

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, Act I into Act II (film 1953)

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, Act I into Act II (London 1999; cast as above with Nolan Frederick, *Paul*)

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, "From this moment on" (film 1953; Ann Mitchell, with Tommy Rall, Bobby Van, Bob Fosse, Carol Haney)

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, "Brush up your Shakespeare" (film 1953, with James Whitmore and Keenan Wynn)

D. Curb her headstrong humor

Finally, we look at an issue with the Shakespeare play that is actually exacerbated in the musical: the fact that it seems to exalt the domination of women by force.

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, Harrison Howell scenes (London 1999, with Nicolas Colicos, *Howell*)

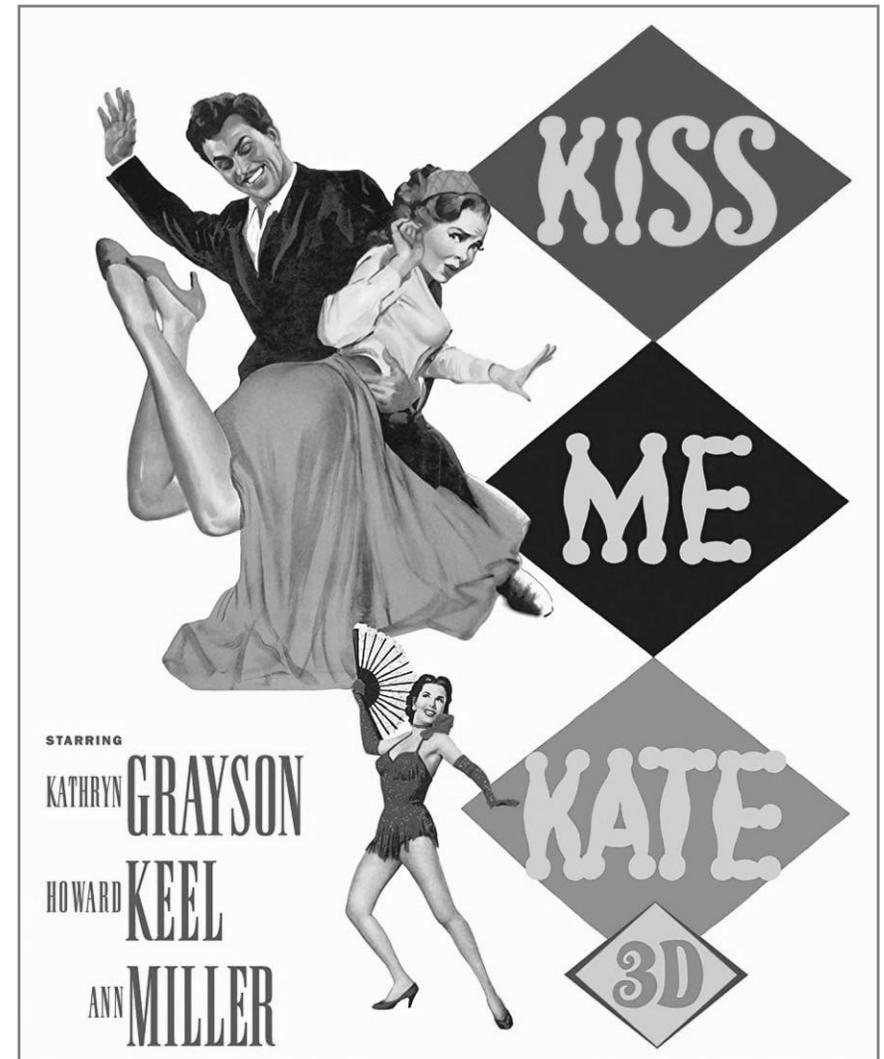
Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, final scene (film 1953)

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, final scene (London 1999)

Bob **Fosse** (1927–87, *American choreographer*), Hermes **Pan** (1909–90, *American choreographer*), Cole **Porter** (1891–1964, *American composer*)

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The Birth of Broadway



7. Stage and Screen

April 1, 2025

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BESIDES BEING ONE OF THE PEAKS IN THE BROADWAY RANGE, **Cole Porter's** *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948) offers a chance to address a question that has been lurking in the background of this course all along: the differences between a Hollywood film, which is the only way we can get to know some of these earlier shows, and the original as presented on a live stage. For once, we have a high-quality film of an excellent and utterly faithful stage production (by Michael Blakemore in London in 1999) to set against the iconic movie of 1953, which is also comparatively faithful to the material but tells the story in its own terms. *rb.*

Interlocking Plots

Kiss Me, Kate is the story of the production of a musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew* in its first pre-Broadway tryout in Baltimore. The plot, therefore, is a combination of the original Shakespeare with the extra elements that the book writers, **Bella and Samuel Spewack**, added to it. The brief summaries below apply to the original and most stage productions; the film handles things rather differently.

SHAKESPEARE. The rich Battista Minola has two daughters: the meek Bianca and her termagant elder sister Katharina. Although she has many suitors, Battista refuses to marry Battista off until Katharina has found a husband. Enter the Petruchio, who offers to tame the girl in return for a generous dowry. He addresses her with the diminutive *Kate* and the two exchange verbal blow for blow, but they find a certain delight in quarreling, and before long they are indeed married. Once home, though, Petruchio puts his wife through a series of ordeals designed to establish his mastery... which she eventually accepts.

SPEWACK AND PORTER. **Fred Graham**, the company director, who also plays Petruchio, realizes that he needs the star-power of his ex-wife **Lilli Vanessi** if the project is to succeed. Although they are divorced and she has gone on to a Hollywood career, it becomes clear that they

still have feelings for each other. When he sends her a repeat of her wedding bouquet on opening night, her feelings pour out—until she realizes that the flowers were really intended for the other female lead, **Lois Lane**, Fred's current squeeze. So when she goes onstage for the first quarrel scene, her anger explodes in vitriolic asides under the Shakespeare text—until Fred threatens to spank her onstage, and does.

She would walk out at this point, except that another actor has forged Fred's signature on an IOU and two gangsters come to collect it. Fred realizes that the only way he can get Lilli to stay is by promising them the takings from the show, and turning the gunmen onto *her* so that she completes the week's run.

A. Another Opening

We look at three different versions of the opening of the show: a semi-staged concert version at the London Proms that sticks close to the original, the 1999 production by Michael Blakemore that slightly rearranges it, and the 1953 movie which completely rewrites it.

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, opening (Royal Albert Hall 2015)

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, opening (film 1953; d. George Sidney; Howard Keel, *Fred*; Kathryn Grayson, *Lilli*; Ann Miller, *Lois*)

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, opening (London 1999; d. Michael Blakemore; Brent Barrett, *Fred*; Rachel York, *Lilli*; Nancy Anderson, *Lois*)

B. Song, Speech, & Silence

We look at two numbers from the third scene of the show that reveal the lingering love between Lilli and Fred, and ask what by means each of the two media choose to show it.

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, “Wunderbar” and “So in love” (London 1999; cast as above)

Porter: *Kiss Me, Kate*, “Wunderbar” and “So in love” (film 1953; cast as above)