

# Exhibitionism

*Chronicle arts reviews*



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## **CURST & SHREWD: AN INVIGORATING CHAT**

**Hyde Park Theatre,**

through September 6

Running time: 2 hrs, 20 min

Find a coffeehouse or a pub or maybe just a kitchen in which there's a fridge full of beer -- anywhere there might be a cluster of friends talking about some show they've all seen -- and listen. Listen to the free-form chatter: a river of reactions, pro and con, to the work as a whole and to a thousand of its aspects -- this performance, that performance, the writing, the lighting, the sound, the hair -- sometimes reasoned and respectful, sometimes rude and raving. Listen to the cascade of voices, speaking singly and in a noisy jumble, each with its own take on what's been seen, informed by the slightly different angle from which it was seen: the emotional, the moral, the sexual, the political, the experiential. Listen to the tumble of genial agreements, sharp dissents, flip quips, intimate observations, and unexpected insights that mark a lively conversation over a show.

In *curst & Shrewd: The Taming of the Shrew Unhinged*, that lively conversation is the show. The intrepid artists of Rude Mechanicals, led by director Shawn Sides, have crafted a performance piece out of their thoughts and feelings about one of William Shakespeare's most controversial plays. In 13 movements, they wander through the tale of Kate and Petruchio, occasionally performing snippets

of the text but mostly commenting on it and what they take its themes to be through scholarly criticism, lines from other plays, slogans, news items, snatches of popular songs, excerpts from bestsellers and TV programs, video clips, choreographed routines, quotes from celebrities, friends, and relations, and, in what appear to be the show's most personal segments, individual monologues that draw parallels between experiences and issues in Shrew and their own and other's lives in the world.

Like the best conversations, the result is a brilliant mess. It's all over the map in terms of what is said and how it's said, roaming hither, yon, and back again in its content and forms of expression and tone. And since its approach to its subject is so fractured -- examining the play in bits and pieces, almost as if in an autopsy -- it loses something essential in our full experience of Shrew: the drama of the story being told when it's performed and mystery of these characters when they're fully realized. Still, for all its aimlessness and myopia, curst & Shrewd invigorates. It is intelligent and inventive, ranging over a deliriously broad range of source material, from Germaine Greer and Isaac Asimov to the Dixie Cups and WAR, from Punch and Judy to Stanley and Stella to George and Martha, from Funny Girl to Men Are From Mars/Women Are From Venus. Nothing is out of bounds and no one is afraid to speak her or his mind (a quality expressed with hilarious aplomb in Ehren Christian's arch deluxe account of a break-up at Trudy's). The show, which could easily mire itself in smothering self-righteousness, maintains an appealing humor throughout, even mocking its own attempts to control the direction of discourse. Most of all, it is clearly personal. In the monologues, in the committed delivery of the performed scenes, and in the eyes of the actors who engage the audience with their gazes, we can glean how much this material matters to these people. That makes it a conversation well worth entering into, and given the style and skill with which Rude Mechanicals conduct it, it's one I'd enter into again in a minute. -- *Robert Faires*