

# Kate From Behind

By

Sue & Clive Read ©

## Act I

### Scene 1

*(Curtain opens on two empty dressing rooms with costumes, make-up etc. left from previous night's dress rehearsal. Wyn enters first one dressing rooms then the other leaving good luck cards. As she leaves the second dressing room she meets the John - the theatre director)*

John Oh hello Wyn - here bright and early as usual I see - keen as ever. How many years is it now?

Wyn Oh - I get a gold bar to my medal this year.

John Really? How many years is that?

Wyn Well my first year was Rose Marie, then the year after that was The Arcadians - now the year after that there were two shows.....

John Oh yes?

Wyn Yes - we did two shows in a year quite often - in fact one year - I think it was '68 - we did three! Or was it '69? No - I tell a lie - it was '67 'cos it was the year my Michael was born and I missed one of them - The Quaker Girl it was. You know it's the only show I've missed in all the time I've been a member of the society.

John Really? - well done! The Society needs members like you.

Wyn Yes - lovely shows they were - different to what you had on here last week. What was it called - Up Yours? Still that's all it seems to be these days. My son-in-law says (if you'll pardon the expression) its all tits and bums.

*(John is meanwhile pinning messages on the mirrors during this)*

John Yes - well that's what brings the audiences in - and you know what'll happen if they don't come - instead of one screen we can easily move - it'll be six screens permanently that can't be moved.

Wyn No! They wouldn't do that! Not to the Tivoli. Nobody would stand for it. Anyway its got a preservation order on it!

John They've done it to most of the other theatres, but looking on the bright side, this is the best year we've had for some time. We've had almost as many live shows had films. So perhaps you're right and it won't happen to the Tivoli - I hope not otherwise I'll be out of a job. There's not much call for theatre directors these days.

Wyn No I suppose not. Anyway I'd better go. My daughter Tracey's in the dance team this year and I've got her a little extra something - you know. I'll pop it on her table before she gets here.

*(She exits. John goes to the ladies' dressing room and pins a letter above the mirror. The Chairman - Colin - enters)*

Colin Oh hello John - nobody here yet?

John No - not yet. You were quite late finishing dress rehearsal weren't you?

Colin Ah yes - I wanted to have a word with you about that. You're not going to charge us until 2.00 a.m. are you? I mean it wasn't all our fault.

John Wasn't it? Well that's not what Mick told me.

Colin Now of course I'm saying nothing against Mick - he's a wonderful stage manager- but no-one could find him between 10 and 11 and then with your lighting chappie being on holiday again this year - well everything got delayed.

John I'm sure we'll come to some compromise Colin. I'll see you about it after the show eh?  
*(He starts to exit)*

Colin Before you go John - a word in your ear - there's a lot of rumours about the old Tivoli being turned into a multi-screen cinema or a super-market or something. Have you heard anything about it?

John I can assure you Colin that Leisurama U.K Ltd will decide these things without consulting me. I shall be the last to know. I should think with your Council connections you'll know anything before I will.

Colin Yes - that is true. Well you understand as the new Chairman of the Musical Society it is my duty to ask. You see I want to make plans for the future. Just between you and me I want to make some changes. I need some hard-headed business people on that committee. To be honest John they're all a bit woolly - but its very difficult to make any plans if I don't know whether the old Tivoli's going to keep going or not.

John All I can say is as soon as I know - you'll know - alright?

Colin Yes of course - thank you John. Er - did you catch any of the dress rehearsal?

John Yes - I saw some of it.

Colin What did you think?

John It looked up to your usual standard. Of course having a professional producer does help.

Colin Yes - she's done a wonderful job. Mind you the principals are untried you know.

John Chris has had parts in the society for as long as I've been here.

Colin Ah yes - but nothing as big as Petruchio. Got a good voice I'll grant you, but his attitude worries me. He treats it all as a bit of a joke you know.

John Oh I'm sure he'll be alright. Certainly the tickets are going well. Saturday night has practically gone.

Colin Really? That's good. I always loved Cole Porter you know. I knew Kiss Me Kate would be a good one for my first year. Good Box Office.  
*Linda Stewart - the leading lady - enters)*  
Hello Linda - nice and early I see. Were you trying to miss the traffic?

Linda No - I just couldn't settle. I gave the children their tea and then I left them with Gerald. It's awful really isn't it but - well - with it being my first major role with the society and everything - I just wanted to get here, get into my dress and get into the part - if you see what I mean.  
*(John exits - nodding at Linda as he goes)*

Colin Splendid! Splendid! You're going to be a superb Kate I just know it. Sylvia was only saying to me the other day that she has produced this show nineteen times now and she's never had a Kate like you.

Linda Really? Well I am feeling confident - not that I'm not nervous you understand because I am - but my singing teacher, Norman, has been very complimentary of late.

Colin Well as you know Linda - I am Chairman of the auditioning committee - and even though you've had very little experience - and that some years ago - I persuaded the other members of the committee that it was time we had a complete change. Not that I've anything against Stella you understand, but she has been our leading lady for the past seven years - and a very good job she's made of it too - but I said that I felt the public get tired of seeing the same old faces year after year and it was time for a fresh face. And there you were - as pretty as a picture - and a voice like an angel.

Linda Oh Colin - how nice of you to say so. But I am aware of the responsibility placed upon my shoulders and I hope I don't let you all down.

Colin *(crossing to the door)* No fear of that my dear - I just know you'll be a great success.  
*(Mark sticks his head round the door)*

Colin Oh hello Mark - or should I say Lucentio? Both you newcomers bright and early eh?

Mark I've been here since 6 o'clock.

Colin I've been next-door - I didn't see you there.

Mark No - I've been in the toilet.

Colin Since 6 o'clock?

Mark Well off and on - if you see what I mean.

Linda Nerves is it Mark? It affects me just the same way.

Mark Does it? Oh - I thought I'd got a bug.

Colin Dear me - this will never do. We can't have our keenest members hors de combat as they say.

Linda Gerald says it will pass as soon as I say my first line.

Colin I do hope not my dear.

Linda Oh you are awful Colin.

Mark Isn't Sandy here yet?

Colin Well if she is I've been struck deaf. Ha ha ha.

Linda Now now - don't be unkind Colin. I think Mark is quite fond of Sandra - aren't you Mark?

Mark No! - Well - Yes! But because she is such a wonderful dancer and singer. The way she licked those girls into shape is just fantastic. And she's been so patient while she helped me with the Rose Ballet.

Colin "It Ain't 'Alf 'Ot" is very good - I'll give her that.

Mark "Too Darned Hot"

Colin What?

Mark It's "Too Darned Hot" - the number - not "It Ain't 'Alf 'Ot".

Colin Are you sure?

Mark Yes

Linda He's right Colin - it is "Too Darned Hot".

Colin Is it? Well where have I heard "It Ain't 'Alf 'Ot"? Oh never mind, I must get myself upstairs the patrons will be arriving soon. I must be there to greet them. Gives a good impression you know.

*(Colin exits)*

Hello Chris.

Chris Evening. *(Chris passes by the open door, retraces his steps and says..)* 'Ere you - you're in the wrong dressing room. This is the girls' dressing room and that is the mens'. *(Mark exits quickly)* Or are you one of those who isn't sure? And how's my fair Kate this evening?

Linda Very well thank you Chris - or should I say Fred - or should I say Petruchio?

Chris Sexy will do my sweet.

Linda Chris!

Chris And how about giving me a good luck kiss before the others get here. *(He grabs her).*

Linda Oh Chris! *(He drops her back in the chair suddenly)*

Chris Oh bugger!

Linda What's the matter?

Chris I've left me beer in the car. *(He exits hurriedly)*

*Lights up on mens' dressing room. Cyril (Baptista) and Mark (Lucentio) are there. Mark is clumsily putting on his make-up as Cyril enters).*

Cyril Evening Mark.

Mark Oh hello Cyril. I've been made up.

Cyril *(Studying him)* Yes so I see.

Mark Is it alright?

Cyril Who did it?

Mark Lionel - is it wrong?

Cyril It would be fine for the Mikado - but not for Kiss Me Kate. You don't need as much as that - you've got enough there for the whole chorus. Here *(hands him a tissue)* - rub some of it off and put some of this brown powder on.

Mark Smells funny doesn't it?

Cyril Well you know what they say about the smell of the greasepaint don't you?

Mark No.

Cyril No - I don't suppose you do. Mind you - now I come to think of it - neither do I. It's just that when you've been doing it as long as me - well the smell sort of gets to you. Even with amateurs.

Mark How long have you been in the society Cyril?

Cyril 40 years - I was 16 when I joined. But this is my last show. Last year should have been my final one but what with Walter - our Chairman - dying and Colin taking over it seemed only right that I should carry on as secretary for another year and see Colin settled in.

Mark Is that better? (*showing Cyril his face*)

Cyril Yes - that's better. Lionel is very willing, but I should do it yourself if I were you. My last show and your first eh Mark?

Mark Yeah - I can't wait. Six months' rehearsals all leading up to this moment. I can't really believe its here.

Cyril Yes - it's a funny hobby - amateur theatre. I mean if you'd been going to woodwork classes you'd have had a bedroom suite by now.

Mark Yeah I know - but it wouldn't be so exciting would it?

Cyril No I don't suppose it would.

Mark How many shows have you been in?

Cyril I do happen to know the answer to that one. Colin asked me to find out - for his speech you know. Believe it or not, taking into account the fact that some years I did two or three shows, it's 101!

Mark Over a 100 shows! That's 100 weeks. That's nearly two years on the stage. What was your first show?

Cyril You always remember your first show. It was The Vagabond King. There's never any show quite as good as your first show

Mark Why is that?

Cyril I don't really know. But the first one is the one that everybody looks upon as something special. Perhaps it's because they remember the feeling that you're feeling now. Putting on make-up for your first part in your first show, knowing that the paying customers are filtering into the theatre. Paying to see you enjoying yourself.

Mark Oh don't talk about the people coming in. They won't be coming in yet will they? Oh it gives me the stomach-ache just thinking about it. *(He starts to exit).*

Cyril Just sit down and take some deep breaths. My wife used to be just like you.

Mark *(Sitting down).* Did she?

Cyril Yes - my Rosemary. She was in all the shows with me until last year. She was with me in my first show - The Vagabond King. Do you know the famous song that comes from that?

Mark No.

Cyril No of course you don't. Anyway, it was "Only A Rose" and that was what I used to call her - Rose.

Mark No wonder your first show was special. Were you both in the chorus?

Cyril Yes, me in the chorus and her in the dance team. But not for long. She could sing - my Rose - and I wasn't that bad. The next year we both got small parts and for some years we played the leads in the Desert Song, Rose Marie, The King and I, Carousel and South Pacific

Mark Oh I've heard of Rose Marie - that was Wyn's first show.

Cyril That's right it was. How did you know that?

Mark Oh she told me about it, but only about twenty times.

Cyril Ah yes - she would. *(Chris enters - wet - with beer cans under his arm)*

Chris You'll never believe it! That silly old bugger, Bert, wouldn't let me in backstage without my membership card. I had to go all the way round to the front. I'm soaked!

Mark But you've been in once already.

Chris I know. I forgot my beer. I had to go back to the car park - and it's pouring down! There's a coach just rolled up from Dentford. Everybody on it looks at least 90.

Cyril Well it's always senior citizens first night - it's half price for them isn't it?

Chris That's right. Old aged pensioners and kids! Those who can hear can't understand it and those who can understand it can't hear! Right! To more important things. Who wants a beer?

*(Lights fade on mens' and up on ladies' dressing room. Stella enters)*

Linda Evening Stella.

*(She doesn't answer but walks straight across to one of her costumes. She examines it.)*

Stella She hasn't done it!

Linda Pardon?

Stella The hem. Rene. She hasn't done it! I specifically said to her after the dress rehearsal last night that it needed shortening. I mean how am I to do "Another Opening Another Show" tripping over my dress every other step?

Linda Oh dear. Can I help?

Stella It's not your job. You're supposed to be the leading lady. It's Rene's job! She's the wardrobe mistress. The trouble is if you don't catch her early she's - well how can one put it kindly - well you can't - she's too drunk! There! I've said it! You may as well know - she's got a drink problem.

Linda Oh Stella. I'm sure that's not true. I've always found her very helpful.

Stella Walter knew of course. I'd almost persuaded him to ask her to step down and then he had a heart attack and went and died! Now we're still lumbered with her and our new so-called Chairman Colin. Oh he's so working class - so nouveau riche.

Linda Well I understand Colin kindly stepped into the breach at very short notice.....

Stella He's an opportunist. He cares nothing about the theatre whatsoever! I mean - what is he - a builder with aspirations towards local politics - pathetic! And to think that a person like that should chair the auditioning committee.

Linda *(Trying to change the subject)* Oh look! I've got a card from Wyn. How nice.

Stella Yes - you and everybody else down to the theatre cat! *(Looking at her costume)* I mean - these are the same costumes we had when I played the lead and that was .. some years ago... It's not all Rene's fault of course - she has no control over what they send her. Why do they both to measure us? They obviously take no notice.

Linda Well I just hope that I can emulate your performance. We were only talking last week about how good "Kate" was the last time the society did it.

Stella Yes - well of course it was different then. We had a real producer - someone who knew what he was doing. Not like Sylvia! I mean what was she? A Bluebell girl! Actually you're doing quite well under the circumstances. Of course Terry, my producer, only produces things for Channel 4 now. I got a card from him at christmas.

Linda Really - how nice of him.

Stella On the Wednesday night - the Wednesday night mind you - they were standing three deep at the back. And I had three encores for "I Hate Men". Thirteen hundred people shouting for More. I don't suppose you'll ever experience that.

Linda Thirteen hundred?



Stella Of course.

Linda All looking at you?

Stella Well I was the only one on stage.

Linda Ooooh! *(She rushes out)*

*(Fade out on ladies' and up on mens' dressing room. Chris and Mark are in there in costume and makeup. Rod [who plays Harrison Howell] enters.)*

All Evening Rod - etc.

Rod Evening - it's pouring down.

Chris I know - I got soaked as well.

Rod Everybody alright then?

All Yes - Fine - etc.

Chris What about you?

Rod Well I have got a slight cold - but - well - I'll soldier on I expect. At least Harrison Howell hasn't got anything to sing.

Chris Yes - we count our blessings don't we Rod? *(Rod glares at him)*

Mark Is Rene here yet?

Cyril I haven't seen her - why?

Mark My tights have got a hole in.

Chris Where?

Mark It doesn't matter where.

Chris Oh yes it does my boy. Oh Christ I've got to stick that beard on now.

Rod I grew one.

Chris Oh that's right - you played this part last time didn't you - with old face-ache next-door.

Rod Do you mean Stella?

Chris Yeah - Stella. Rather you than me mate. Here Cyril can you help me with this?

Mark Why don't you go and see Lionel?

Chris     You must be joking! He stuck one on me in the Desert Song when I was a Riff. I looked like a werewolf.

Cyril     But he's willing.

All        Oh yes - he's willing.

Rod       I'll have you know Stella and I had a marvellous relationship the last time we did this show. And, say it as I shouldn't, my Petruchio to her Kate was superbly matched. Of course, she never did get "I Hate Men" right - but nevertheless...

Mark      You played Harrison Howell last time didn't you Cyril?

Cyril     Yes.

Mark      The review in The Gazette said you were, and I quote, "as usual a well studied, hilarious cameo."

Cyril     How on earth did you know that?

Mark      Wyn showed me the report in her scrapbook.

Chris     I bet you don't know who played your part do you?

Mark      No - it didn't say.

Chris     No - it wouldn't! He was useless - the worst dancer in the world!

Mark      Who was it?

Chris     Yours truly.

Mark      You?

Chris     Yes and Sandy was Lois again. Mind you, she's better this time round. She hadn't got the experience then. (*He winks*).

Mark      I'm sure she was just as good last time as she is now.

Chris     Well if she is you're in for a treat.

Cyril     Will you stop talking while I'm trying to stick this beard on! If not - you can go to Lionel!

Chris     (Screaming) Oh no - anything but that!

Mark      It was a very comprehensive newspaper review actually. And it said about Kate and Petruchio....

Rod Yes - well the past is the past - and we must all look forward to this show.

Mark Quite right! Anyway - you'll have chance to do better this time Rod.

Cyril Mark! Weren't you going to find Rene and get those tights mended?  
*(Mark moves from men's to ladies dressing room as the lights change).*

Mark Is Rene in here?

Stella No she isn't. You don't expect to find her where she's needed do you?

Mark Only it's just that there's a hole in my tights.

Stella Oh calamity! A hole in his tights! How dreadful! I mean - how can he possibly go on with a hole in his tights? Here am I, liable to break my neck on my first entrance and he's worried about a hole in his tights!

Linda Would you like me to sew it up for you Mark?

Mark Are you sure? I mean - if its not too much trouble...

Linda No - of course not. I don't mind. I'm all ready anyway.

Mark Oh thanks. I'll go and fetch them. *(He exits).*

Stella A word of advice my dear. Don't start doing things like that. People only take advantage.

Linda It's only a little hole in his tights.

Stella That's as maybe. But mark my words, before you know it you'll be remaking an entire costume. Anyway it's not your job!

*(Rene enters - something clinking in her bag)*

Well - talk of the devil! You made it then.

Rene We couldn't find anywhere to park and its chucking it down. *(She shakes her brolly furiously).*

Stella Oh thank you very much!

Rene It's only a little clean water Stella. It won't hurt you.

Stella I still don't want it all over me.

Rene Oooh! What a mood you're in. *(To Linda)* She's always like this opening night. It's nerves.

Stella     It most certainly is not nerves. You don't really imagine I'm nervous over a tiny part like this after all the leads I've played!

Rene       Nerves!

Stella     I'm more nervous about tripping over this! (*She holds up a Shakespearian frock*). I did ask you to shorten in last night. I don't want my first number ruined!

Rene       (*Calmly*) You don't wear that for your first number. You wear it for the Pavanne and that's half way through Act I. I'll have it done by then - don't worry.

Stella     Oh - well - that's alright then. I