

## Curious Kate conquers 'brutish' Marlow

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CURIOUS LOVE: Howard Chadwick and Gilly Tompkins as Mr and Mrs Hardcastle.

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### SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER New Vic

FIRST performed in 1773, *She Stoops to Conquer* is a love story of the most curious kind.

The comedy is one of the few plays from the 18th century that has endured what time has thrown at it, and is still regularly performed today.

Although much has changed from when it was written, its central themes of love, class and generational divide continue to be relevant in modern times.

The play's opening scene presents Mr Hardcastle – a traditional gentleman who hopes to marry his fiery daughter, Kate, to the son of an old friend from London.

The different worlds of modern town and old country collide when the prospective suitor, Young Marlow, travels to Mr Hardcastle's rural manor, Liberty Hall.

But, along the way, Marlow and his travelling companion, Hastings, stop at an inn where they are tricked by Mr Hardcastle's mischievous and juvenile step-son, Tony Lumpkin, into thinking they are miles from their final destination. He sends them onto the next suitable inn where they are bemused by the 'innkeeper' who insists on boring them with fanciful tales of battles and English lords when all they want to do is relax and be merry.

Little do they know this man they treat as a servant is actually Mr Hardcastle and they have stumbled upon his home. And so begins a long and tortuous night of confusion, trickery and humour. One that seems very fitting of the play's Irish author, Oliver Goldsmith.

Directed by Conrad Nelson, the play is brought to life by Halifax-based theatre company Northern Broadsides.

Oliver Gomm plays the brash, insolent Marlow, who is inflicted with the inability to stop himself from turning into a shivering, quivering shell of a man when talking to women of a similar social status.

Yet, when he is faced with women of an inferior class, he becomes confident, self-assured and lecherous.

And so it is that Kate, played by Hannah Edwards, conjures up a plan to stoop to conquer and trick him into believing she is a lowly barmaid in order to get to know him.

Hastings (Guy Lewis), also plays tricks to get what he wants, and what he wants is to elope with Mrs Hardcastle's niece, Constance Neville (Lauryn Redding). The couple are helped along by man-child Lumpkin (Jon Trenchard) whose comical quips and musical interludes are not far removed from the Shakespearean fool.

Rarely is there a moment's silence as the actors don instruments and treat the audience to a song while the sets are prepared.

Lumpkin's farcical interjections are supported with a comedic trio who provoke many laughs.

Howard Chadwick and Gilly Tompkins play the long-suffering, but equally as mischievous, Mr and Mrs Hardcastle.

Tompkins is also brilliant as the larger-than-life wife who can't quite get to grips with London fashions.

Expect fantastical 18th-century costumes, with a modern twist, big wigs and even bigger words. And, although written hundreds of years ago, the language is easily translated by the talented cast.

Still, if I were Kate, I would not have been too enamoured with Marlow's brutishness when he believed she was a commoner. And that is why this a most curious love story.

It runs at the New Vic until November 15