

# Talkin' Broadway Regional News & Reviews: San Francisco - "Smash" - 4/14/14



## ***Smash Is a Smash!***

Dragon Productions Theatre Company

Also see Richard's reviews of *Painting the Clouds with Sunshine* and *Every Five Minutes* and Patrick's review of *Baba*

Jeffrey Hatcher's theatrical adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's novel "An Unsocial Socialist" has all the earmarks of Shaw's better-known plays: witty, erudite dialogue; arch and sarcastic comedy; and insightful social commentary. Apart from some modern-sounding dialogue, you might mistake it wholly for Shaw's work, clever and timeless in its views of society and male-female relations. The current production at Dragon Productions captures all the delight and comic mileage with a lively, enthusiastic cast.

Mere minutes after saying his vows, Sidney Trefusius (William J. Brown III) tells his bride Henrietta (Katie Rose Krueger) his intention to leave her and go off to foment Socialist revolution in England. Her protestations ignored, Henrietta despairs of seeing him again. But we do, three months later, at a women's college where he is posing as a working-class handyman. There we also meet a host of other characters, including Headmistress Miss Wilson (Shelley Lynn Johnson), students Gertrude (Kendall Callaghan) and Jane (Laura



**Katie Rose Krueger and  
William J. Brown III**

Henricksen), instructor Mr. Erskine (Brian Flegel) and neighbor Sir Charles (Evan Michael Schumacher), and groundskeeper Lumpkin (Nicolae Muntean).

They're all abuzz about troublemaker student Agatha (Sarah Benjamin), whose rebellion against school constraints is causing major disruption and threats of her expulsion. When she rides in on her bicycle, red hair streaming, Sidney discovers a kindred spirit, and he enlists Agatha in his scheme to infiltrate and take over the school in order to overthrow the government. Then Henrietta and her father (Paul Stout) show up, as Agatha's fostering kin, and schemes begin to unravel.

That's all the spoilers you're going to get—you can already hear Shaw's droll absurdity in the plot, his skewering of capitalism, socialism, education, marriage, love, and just about everything else. Even badminton and bad poetry come under fire, with razor-sharp wit and the broadest comedy.

The text is given a very arch, over-the-top delivery by director Vickie Rozell that mostly works, especially given an American audience. There's too much shouting in act one, but everyone seems to settle down for the more hilarious act two, and the plot goes from zany to downright wacky. The resolution has some nice surprises in store; Shaw likes to contradict expectations.

The cast is quite good, mostly up to the dialect and the arch style. Benjamin can be shrill at times, but makes up with gleeful enthusiasm, and Brown flexes easily between cad and comrade, bringing a nice note of wistfulness to the otherwise scheming Sidney. Krueger charms as the seemingly hapless Henrietta, and makes a genuine transformation into a strong Shavian female. Supporting cast contribute much to the overall enjoyment and fun, with adept roller-skating, virtual badminton, and sincerely rotten sonnets.

Michael Palumbo has devised a simple yet effective and attractive garden setting for the set, allowing for a wide-open playing area and ramps for cycling and skating. His deft light design adds delineation and atmosphere. Costume design by Y. Sharon Peng is both functional and comic. Some props are a bit jarring, but the wonderful tea cart is almost another character in the show.

If you're a Shaw fan, you'll want to enjoy this entertaining rendition of one of his lesser-known works; if you aren't familiar with Shaw, this could be just the right introduction you need, for fun and philosophy.

*Smash* by Jeffrey Hatcher, adapted from George Bernard Shaw's novel 'An Unsocial Socialist," presented by Dragon Productions Theatre Company, 2120 Broadway Street, Redwood City; through May 4, 2014. Tickets \$15, available at 650-493-2006 or [www.dragonproductions.net](http://www.dragonproductions.net).

*Photo: James Kasyan*

Cheers - and be sure to Check the [lineup of great shows this season in the San Francisco area](#)

- Jeanie K. Smith