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## The art of negotiation inspires 'Shrew'

By Jim Farber Staff Writer

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Geoffrey Lower and Sabra Williams star in "The Taming of the Shrew." (Photo courtesy of Craig Schwartz)

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dies, it leads him to grow up, get a wife and start a family. He's an exceedingly self-assured wheeler-dealer."

For Sabra Williams (best known for her work with the Actors' Gang) the role of Katherine, she says, is more about female empowerment than shrewishness.

"I think what people see in her as shrewishness actually comes from a lot of pain and frustration and the desire to be accepted for who she is," Williams says. "I see her as a woman operating on her full power and that's intimidating to people. She will not compromise who she is to fit into the way society expects women to be. Yes, she definitely has a temper. But I don't think she's a bad person."

"My Hebrew name, Sabra, means prickly on the outside and soft on the inside," says the Israeli-born actress. "I think that's Katherine."

For Donenberg, however, the driving force behind this "Taming of the Shrew" is the art of negotiation. And for inspiration, the 51-year-old director says he didn't have to look any further than his own marriage.

"I've been married for 14 years," he says, during a breather between rehearsals. "I have two kids - a 3-year-old and a 9-year-old. And I've come to an understanding in my marriage. We both work full time. And for our relationship to work there is this constant negotiation that goes on. So, when I started looking at 'Taming of the Shrew,' I viewed it through the lens of

negotiations."

The core idea behind the production, Donenberg says, was stimulated by Harvard professor Roger Fisher's 1981 book, "Getting to Yes," a contemporary bible on the art of negotiation.

"There are primarily two styles of negotiation," Donenberg explains professorially. "There's 'principled negotiation' and 'positional negotiation.' In positional negotiation you take a position and try to beat the other person down. You win or lose, but you hold your position and don't give in. It's a 'win/lose' scenario."

"Principled negotiation," he continues, "has at its core strengthening and preserving the relationship between the two parties that are negotiating. If you care about the relationship, you take a principled approach. You look for mutual interest in order to create a 'win/win.'"

In "Taming of the Shrew," Donenberg says, "Petruchio and Katherine begin as 'positional,' in a beat-me-down confrontation, and gradually evolve into a principled negotiation that is mutually beneficial."

"They start out as antagonists, based on who has the most power," he says. "By the end of the play it's about the intimacy they share."

It's a civilized, certainly less misogynistic interpretation that Donenberg is convinced is truer to what Shakespeare had in mind.

"I looked up the word 'negotiate' in the Oxford

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English Dictionary," he says. "And it said that Shakespeare invented the word (in its English form). In 'Much Ado About Nothing' he writes, 'Let every eye negotiate for itself and trust no agent.'

"I think that's what he wrote 'The Taming of the Shrew' about. Everything in life is a negotiation. And Shakespeare saw that."

## PREVIEW

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