

Sex-for-peace: Summer Theater presents bawdy anti-war comedy *Lysistrata*

BY JOHN SANFORD

The women in *Lysistrata* are antiwar activists who achieve peace by offering the combatants, their husbands, an ultimatum: Put down your arms or no more sex.

Stanford Summer Theater's production of the bawdy, 2,400-year-old play by Greek dramatist Aristophanes opens July 17, with a sneak preview set for July 16, in Pigott Theater, adjacent to Memorial Auditorium. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 7 p.m. Sundays through Aug. 9. In addition, Saturday matinee performances are scheduled for 2 p.m. Aug. 2 and 9. For tickets, stop by or call the ticket office in Tresidder Memorial Union (725-2787). After hours, call 725-5838. Or visit the web at www.stanford.edu/group/summertheater. Admission is \$25; \$17 for seniors and students.

The play stars the gifted Bay Area actor and mime Geoff Hoyle, acclaimed for his physical comedy (he began his career as a clown in the Pickle Family Circus and Cirque du Soleil) and one-man shows, including *Feast of Fools* and *The Convict's Return*. Hoyle, who also created and performed the role of Zazu in the original

Broadway production of *The Lion King*, last appeared on campus in the 2001 Stanford Summer Theater (SST) production of Ionesco's *The Chairs*.

The cast of 10 also includes Kay Kostopoulos, a veteran of the American Conservatory Theater, the California Shakespeare Festival, and SST; Katie Sigismund, who also has appeared in the California Shakespeare Festival; and Annie Abrams, a recent Stanford graduate who appeared in last year's SST production of *Biedermann and the Firebugs*.

In the spirit of Aristophanes' original, the script has been adapted with plenty of raunchy humor by Stanford drama lecturer Amy Freed, whose most recent play, *The Beard of Avon*, ran last winter at the Geary Theater in San Francisco. Freed's other plays include *Freedomland*, a 1998 Pulitzer Prize finalist; *The Psychic Life of Savages*; and *Claustrophobia*. Live music for the SST production was composed by Bruce Barthol of the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

Director Rush Rehm, an associate professor of drama and classics who founded SST, has described the play as "the world's best anti-war comedy" and asserts that Aristophanes speaks to our times. And while it may not conjure images of U.S. Defense

Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on his knees begging his wife for some whoopee, the production is every bit a riposte to the war in Afghanistan, which Rehm said first inspired him to stage the play, and in Iraq. (Unrelated to the SST production, public readings of *Lysistrata* were held around the world March 3 to protest the war in Iraq.)

Rehm, who has been arrested twice this year — once in San Francisco and once at the Lockheed Martin facility in Sunnyvale — while protesting against the Iraq war, said that some classicists view *Lysistrata* as not much more than a ribald comedy. But he believes there is a deeper political message and hopes it will come to the surface in this production. "Amy [Freed] has such a natural feel, for, you know, bodily humor, scatological stuff, wit, marvelously clever language, physical comedy," Rehm said. "So if there's anything I pushed, it was probably the political side of it."

Rehm said differences between the Peloponnesian War, which resulted in a 30 to 50 percent decline of Athens' population, and the recent war in Iraq, in which few Americans have been killed, also highlight

a relevant fact: Whereas the Greek war touched Greek lives every day, the vast majority of Americans won't face death at the hands of Iraqis, much less run up against the sharp end of U.S. military might (even as "collateral damage").

"One of the things we have to do is help suggest a context — that war isn't just a media event that happens to people whose names we can't spell and whose color we don't like, but is actually something that comes very, very close to home,"

Rehm said. "Everybody got that when the World Trade Center was attacked."

The SST production is made possible by funding from Stanford Summer Session, the Office of the President, the School of Humanities and Sciences, and the Drama and Classics departments.

In conjunction with SST, the Continuing Studies Program is sponsoring a panel discussion, "Serious Laughter: Comedy and Social Issues," from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. July 14 in Pigott Theater, featuring Freed, Hoyle, Rehm and Barthol. The event, which is free and open to the public, will explore comedy as a vehicle for delivering simple truths and incisive social critique. **SR**

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