

Stanford's 'Lysistrata' urges peace but plays for laughs

By **KAREN WANG**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

"It's better to fuck than fight," said Rush Rehm, director of "Lysistrata", a Stanford Summer Theater production that opens tonight at 8:00 p.m. in Pigott Theater.

This rendition of "Lysistrata" is a modern adaptation of Aristophanes' 2,400 year old anti-war comedy about the male sex's propensity for war, complete with criticisms of the current administration's justifications for the war in Iraq.

In the original play, the heroine Lysistrata unites women on both sides of the Peloponnesian War in a sex strike to force their warring husbands to reach a peace agreement.

"The play was written 2,000 years ago but is completely relevant," said Anne Gregory, Class of '03, who plays the lead role as Lysistrata. "It kind of makes one question why war is necessary or [if] we resort to it too quickly."

Recent Stanford graduates joined with professional actors to rehearse an average of 48 hours per week this past month for the production, which was adapted to its current form by renowned playwright and Stanford drama lecturer Amy Freed, a 1998 Pulitzer Prize finalist.

"Amy [Freed] has such a natural feel, for, you know, bodily humor, scatological stuff, wit, marvelously clever language, physical comedy. So if there's anything I pushed, it was probably the political side of it," Rehm, an associate professor in the drama department and the founder of SST, told the Stanford New Service.

"I'd like the audience to laugh and encourage them to think about the idiom and destruction of institutionalized war," he said.

Even though the play takes specific

cracks at the current situation in Iraq, Rehm said that its message is timeless.

"It's funny and simple — make love not war," he said.

"Sadly the United States' contribution to military violence is not limited to Iraq,"

he added. "It is in many places with [US] troops or support for militaristic regimes. It's not an one issue play."

While Rehm had been wanting to bring "Lysistrata" to campus for over a year, others previously read the play in

White Plaza on March 3 as part of a coordinated theatrical protest, which had participation from groups in 59 different countries, against the then-pending war in Iraq.

"It's pretty cool to be involved with something worldwide," Gregory said. "It ties you to something that is bigger than just a small production."

New York actresses Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bowe started the prior Lysistrata project to foster dialogue about the war. Actors in the SST production of "Lysistrata" are also hopeful of inspiring public discussion on the motives for all wars.

"It would be ideal if people take the message that war is a little silly and question why our society constantly goes to war," Gregory said.

Rehm sees theater acts like "Lysistrata" as a means of circumventing the censorship and propaganda that he says permeate mainstream media organizations.

"I think this is an artistic expression of the same kind of action and commitment that parts of the Stanford community have shown with the rise of student activism," Rehm added.

"Being that we're doing it right across from Hoover Tower, there's a sense of simply refusing to be silent. Simply for the sake of speaking out," said rising senior Audrey Hannah, who plays Siliconia, one of Lysistrata's female sidekicks.

Despite its serious political message, "Lysistrata" is a classic raunchy Greek comedy.

"How many synonyms can you come up with for penis — they are probably all in the play," Gregory said.

Performances will be held through Aug. 9. Tickets are available at the Tres-sider Box Office and the Pigott Box Office or at <http://www.acteva.com/go/stanford-summertheater/>.



Recent Stanford graduate Annie Abrams plays Myrrhine and Geoff Hoyle plays the Magistrate in the University's adaptation of the Greek comedy "Lysistrata," directed by Rush Rehm.

Courtesy of Chad Bonaker