

Sex or war – take your pick at Stanford

Theater Review by Robert Lee Hall

A furiously trembling man stuck his angry face in mine. “I came to see Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, not some liberal BS!” he spat before stomping out of Stanford University’s Pigott Theater. I, too, had come to see the world’s greatest anti-war comedy (the Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup* runs a close second). Only when I took my seat did I discover what

had set him off: video projections of slogans like, “People don’t start wars, the Bush White House does,” and such facts as, “The U.S. sells 43% of all weapons in the world.”

Artistic license strikes again.

Written around 400 B.C., *Lysistrata* is not only a great anti-war play that can make jingoists apoplectic, it may also be the (delightfully) dirtiest comedy ever written. It’s all about sex — or, rather, the withholding of sex. Recovering from a disastrous war, the men of Athens want to march right back into battle, when a spunky maiden, Lysistrata, decides to bring them to their senses. She urges the women of the city to join her in a sex-strike until the men lay down their swords.

The determined band occupies the Acropolis, and as the days pass and their lovers swell with desire, they stand fast — though much of the comedy derives from the fact that they have cravings as well as the men.

Nobody wins when love is put on hold.

Lysistrata is unabashedly bawdy. Fortunately no acting

see *STANFORD* on page 17



Geoff Sobelle is Kinesias and Annie Abrams is Myrrhine, his coy wife, in Aristophanes’ 2400-year old play, *Lysistrata*, playing at the Pigott Theater on the Stanford campus in Palo Alto through August 9.

Stanford

Continued from page 14

company today, even a university company, need shy from its raunchy delights, and Stanford’s Summer Theater certainly doesn’t. This contemporary Amy Freed adaptation features references to Viagra and Victoria’s Secret, Hoover Tower becomes a phallic symbol, citizens have names like Farticus and Prophylactus, and the Athenian men’s cloaks swell suggestively whenever some Greek cutie struts into view.

Directed by Rush Rehm, Stanford’s production is sometimes ragged and not always as funny as it thinks it is; it pushes its political bias awfully hard. Only a few of the performers have finely-honed comic timing. One who does is the great Geoff Hoyle in several roles, including a Russian lesbian (!) and an uptight Athenian official named Testiclese.

Still the whole thing bumps along agreeably on Mark Guirguis’s handsome set, lit well by Chad Bonaker, with witty costumes by Connie Strayer. It features a biting Brecht-Weill-ish musical number called “War Fever,” as well as a hilarious seduction scene between painfully swollen husband, Kinesias, played with excruciating verve by Geoff Sobelle, and his coy wife Myrrhine, played by a delicious comedienne named Annie Abrams, who is Goldie Hawn in a chiton.

Anne Gregory makes a fervent Lysistrata. Audrey Dundee Hannah, Jordan Kaplan, Mandana Khoshnevisan, Kay Kostopoulos, Stephen Pratt, and just plain Zack fill out the game cast. *Lysistrata* plays on the Stanford campus until August 9. For tickets call 650-725-ARTS.

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