



The J. Paul Getty Trust

UPDATE: Culture Clash's Ric Salinas, left, Herbert Siguenza and Richard Montoya riff on current events from a Chicano perspective and whip themselves into a Marx Brothers frenzy in their reworking of Aristophanes' comedy.

THEATER REVIEW

Classical cut-ups

Aristophanes' 'Peace' gets the zany Culture Clash treatment at the Getty Villa's outdoor theater.

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THEATER CRITIC

The comedies of Aristophanes — so sanely rebellious, so tastily profane — are perhaps more tantalizing to us moderns than the ancient Greek tragedies. They are also more theatrically elusive, loaded with topical references that require either heavy annotation or radical adaptation. And the gamboling lyrical intelligence that encourages metaphors to come to life makes it difficult for our prosier sensibilities to keep pace with these hilarious Dionysiac fever dreams.

In the wrong hands — like the stodgy academic translation I read before attending the Getty Villa's new production of Aristophanes' "Peace" — the zaniness can have a musty, archaeological aroma.

Let's enjoy, then, for the time being this giddy reworking by John Gloré and the Culture Clash trio of Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas and Herbert Siguenza, which may give

short shrift to the playwright's admittedly distant poetry but succeeds in forging a direct and exceedingly jokey connection with a local audience.

Sure, a phallus is worn by male actors in good old classical form. And there's a valiant attempt to capture (within more demure 21st century limits) the ribald lunacy and satirically snapping spirit of the play, which was first done in 421 BC, 10 years into the ruinous 27-year-long Peloponnesian War, when a truce seemed like a not-so-distant possibility. But the production, resourcefully directed by Bill Rauch at the Villa's heavenly outdoor Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater, is pitched expressly to contemporary Angelinos.

This update contains a young and impressionable Michael Jackson wannabe, references to President Obama, much ado about Eastside-Westside cultural differences, and a Latino gardening crew willing to transform into a randy chorus. And what denizen of this city wouldn't be charmed by the onstage presence of Las Colibri, a trio of musicians with a breezy mariachi way of reinterpreting pop songs?

Culture Clash is no stranger to Aristophanes, having already done a version of "The

'Peace'

Where: Getty Villa's Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater, 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades

When: 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays. Ends Oct. 3

Price: \$42

Contact: (310) 440-7300 or www.getty.edu

Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Birds" at the Villa's indoor auditorium in 2007. Assuming multiple farcical roles here, the group's performers stand ready to riff on current events from a Chicano perspective, indulge in textually relevant potty humor and whip themselves into a Marx Brothers frenzy.

John Fleck makes a delightful Trygaeus, here known as Ty Dye, a marijuana farmer and aging hippie who's so sick of the endless imperialist campaign that he rides a dung beetle to Mt. Olympus to give the gods a piece of his mind. This is the happy idea that motors the action, a Utopian quest for peace that will be personally experienced as a sexual rejuvenation. It's one of several plays by Aristophanes in which eros

is held as the antithesis of destruction — and proof that the "Make love, not war" message dates well before the Vietnam protests.

Joining the gleeful madness is Amy Hill, playing a nearby Malibu resident upset with all the noise who nonetheless decides to play the Chorus Leader. She may be rich and somewhat intolerant but her politics still lean to the left, and her boisterous command of the stage signals an Ethel Merman-like love of showbiz.

The play — which involves the rescue of the goddess of peace (represented by a statue) who along with her nubile handmaidens (represented by blowup dolls) has been held hostage by the god of war — offers great imaginative freedom for the design team. And Christopher Acebo's set, Shigeru Yaji's costumes and Lynn Jeffries' puppet craft are even more colorful than the production's gag-filled routines, which to give you a sense of the liberties taken, turn Hermes into a prancing fashionista with groping hands.

The millenniums that separate us from Aristophanes may be unbridgeable, but Culture Clash and company find the common ground of our laugh-drunk, dirty-minded humanity.

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