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Culture Clash to Re-Interpret Aristophanes at Getty Villa

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Encounters between performers of contemporary art-music and popular music of the art-rock, or “indie,” genres are becoming more frequent, if not yet commonplace. Many younger musicians ignore the old, once-bold line between highbrow and lowbrow art forms. Thus it was with the recent music cum performance extravaganza offered by Eighth Blackbird at this year’s Ojai Music Festival.

So it also seems fitting that Culture Clash, the Chicano/Latino performance troupe known for its work, ranging from sketch comedy to original drama to adaptations of Aristophanes, will offer its free adaptation of Aristophanes’ “Peace” at the outdoor stage at the Getty Villa in September.

Bill Rauch, co-founder and artistic director of the Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles and currently artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, will direct the 4th-century comedy for the four-week run.

Gathered recently at a lunch at the Getty Villa, Richard Montoya—writer/actor and co-founder of Culture Clash with Ric Salinas and Herbert Siguenza—was “honored” by being chosen for the commission. This would be the second time the group will play with the revolutionary spirits of Aristophanes, having previously produced “The Birds.”

“We have such a great time biting the hand that feeds us,” Montoya said. “Arguably, this is Aristophanes’ filthiest play, so we couldn’t think of a better reason to do it.”

“Peace,” written by then-27-year-old playwright Aristophanes launches a ribald and scathing theatrical assault on the entrenched military-industrial complex of Athens in the 5th century B.C. Aristophanes was responding to the intense desire of moderate-minded citizens for relief from the

miseries of war—a war that had already dragged on for 10 years.

The plot revolves around Trygaeus, a rustic patriot, who resolves to ascend to heaven to talk personally with Zeus about allowing the wretched war to continue. He rides a gigantic dung beetle to his rendezvous with the ruler of Mt. Olympus. Upon his arrival, he soon realizes that the gods have gone elsewhere, leaving the heavenly abode in the hands of the demon of war. His visit has not been in vain, for he learns that the goddess Peace has been cast into a pit, where she is kept a prisoner. He then mounts a rescue and triumphantly brings her back to earth.

Montoya and his troupe see themselves as troubadours, storytellers—as much actors as singers. “We tell a very tragic song, and though the play is outrageous, it has a beautiful heart. Underneath a lot of fart jokes, the desire for peace runs strong under all the outrageous action.”

Out of all the zaniness, Montoya postulates, will come some very soulful music. The music, under the direction of Susie Garcia, will combine some Mariachi and Latin sounds with ‘70’s retro and “ancient Greek sounds,” Montoya said.

For a decade, Garcia was a member of the Mariachi Divas, playing a variety of music including ranchera and the Beatles. She is currently a member of Ollin, an Irish/Mexican fusion band based in East L.A.

Ancient drama offers insight into the social, cultural and political realities of Ancient Greece and Rome. “We turn to modern adaptations to interpret these basic human stories that are ever powerful and resonant,” said Karol Wight, Getty curator of antiquities, in welcoming the guests.

Performances of “Peace” will run Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, September 10 through October 3. Tickets go on sale July 1. For tickets, visit www.getty.edu or call 310-440-7300.



Culture Clash members (from left): Richard Montoya, Herbert Siguenza and Ric Salinas, front, have been commissioned by the Getty Villa to adapt Aristophanes’ “Peace.”