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St. Mary's Actors Stage Powerful 'Lysistrata'

By Sophie Braccini



The "Lysistrata" actors rehearse with director Daniel Larlham (front left) and Kentaley McCurdey (front) playing the title character. Photo Sophie Braccini

comedy supports conventional thinking of the time about women. Women were, in essence, feeble and over-emotional creatures. But this is transcended by the figure of Lysistrata, a common woman, who proves herself unwavering and powerful.

"This is a challenging show, but the students understand it very well," says Larlham. "We have added a lot of things, and it is quite exciting."

Larlham has been teaching at SMC for over a year and enjoys directing the students in plays. "I feel more and more that I don't have to have a clear conception of how a scene should be set, until we are on rehearsal," he says. "My job is to magnify potential I see in students. They are not fully formed yet and they can let strange things flow through; sometimes it is wonderful, and I structure it into the show."

The SMC troupe is working from an adaptation by Ellen McLaughlin, which makes the language easy to understand and removes the contextual aspects that were familiar to Athenians 2,400 years ago but would be totally obscure today.

"We have added two big choreographic scenes, the first darker to begin the show, to convey some of the expression of women suffering in a war zone, then we turn the knob toward comedy," Larlham says. "The second is an interlude in the middle of the show that came from an improvisation students did during audition. It blew my mind, it was so creative and powerful."

Songs have also been added, some of them created by Larlham and arranged by the students. One scene was inserted to symbolize the Peloponnesian Wars, as a physical and rhetorical competition between Athenians and Spartans.

"(The director) is very inclusive and opened to our ideas," says Kentaley McCurdey, who plays Lysistrata.

Aristophanes' "Lysistrata" is a subversive comedy that has inspired directors and actors across centuries and borders, from ancient Greece to the present day. St. Mary's College's version is nothing like you have seen before, infused with the energy of youth and with the creativity of director Daniel Larlham.

This refreshing and fun take on a classic is for adults and will open at the Lefebvre Theater on April 14 and play through April 24.

Aristophanes wrote "Lysistrata" in 411 B.C. in Athens during the Peloponnesian Wars, its three-decade clash with Sparta. The idea is simple: women in both city-states get tired of the war and decide to stop the conflict using one deadly weapon: withholding sex from their husbands.

In a time where women were not regarded as equal and had no right to vote, this unique anti-war

McCurdey, who will graduate this year with a major in theater, says that she was amazed when she discovered a play so old talking about civil rights and feminism.

"This woman is so powerful and so strong, this is so easy for me," says the young actor, who exudes a powerful presence naturally. "And she is also so funny, I immediately connected to her."

Two-thirds of the 20 students in the play are also majoring in theater.

The students had the benefit of a talk with Professor Emily Klein, who recently published "Sex and War on the American Stage: Lysistrata in Performance 1930-2012," that examines staging of this play in the U.S. over the past 80 years.

Klein teaches at SMC and will be part of a pre-show talk at 7 p.m. on Friday April 15. More information and tickets can be found online at www.stmarys-ca.edu/Lysistrata.

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