



*Lysistrata (center), played by guest actress Fenella Fielding, attempts to convince a dubious group of Greeks that chastity can lead to peace.*

## *Lysistrata: Relevant Relic*

*A 25-century-old anti-war comedy gets dusted off and cleaned up—a bit*

*Photographed by Robert E. Fields Jr.*

*Aristophanes' Lysistrata was staged Oct. 22-26 as the first University Theatre production of the 1968-69 season and as the inaugural production honoring President Hollomon. In the following articles, three faculty members discuss the production. Dr. Nat Eek, professor of drama and director of the School of Drama, writes about the visiting*

*artist program and the various considerations and planning which went into Lysistrata. Dr. James C. Hogan, associate professor of classics, discusses the historical background of the play and the difficulties in adapting such a work for today. Alan R. Velie, instructor of English, reviews the OU production.*

On October 21, the School of Drama premiered its production of Aristophanes' farce *Lysistrata* before an audience invited to see the play in honor of the inauguration of J. Herbert Hollomon. Mr. Bernard Hepton, a guest artist from London, had flown over a month earlier to direct the production, and a week later, Miss Fenella Fielding, a popular young British comedienne, joined him to play the title role.

The appearance of Mr. Hepton and Miss Fielding on campus continued for the fourth year the School of Drama's policy of bringing in professional guest artists as directors and actors to work on special productions with the students and faculty.

These appearances are made possible through the aid of the OU Foundation, and previous artists have been director Frank Dunlop of England's National Theatre, actor George Grizzard, actress Barbara Baxley, professional puppeteer George Latshaw, actor Murray Matheson, and playwright-director George Voskovec.

One of the questions raised by these appearances is just how much the students learn by working with professionals. The answer is a tremendous amount. The expense more than justifies itself. Perhaps the best way to understand this unique learning process is by following it from concept to first curtain.

Mr. Hepton arrived on a Friday,

and the next day he met the staff informally and talked about his production concepts. He wanted to do the play quite romantically and very delicately. He sought to avoid heavy-handed bawdy humor, creating what might best be described as a theatrical soufflé. He envisioned warm, light, bright colors in costume, set against a bright blue Mediterranean sky. He saw the young women all looking lovely and seductive, but with a certain sense of innocent purpose. He wanted to use contemporary Greek music and choreograph a variety of love dances, war dances, and celebration dances. His ultimate objective was for the audience to have a wonderful time but to go away re-

membering that though delightful, the play had a great deal to say about the futility of war.

For the next four days he met with our faculty members: Raymond Larson, the set designer; Nancy Gade, the costumer, and Bennett Averyt, the lighting designer, to set the technical elements and style of the play. While Mr. Larson prepared a model of the set, Miss Gade painted her costume sketches, and Mr. Averyt worked on a preliminary light plot, Mr. Hepton held auditions for actors. A total of sixty students read for the director. Each actor came on stage alone, presented a short, prepared scene, and then Mr. Hepton gave him some direction, talked to him, watched him speak and move. Two days later, he cast the play and rehearsals began.

First rehearsals are usually reading rehearsals, and laughter from the cast punctuated these detailed meetings as Mr. Hepton gave line meanings, interpretations, and changed and cut the play script. He then moved the cast on stage to rough out the stage movement of the entire play. By this time the first week of rehearsals was over, and Miss Fielding joined the cast. The night of her first rehearsal had much of the tension of an opening night, because unconsciously the student cast was hoping for a performance from her. Was she really as good as they said? She passed with flying colors, and within days a fine feeling of friendship had developed between star and cast.

The next few weeks went by rapidly, smoothing the action and line interpretations, working on the dances. One week before opening, Miss Helen Gregory, the choreographer, and Mr. Hepton threw out the final dance and created a completely new one, which proved to be much better and more fitting. Technical rehearsals now began, and the evenings became long as scene changes, light cues, sound cues, and costume changes were coordinated. Charles C. Suggs checked the theatre constantly for proper sound levels to make sure the dialogue could always be heard over the recorded music. Even a new flute pas-

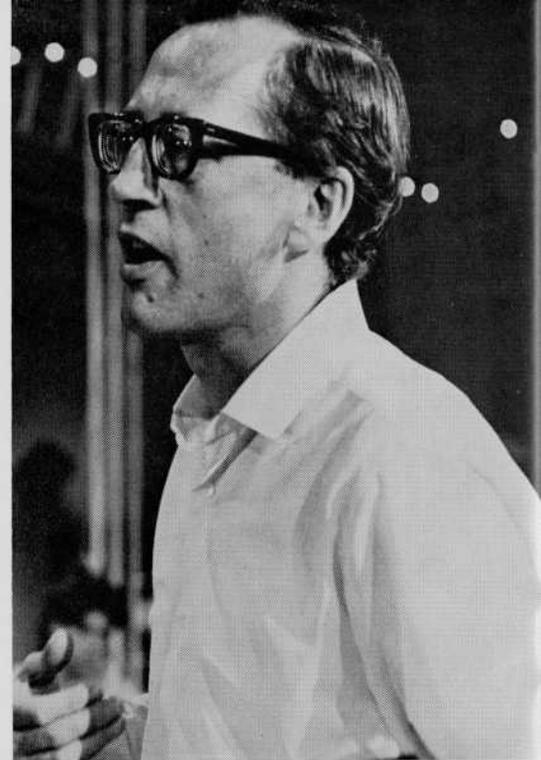
sage was added to the tape recorder to smooth a visual transition from dusk to night.

Costumes were finally added for the last three rehearsals, and adjustments were made in fit and hemlines, so that they complemented and reinforced the actor's movement. These final three dress rehearsals put all the elements of the play together, and now *Lysistrata* was ready for opening night. The last week of rehearsals is usually filled with tension and exhaustion, and it is the mark of the true professional to remain patient but purposeful during this trying period. Both Miss Fielding and Mr. Hepton proved to be admirable in this respect, and the cast met the challenge with equal professionalism.

The by-invitation-only opening night proved quite smooth, and the play settled into a comfortable run. Over four thousand people were able to see the seven performances, and the reactions were as Mr. Hepton had hoped.

There are many bonuses from guest artists during the rehearsal process. Mr. Hepton and his wife, also a professional actress, worked with individual students on movement and voice and diction. Mr. Hepton gave a demonstration of fight-arranging on the stage for the entire school. Miss Fielding worked with individual actors on comic techniques and timing. There were many afternoon and late-night coffee sessions with the students, discussing plays, players, and principles. The artists were also able to meet other members of the faculty informally, and during their stay they had TV interviews and several tours around the state to places of interest.

When asked if the extra effort and tension is worth it all, the students invariably reply a resounding yes. The faculty feels the same way, but for different reasons. It challenges them to work with different artists and to experiment with new artistic approaches as well as new personalities. For the students it provides an honest contact with the hard world of the professional theatre, but at the same time the aesthetic stimula-



*Briton Bernard Hepton directed the play.*

tion of working with acknowledged artists in their field. Any guest artist program is fraught with pitfalls; it is always possible that personality or artistic ability is not adaptable to the university situation. However, the School of Drama has led a charmed life in this respect, and each of the eight artists who have come in the past four years have contributed joyously and significantly to the University program.

*Nat Eek—*

Of all the dramatic poetry to survive from Greek and Roman literature, no group of plays presents more problems for modern production than the comedies of Aristophanes. The reasons are evident after even a cursory glance at one or two. Aristophanic comedy is highly topical: *Lysistrata* is filled with references to Athenian and Spartan generals and politicians, to events of the Peloponnesian War, to the manners of Athenian society in particular and Greek society in general.

Perhaps a more serious difficulty, especially for a university theatre in the provinces, is the bawdy and licentious character of old comedy. Modern translations would find themselves in the court before sunset if

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# *Lysistrata*: Relevant Relic

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they reproduced the gross references to the sexual organs and sexual practices so pervasive in these plays. A glance at some representations of comic figures preserved on ancient vases indicates that visual obscenity was just as vigorously developed as the verbal obscenity.

While topicality and obscenity are perhaps the two most troublesome aspects of Aristophanes for the modern producer, they are certainly not the only problems. Many of the plays lack definite dramatic form; they are often episodic in the extreme. In *Lysistrata*, moreover, there is a minimum amount of character development, and the personae of the play often seem to step out of what dramatic character they possess to speak directly to the audience. When *Lysistrata* abuses her friends for their lack of sexual restraint, she is playing a part; but when she speaks on the evils of war, she seems to be lecturing the audience, not merely the Athenian and Spartan bigwigs on stage. Here we come across a related problem: these plays tend to utilize rapid and often radical changes in tone and theme. The effect of these sudden transitions, e.g., from serious advice on war to praise of wine and sex to scurrilous references to prominent members of the audience, can be to blur all distinctions and induce a verbal and tonal chaos comparable to the structural looseness.

The truth of the matter is that Aristophanic comedy is very intellectual in its appeal. For all the low humor, satire and burlesque are normally even more evident. The profusion of themes and allusions constantly invites the critical intelligence to contemplate man's follies and prejudices in all their variety and absurdity. Such comedy challenges both actor and audience. Both must change gears frequently, and in the scene in which *Lysistrata* expounds on the evils of war while the men stand about panting, the ridiculous victims of their own sexual organs, the audi-

ence is expected to move simultaneously in two quite different gears.

While war and sex are universal themes, always with us and always of interest, Fifth Century (B.C.) Athens is too distant for the retention of the wealth of historical reference found in these plays. The translator must be bold enough to substitute Saigon for Syracuse, LBJ for Cleisthenes. He must burlesque our own sexual modes and artistic fads and leave Athenian candor alone and poor Euripides at peace in his grave. Nothing in ancient literature so surely demands to be translated according to its spirit, rather than its letter, than the comedies of Aristophanes.

The OU production was in many respects a composite, often successfully so, but especially in the first act its reluctance to depart from the topical resulted in a slow pace and considerable awkwardness. And for this observer, the addition of the dance numbers and Broadway manner of the larger scenes were sadly out of character with the original. Aristophanes' Greek comedy *Lysistrata* had more bite than our fairy tale version, which was rather far from the "outrageous" play that was advertised. Still, the second act (of course, this division itself is quite arbitrary and non-historical) was quite good, well paced, with an abundance of humor which developed naturally from the situation. Perhaps one reason for this change was the increasing importance in the second half of a variety of student roles. The visiting British actress Fenella Fielding adopted a declamatory style which tended to create pauses in the action of the first act. Nothing in *Lysistrata* drags; if we are asked to think, we are not required to contemplate.

James C. Hogan—

The School of Drama's production of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, perhaps the world's oldest anti-war play, was a resounding success. Although

the comedy is twenty-five centuries old—it was first performed in 411 B.C.—its subject is as timely and relevant to a college audience as Mike Nichol's motion picture, *The Graduate*. It is also bawdier than *The Graduate* and, judging from the audience's response, every bit as funny.

*Lysistrata* is about a sex strike. The women of Greece are thoroughly fed up with the war between Sparta and Athens, which has been dragging on (one of the first wars of attrition) for more than twenty years. Their motives are more selfish than idealistic. They do not object philosophically with the morality or immorality of war; they simply want their husbands at home with them instead of hassling about in the field with the army. Led by *Lysistrata*, a pragmatic, willful Athenian matron, the ladies of both Sparta and Athens decide to exert Woman Power in an effort to end the conflict. Their attack is two-pronged. They gain control of the treasury forcefully, and more importantly they vow to keep their husbands and lovers out of their beds until peace is negotiated.

Their efforts succeed. The sex-starved legions of Athens and Sparta, bent over with erections, decide to make love instead of war.

*Lysistrata* is ribaldly hilarious. Its puns and double entendres continually aim below the belt, and sometimes the dialogue is startlingly explicit. (*Lysistrata*, after a few days of sexual abstinence: "I want to get laid.") The play has been a popular one in times of peace as well as war since its first performance. Today, however, when the United States is bogged down in a seemingly interminable war of its own, *Lysistrata* seems particularly apposite, especially for a college audience. To upperclassman viewers, with time running out before they pack off for Southeast Asia, the subject—a government and army coerced into ending an unpopular war—is of special meaning and appeal.

The OU production underlined the timeliness of the play's content by updating several of its lines. Numerous allusions to Greek affairs were

deleted, and references to contemporary events were added. (After an altercation between Athenian men and women, one actor groans, "This is worse than Chicago!" An Athenian general invites the Spartan emissary to "Come, let us reason together.")

The Spartans were given deep Southern drawls, reflecting, I suppose, the hawkish proclivities of our friends from Dixie. The Athenians sounded like the British of the Empire, stiff-upper-lip school.

Aristophanes wrote the play as the broadest sort of farce, and the production caught his tone well. Little of the Greek's bawdiness was lost in translation. It must have been a long evening for those in the audience with tender ears. At times a distinctly blue haze hung in the theatre. There was a good deal of slapstick and horseplay, the most amusing bit being the scene in which Kinesias, a love-sick soldier played by Randy Staley, chases Myrrhine, his wife, played by Kathy Widner, around and about their bed—unsuccessfully.

The playwright spares no one in the play. The women moan about their deprivation just as much as the men. (Chastity doesn't seem to be a Greek virtue.) He comes down just as hard on the senior citizens. The mannish old women and the womanish old men are equally unattractive. The Greek military men are obtuse and condescending, much like their modern counterparts in the Pentagon. They imagine no civilian capable of understanding the issues of peace and war. The commissioner, the only public official we meet, is a younger, slightly sillier version of Dean Rusk. Though he lacks the Secretary's imperturbability, he shares his contempt for public opinion.

*Lysistrata* seemed a fitting choice to lead off the School of Drama's new season. With this election year's choice of a President limited to three hawks, the play is a welcome escape from grim reality. And if our government can't end the war, maybe our women ought to borrow from *Lysistrata* and get out their chastity belts.

Alan R. Velie—

## Campus Notes

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and the Norman Transcripts thinks it's all right. Sterlin Adams of the Afro-American Student Union and several members of Student Action have spoken against the practice. President Hollomon says the matter is under study, presumably by the eleven-member advisory committee for the campus security office. The committee, composed of six students and five faculty members, is to serve in an advisory capacity to William T. Jones, the new director of campus security. Its members were chosen by David A. Burr, vice president for the University community.

The argument heard most in support of the campus cops carrying weapons is that they may need them. The counterargument is contained in the following letter which several faculty members sent to the president of the Faculty Senate for that body's consideration:

"The practice of permitting the campus police at OU to carry firearms is one which we find highly disturbing. The display of lethal weapons intended for use within the University community has a harmful effect on the academic environment of the University without fulfilling a compensatory need. We believe the policy upon which this practice is based should be re-examined in the light of the University's needs and purposes.

"The sight of a revolver is, in general, an indication of the degree of force a man is willing to use. In the hands of an attacked, a revolver represents a level of force available to keep controversy safe; he is literally prepared to kill in the name of general safety.

"In the civil community this level of force may well be appropriate and, at times, an obvious need. But even in the civil community the gun has been seen on occasion not as the limit of violence but the provocation for it. In the university community, both at large and in this University in particular, the circumstances and needs differ greatly from the civil community in that the need to limit violence with firearms scarcely ever occurs, if at all, while the presence of arms is more likely to be considered provocative. Knowing the difference between the limiting and provoking uses of deadly weapons is a sign of a thoroughly professional police system.

"Little evidence exists for the need of weapons in University precincts. First, there are in actuality, few, if any, occasions when such extreme force is an appropriate response. There is certainly nothing in the past record of the University of Oklahoma to prompt the assumption that campus violence is likely.

"Second, the university function is such as to make open, invited exchange and argument a normal act of controversy which has as its mode of resolution more of the same. In fact, the very openness of controversy in the university community

provides the protection from forceful resolution of conflict which the gun supposedly assures in the civil community.

"Third, the university community, both here and in general, has traditionally been an area of peace. This peace has, to be sure, been disturbed on recent occasions, but there is considerable evidence to suggest that these disturbances were the result of an initial breakdown of the openness of relations in the university community, especially between administration and faculty-student groups.

"Fourth, security of persons and property may require the presence of authorized personnel of the University to discourage unlawful acts, but guns do not seem to us necessary to performance of that duty.

"Fifth, on those occasions where violence beyond the control of the campus police has occurred, help from the Norman police force has been employed; we see no reason why a satisfactory arrangement for the future might not be made.

"The arming of the campus policeman implicitly raises a central issue for any campus, i.e., the place of a potential for deadly force on the campus of a university. To put an agent of the University in a dutiful position to inflict injury or death is to place the University on the wrong side of an important moral issue. To do so is inconsistent with the values, the meaning, and the function of the institution.

"If the concept of a university community, so recently articulated in the report on the future of the University, is dependent upon having campus police armed, then we should like to know why. If it is not, then in our view, the practice should be discontinued as offensive to members of the community. We feel nothing in the past justifies the practice and we have a con-



David Bakker

**Campus Cop & Gun**  
*A focal point of disagreement*