

# Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* — withholding sex for peace

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OP CONTRIBUTOR

*Lysistrata*  
Frederic Wood Theatre (UBC)  
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Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is one of the few extant plays of Greek Old Comedy, a style known for its fantastical story lines and bawdy humor. Written in 411 B.C., *Lysistrata* was originally intended as a social criticism of the political climate in Greece. Over 2,000 years later, Aristophanes' play is still relevant. It provides a unique outlook on the senselessness of war in a surprisingly fun and refreshing manner.

*Lysistrata* (Jessica Clements) is a young woman living in Athens during the Peloponnesian Wars. Sick of watching the men of Athens being slaughtered in battle, she convinces her fellow women to stage a sex strike until their husbands make peace with the Spartans. The men attempt to fight back, but find themselves at the mercy of their desirable, seductive, and sexually unresponsive wives.

The play opens with three old men outside a cafe. One is selling pitas, one is chasing garbage around with a broom and dustbin, and one is asleep at a table. The men shuffle around the stage shaking their fists at each other and tripping over their own feet.

Loud guitar music drowns out the sparse dialogue in this scene, which is really an amusing prelude to the play. The house lights are still lit, so it takes the audience awhile to settle down and focus on the stage. The lights go down as

the last old man attempts to ride a bicycle with the aid of his cane.

The play really begins with *Lysistrata*'s entrance. Her opening monologue, laced with not-so-subtle sexual innuendoes, quickly sets the tone for the next two hours. *Lysistrata* is riddled with lewd jokes, puns, and physical gags. In ancient Greece this was considered the norm. In today's society, theatre commonly explores sexuality as a social issue, but rarely do you see sex as the butt of the joke (pardon the pun, but if you think that's bad, you ain't seen nothin' yet). *Lysistrata*'s raw, in-your-face sexual humor verges on obscene, at times providing images you'd rather not have stuck in your head. (*Lysistrata* thinks the men will soon give in because without their women "their palms are chafed and blistered.") The jokes are orchestrated to play off each other, often building to a ridiculous "climax" before the play continues. These sexual digressions are met with loud, delightfully embarrassed laughter and groans from the audience, which secretly loves being taken off guard.

David Bloom did a fantastic job adapting and directing Aristophanes' two-millennia-old text for a modern audience. He captures the spirit of Greek Comedy—the lightheartedness, the raw energy, and most importantly, the fun. It's an old style of theatre that most people are not used to. Along with a solid group of actors, he manages to grab the audience and pull them into a different time. It feels good to be shaken up in your seat, and any production that succeeds in doing so has my deepest respect.

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