

REVIEW

Make jokes, ²⁵⁵⁵ not war

Culture Clash mixes low humor and a few high ideals in 'Peace' at the Getty Villa.

By RICHARD CHANG
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

At first glance, Culture Clash and the ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes wouldn't seem to share too much in common.

But the Los Angeles-based performance troupe has been known to take on politically and historically charged topics. And Aristophanes was a rebel, a provocative comic playwright who challenged the powers that be and the military-industrial establishment of his time.

Through Oct. 3, Culture Clash is presenting "Peace," a bawdy, ribald play written by Aristophanes in 421 B.C. The venue is the Getty Villa's outdoor Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater, a classy, pristine amphitheater near the Pacific Ocean that takes on a life of its own during this nighttime production.

The Culture Clash trio has infused this rarely performed ancient play with numerous contemporary references and jokes. "Welcome to the Getty Pancho Villa" says one Culture Clash member in an introductory monologue. The place is later referred to as "the Ghetto Villa," and several other local references are sprinkled throughout: "I hate Glendale!" "Who doesn't, sir?" and "I'm already committed to a men's drumming circle in Laguna."

A script nod should be given to co-author John Gore, associate artistic director of South Coast Repertory. The director of "Peace" is Bill Rauch, artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and a professor of drama at UC Irvine from 2005-07.

In the original play, merciless god War has imprisoned goddess Peace on Mount Olympus and is having his way with Greece. Meanwhile, down on Earth, a group of objectors devises a plan to fly to the heavens and rescue



CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Numerous inflatable props are used in "Peace," adapted from an ancient Greek play by Aristophanes. Herbert Siguenza is at left, with John Fleck.

'Peace'

Where: Getty Villa, 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades

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

How much: \$42, \$36 for seniors and students

Call: 310-440-7300

Online: getty.edu

the goddess.

The Culture Clash version essentially follows the plot, except the leader, a farmer, is a pot grower played by John Fleck. He's hilarious in his role as Trygaeus, or Ty Dye.

Fleck cracks a lot of jokes, some of them flatulent and others irreverent and profane. Tubular balloons are used as - ahem - props. So are blowup dolls. One should definitely leave the kids and sensitive young (or older) adults at home for this performance.

The three members of Culture Clash - Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas and Herbert Siguenza - play various roles, but they primarily are a trio of Guatemalan gardeners, ready at a moment's notice to satisfy the neighbor/chorus leader, played by a humorous Amy Hill.

A mariachi trio, Las Colibri, led by Suzanne Garcia, does an excellent job interspersing the proceedings with

heartfelt music.

Throughout "Peace," the jokes come at you a mile a minute, or at least a few every couple of minutes. A good number of them are sexual, so be prepared. Some of them are tasteless. I didn't laugh at the references to an "Oriental massage parlor in Van Nuys," or to too many North Koreans on mid-Wilshire. In fact, there are probably hundreds of *South Koreans* on mid-Wilshire, and hardly any from the isolated communist country where it's illegal to leave or enter.

The dig at Michael Silverblatt of KCRW/89.9 FM is a bit too severe and overwrought. We get the joke that he's way into himself about a minute into the 10-15 minute skit.

Overall, however, the members of Culture Clash do a fine job transposing this ancient play to modern L.A. and Southern California.

While the friction between war and peace is clearly relevant to today's world, the players don't hit you over the head with dogma or delivering their message.

Instead, they instruct through laughter and a couple of touching metaphors at the end. It's a worthwhile play in a magnificent venue; I would recommend giving "Peace" a chance.

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