

LYSISTRATA by MICHAEL THEODOROU

A New Version of the original play by Aristophanes

CAST

THE WOMEN

LYSISTRATA
CALONICE
MYRRHINE
LAMPITO
ISMENIA
STRATYLLIS
PROPYLLEA the stripper
FATIMA the belly dancer
1ST WOMAN
2ND WOMAN
3RD WOMAN
4TH WOMAN

CHORUS OF WOMEN

THE MEN

LEADER OF THE MEN
MAGISTRATE
DEATH
1ST GUARD
2ND GUARD
CINESIAS - husband to Myrrhine
NICHARCHUS - husband to Calonice
LAMARCHUS - husband to Lampito
MANES - slave to Cinesias

CHORUS OF MEN
2 SPARTAN MEN - non-speaking

All characters also become members of their respective - according to gender - Choruses when not required in a scene. Thus, the play could be done by as few as 23 - or as many as you like!

It can easily be reduced to fewer characters and scenes to make a good examination length piece.

EXTRACT ONE

ACT ONE.

The scene is an open space outside the Athenian Acropolis. To the left, a couple of pillars indicate the entrance to the shrine. To the back, a parapet overlooking sea and sky. Down right, a stone seat. Early morning. A cock crows. The stage is empty. Then Lysistrata enters from the right.

LYSISTRATA
I'm fed up with those women! Be here at the crack of dawn, I said. And where are

they? Still in bed, I warrant you. Snuggling up to their husbands, celebrating the rites of Aphrodite with soft fondling caresses and erotic kisses guaranteed to inflame their husbands' ardour. It's disgusting, that's what it is. And here am I - cold, miserable - shamelessly kept waiting. [*Looking off right.*] Ah, here comes one of them at last. It's that young neighbour of mine, Calonice, the one who's just got married. Look at the way she's walking up that slope. You can see she's had a rough night.

Enter Calonice, puffed and out of breath, holding her back.

LYSISTRATA

Good morning, Calonice. Have you had a good night, dear?

CALONICE

My God, Lysistrata, you do choose your times and places. I'm absolutely shagged.

LYSISTRATA

I bet you are!

CALONICE

I must sit down, my dear. My back's killing me. [*She sits on DR seat.*]

LYSISTRATA

I bet it is!

CALONICE

What's the matter, my dear? Why are you frowning and looking as stern as the great god Zeus himself?

LYSISTRATA

I'm disappointed in you, Calonice.

CALONICE

Disappointed, dear? Why?

LYSISTRATA

In fact, I'm disappointed in all womankind. Here am I, waiting to discuss a matter of the most vital importance to all the female sex - and half of them are still asleep!

CALONICE

Well, of course they have got babies and husbands to feed, servants to give orders to

...

LYSISTRATA

Stuff husbands and babies and servants!

CALONICE

Well, we do our best, dear.

LYSISTRATA

There are more important matters than that!

CALONICE

Are there? [*Lysistrata glares.*] Oh, yes, of course there are, Lysistrata dear. I was being stupid. Anyway, what's this meeting all about, that you've summoned all the women to?

LYSISTRATA

It's about something very big.

CALONICE

How big?

LYSISTRATA

Something of enormous proportions.

CALONICE

Sounds exciting.

LYSISTRATA

No, not that sort of thing, you one-track slut.

CALONICE

Well, what is it then?

LYSISTRATA

It's about an idea I've had - something that for many sleepless nights I have been tossing to and fro.

CALONICE

To and fro?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, to and fro.

CALONICE *to audience*

Sounds like last night!

LYSISTRATA

Calonice, we women have the future of Greece in our hands.

CALONICE

In our hands? How disappointing.

LYSISTRATA

Listen. This terrible war that's been going on between our city of Athens and the Spartans.

CALONICE

Yes, what about it?

LYSISTRATA

Well, wouldn't you like to see it come to an end?

CALONICE

Of course.

LYSISTRATA

And have our menfolk with us all the time, instead of them going off to war months at a time?

CALONICE

There's nothing I'd like better.

LYSISTRATA

Well then. We women can do it.

CALONICE

Do it? How do you mean?

LYSISTRATA

We women can stop the war.

CALONICE

The women? But how on earth do you propose to do that?

LYSISTRATA

Before I tell you how, will you answer me one thing. Do you really want to bring about a state where the men will no longer lift their spears against each other? Or are you just going along with me to humour me?

CALONICE

Of course I'm with you, dear. I'm with you all the way. [*Aside.*] I think.

LYSISTRATA

Imagine it. The men will hang up their shields for ever.

CALONICE

Oh, ecstasy!

LYSISTRATA

They will fling their helmets aside!

CALONICE

Oh, double ecstasy!

LYSISTRATA

They will take off their armour ...

CALONICE

Oh treble ecstasy ...

LYSISTRATA

They will take out their weapons ...

CALONICE

Oh, lots of ecstasy.

LYSISTRATA

... And bury them in the sand.

CALONICE

Oh, not in the sand!

LYSISTRATA

What?

CALONICE

Oh, I'm sorry, dear. I was getting carried away.

LYSISTRATA

Listen, you slut. Would you like to have a man's breath warm on your cheeks, night after night?

CALONICE

Oh, yes.

LYSISTRATA

And sense his warm flesh tingling next to yours, night after night?

CALONICE

Oh, yes, yes!

LYSISTRATA

And feel his hot arms entwined around you, night after night?

CALONICE

Oh, yes, yes, yes!

LYSISTRATA

And bear the weight of his passionate body on top of you, night after night?

CALONICE

Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!

LYSISTRATA

Then you must do as I say.

CALONICE

I'll do anything you say, Lysistrata. Anything...

EXTRACT TWO

Myrrhine enters, dressed immaculately as usual.

MYRRHINE *going to Calonice*

Calonice darling! [*She kisses her, then moves towards Lysistrata.*] Lysistrata, darling!

LYSISTRATA

Don't talk to me you lazy bitch. You realise you've kept me waiting a whole hour out here on the side of this mountain?

MYRRHINE

But, darling, I had to put my makeup on.

LYSISTRATA

Wonderful.

MYRRHINE

Then I had to choose which gown I wanted to wear today.

LYSISTRATA

Of course.

MYRRHINE

Then I had to get Cinie's breakfast. You know, he goes mad if he doesn't have a full breakfast.

LYSISTRATA

I can imagine.

MYRRHINE

Then I had to get the slaves to take the litter out to carry me up here. It's a very long way, you know, darling. So why on earth have you chosen such a weird meeting place?

LYSISTRATA

Before going any further I wish to wait for a few more women to arrive, so I don't have to keep repeating myself.

MYRRHINE

Darling, more women? What is this? A lesbian party?

CALONICE *to Myrrhine as Lysistrata moves upstage*

You mustn't offend her, Myrrhine. She's spent days organising this. The poor dear's completely convinced about something.

MYRRHINE

Yes, but what, darling? What?

CALONICE

It's something to do with getting the men to stop going to war.

MYRRHINE

Oh well, in that case she must be completely off her trolley! The men love to fight. After sex, it's their favourite occupation.

CALONICE

Yes, dear, but think of how much more time they'd spend with us if they didn't have to go off to war.

MYRRHINE

Ah yes, I see your point.

CALONICE

You'd get the point alright! [*She nudges her and they laugh uproariously.*]

MYRRHINE

How perfectly delightful! [*She sniffs the air.*] My dear, can you smell something?

LYSISTRATA *looking off right*

Ah, here come the others.

Enter Lampito and Ismenia. They should have 'foreign-sounding' accents.

LYSISTRATA

Welcome, Lampito. Welcome, Ismenia.

MYRRHINE *to Calonice*

Darling, what a pong! Where did those two crawl out from? [*She holds her nose.*]

CALONICE *to Myrrhine*

Shhh!

LYSISTRATA

Calonice. Myrrhine. I'd like you to meet our two representatives from Sparta.

MYRRHINE

Charmed, I'm sure.

LAMPITO

Something the matter with your nose?

MYRRHINE

Yes, I'm having a spot of sinus trouble.

LAMPITO

Not enough exercise, that's the trouble with you Athenians. Weaklings, that's what you are - the lot of you. Here ... feel this. [*She tenses her arms. Lysistrata feels her muscles.*]

LYSISTRATA

My dear, you're as strong as an ox.

LAMPITO

That's what my man says.

LYSISTRATA

And such colour in those cheeks.

LAMPITO

I could throttle a bull with my bare hands.

LYSISTRATA

Have you been in training?

LAMPITO

I'm not one of your pasty-faced city tarts. And look at Ismenia. [*Ismenia steps forward.*]

Built like a rock. She could crush a man in two if she wanted.

MYRRHINE

I'm not surprised, with those tits.

LAMPITO

Did you say something, Missy?

MYRRHINE

Me? No, not a thing.

LAMPITO

Because I'd advise you to keep your mouth shut, if you value your hairstyle.

CALONICE

Quiet, Myrrhine.

LAMPITO

Now, why have you sent for us? I haven't got all day, you know.

MYRRHINE

Well, don't look at me. I certainly didn't send for you.

CALONICE *indicating Lysistrata*

It's that lady over there to whom you should address your remarks.

LAMPITO *imitating her*

'It's to that lady over there to whom you should address your remarks...' What's the matter with you, duckie? Swallowed a Greek dictionary?

MYRRHINE

I see no harm in speaking Greek correctly.

LAMPITO

Watch it, smarty knockers, or you'll get a bunch of Spartan fives up your nostril.

MYRRHINE *turning away*

Oh, really!

LAMPITO

Come on now, for God's sake. Will someone tell us what the hell we're doing, freezing our Spartan what-nots half way up a mountain?

LYSISTRATA

First, Lampito, let me ask you a question. Do you miss your husband when he's away at war?

LAMPITO

Not particularly. I've got used to him being away.

CALONICE

I miss my little Nicharchus like mad. Even when he's staying at home.

MYRRHINE

And I miss my big Cinesias like mad. Especially when he's not in bed.

LAMPITO

Well, yes, I miss my man Lamarchus like mad. Especially when I'm hungry.

LYSISTRATA

Hungry?

LAMPITO

Yes. He does all the cooking, you see.

MYRRHINE

Well really! What a man!

LAMPITO

He does the best cows' udders in all Sparta.

CALONICE

Disgusting.

LYSISTRATA

And what about Ismenia? Do you miss your husband when he's away at war?

Ismenia looks blank.

LAMPITO

You mustn't mind her. She's a bit slow, you see. Runs in the family.

LYSISTRATA

Ismenia?

ISMENIA

Pardon?

MYRRHINE

All tits and no brain.

LYSISTRATA

Do you miss your man when he's away at war?

ISMENIA

Yeah! [*But she shakes her head to indicate 'No.'*]

LAMPITO

You mustn't tax her with these questions so early in the morning. - Alright, for the sake of argument, let's say we do miss our men. So what?

LYSISTRATA

If I could find a way of stopping this war, and indeed all wars, would you all help me to achieve that end?

MYRRHINE

Darling, you can count on my end!

CALONICE

And mine too. Even if I have to splice myself in two, like a flatfish, and give half of myself to the cause.

LAMPITO

Me too. I'll go for the flatfish. [*Indicating Ismenia.*] And she will too.

LYSISTRATA

And so will I. I swear.

CALONICE

By the flatfish!

ALL

By the flatfish!

LYSISTRATA

Ladies, as you seem to be so resolute, I shall reveal my plan to you. ... In order to make peace and force our menfolk to stop making war, we must give up something.

MYRRHINE

Well, what must we give up?

LYSISTRATA

Are you ready?

LAMPITO

We're ready.

LYSISTRATA

We must give up - sex...

EXTRACT THREE

The men's Chorus enters, armed with bundles of sticks and torches, to smoke the women out. They make threatening noises and shouts towards the Acropolis, interrupted by the entrance of Stratyllis.

STRATYLLIS

What do you think you're up to, shrimp?

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS

How dare you! Me, a shrimp! You ... you ... woman, you!

STRATYLLIS

If you had any reverence for the gods, you wouldn't be doing what you're doing so near to the sacred temple of Apollo. It offends the nostrils of the gods.

LEADER

Be quiet!

MEN'S CHORUS

Yes, be quiet!

STRATYLLIS

What are you frightened of? We're only women after all!

LEADER

Frightened? Who says we're frightened? You blackhead!

STRATYLLIS

Frightened, I say, of a few women who are prepared to take a stand against the insanity that you men have made with your eternal wars.

LEADER

I think it is time you were taught a lesson, you po-faced hag!

MEN'S CHORUS

Po- faced hag!

STRATYLLIS

Oh, you're so brave, aren't you? Safety in numbers, eh?

LEADER

You miserable old crone. I'm going to knock your block off!

He takes a step towards her. Immediately, the women's Chorus comes on, all taking up warlike stances around Stratyllis.

LEADER

So ... Reinforcements, eh?

MEN'S CHORUS

Reinforcements, eh?

WOMEN'S CHORUS

Yes, reinforcements ... eh!

STRATYLLIS

Go on ... hit me, then.

LEADER

I'd never dream of striking a woman. It's cowardly.

MEN'S CHORUS

Cowardly.

STRATYLLIS

You bloated little toad.

WOMEN'S CHORUS

Bloated little toad.

LEADER

Did you hear that, men? Did you hear what she called me?

MEN'S CHORUS

Yes. A bloated little toad.

LEADER

Well ... go on, then. Attack them.

STRATYLLIS

If you come one step nearer, I'll grab you by the balls and swing you round my head.

LEADER

Did you hear that, men? Did you hear what she said to me?

MEN'S CHORUS

She said she'd grab you by the balls and swing you round her head.

LEADER

Well, are you going to stand for this?

WOMEN'S CHORUS

Well, are you going to stand for that?

MEN'S CHORUS

No ... we'll sit.

All the men sit and the women burst out laughing...

EXTRACT FOUR

MAGISTRATE

You, a woman, dare to order me to be silent. Me, chief Magistrate of Athens ... I think I'm going to faint ... A chair!

All in rotation shout 'Bring in a chair!', in the tone of a court usher. Finally, a Guard brings on a chair and the Magistrate collapses into it.

LYSISTRATA

For Zeus' sake! He's half dead already. And these are the people who are supposed to be in command.

MAGISTRATE

I'm going to faint.

ALL

He's going to faint.

MAGISTRATE

A drink! A drink ...

All calling as before 'Bring in a drink' in the tone of a court usher. Lampito finally comes in with a bowl of bubbling brew smoking. The magistrate drinks it and the lights change to red. Everyone fades into the background as we focus on the Magistrate and Death who now enters, to spooky music, and snaps his fingers in the Magistrate's face. The Magistrate blinks and looks at Death.

MAGISTRATE

Oh, it's you!

DEATH

It's me, baby.

MAGISTRATE

Are you? ... Have you come for me?

DEATH

Right on, baby.

MAGISTRATE

So ... it's time?

DEATH

Time for what?

MAGISTRATE

Time to ... die?

DEATH

Time to die.

MAGISTRATE

But I don't understand - I can talk!

DEATH

You can talk.

MAGISTRATE

This is it?

DEATH

This is it.

MAGISTRATE

No return?

DEATH

No return.

MAGISTRATE

But I can. [*He stands.*] I'm all here.

DEATH

You're all here.

MAGISTRATE

I'm not dead. I'm all here. [*He feels his face.*]

DEATH

Look down there. [*The Magistrate looks down into the audience.*] See down there?

MAGISTRATE

That's not me.

DEATH *quietly*

That is you.

MAGISTRATE

But I'm fine.

DEATH

Yep. You're fine. You came up like a dream.

MAGISTRATE

Then it's ... curtains for me?

DEATH

Yep, that's right.

Pause.

MAGISTRATE

Can I plead my defence?

DEATH

For what cause?

MAGISTRATE

To go back.

DEATH

For how long?

MAGISTRATE

I don't know. What's the form?

DEATH

What you got? [*Death sits on the chair.*] I'm the man on the bench.

MAGISTRATE

I was never a liar. I gave each man his due.

DEATH

Not enough. Not worth more than a day.

MAGISTRATE

I worked hard and I gave to the poor.

DEATH

That's not much ... Seven days at most. You'll be back in a jiff.

MAGISTRATE

I helped people to learn self-respect.

DEATH

You gave nothing at all. You helped send them to me.

MAGISTRATE

I was just. I gave each man his due.

DEATH

Half a day. Case dismissed. This really is not worth my time. [*He stands.*]

MAGISTRATE

Something there must be I've done in my life to merit a little more time?

DEATH

There could be. But you'll not agree.

MAGISTRATE

Let me judge for myself.

DEATH

See those women down there, the women you've always abused? You can go back again, for two years and a bit, if you promise to sign their decree.

MAGISTRATE

But they're all for peace! Man's honour is surely in war!

DEATH *angrily*

I've had it with you! Do you want your two years and a bit?

MAGISTRATE

If that's all there is, I'll have to agree.

DEATH *producing a piece of paper*

Just sign and I'll send you right back.

MAGISTRATE

For two years?

DEATH

For two years and a bit.

MAGISTRATE

Give me the paper. I'll sign my name.

Death gives him the pen and paper.

DEATH

On the line that says 'Sign.' Sign.

MAGISTRATE

I sign.

He signs the paper. Death snaps his fingers. The Magistrate falls asleep as before. The lights snap back to normal. The Magistrate blinks. Everyone is looking at him.

MAGISTRATE

Friends ... Neighbours ... Countrymen ... I have ... I have had ... I have had a dream!

DEATH *off*

Hallelujah!...

EXTRACT FIVE

MAGISTRATE

Let me be. I am a magistrate. I shall be impartial.

LYSISTRATA

What do you wish to say? Speak.

MAGISTRATE

I've had a dream ...

MEN CHORUS

Shut up!

WOMEN CHORUS *to the men*

Be quiet!

LYSISTRATA

What was this dream? Do tell.

MAGISTRATE

If you take a tangled skein of wool, put it in the spindle, unwind it this way and that way, patiently, lovingly, you'll soon unravel with understanding what could not be solved with force. Similarly, if we listen to the arguments of these women here, patiently, lovingly, we'll soon discover that agreement is possible, that understanding is necessary. How can we go on arguing and shouting from our own point of view, without in the least paying attention to the opinions of others? Like the skein of wool, we men must patiently unravel the opinions of the women - lovingly listen from their position, not ours.

Pause. Then the women burst into cheering and clapping. All freeze. Lighting change.

MAGISTRATE *looking up to heaven*

How am I doing?

DEATH *voice-over*

You're doing well, baby.

MAGISTRATE

Do I get my extra years?

DEATH

You've earned it, baby. What a speech!

EXTRACT SIX

MYRRHINE

Oh ... I can't possibly give myself to you until I've seen our baby's safe.

CINESIAS *muttering*

Until our baby's safe ... Right ... Er [*He scratches his head, then suddenly calls down to Manes, his slave.*] Manes! Manes!

Enter Manes. He is a rough, rather stupid-looking fellow.

MANES

Yes, master?

CINESIAS

Go and get the baby.

MANES

The baby, master?

CINESIAS

Yes, the baby. Our baby. Go and get it. Your mistress wants to see it.

MANES

Righto, master. [*He goes off.*]

CINESIAS

Still the same old Manes. Stupid as ever. ... Ha ha ha ... Won't you ... until Manes comes back ... let me ... just ... put my arms around you?

MYRRHINE

No, darling. Not until I've seen the baby. You stay that side and I'll stay this side.

CINESIAS

But it's so daft, Myrrhie. This little space separating us ... Manes, hurry up!!! ... Tell me, Myrrhie ... have you missed me?

MYRRHINE

Unutterably, darling. And you?

CINESIAS

As you can see ... I'm longing for you ... Where is that damned slave?

MYRRHINE

I'll just go and change, darling, while you're waiting.

CINESIAS

There's no need to do that, Myrrhie. You're fine just as you are.

MYRRHINE

But it's getting cold, darling.

CINESIAS

Is it? I thought it was rather warm actually.

MYRRHINE

I shan't be a tick. [*She goes off.*]

CINESIAS

Oh, damn! Damn! Where is that cursed slave? [*shouting*] Manes! Manes!

MANES *entering*

Yes, master?

CINESIAS

Well, where's the baby?

MANES

I've sent for it, master.

CINESIAS

Well, never mind. I can't wait that long. Look, just get a shawl or something and wrap it

round a stone. Anything.

MANES

Shaw! Yes, master. [*He goes off again.*]

CINESIAS

Oh, what a fool, what a fool! I know! ... I'll use my cloak! ... Manes! Manes! Come back here! [*Cinesias wraps his cloak into a bundle.*] Myrrhie, darling! The baby's here!

MANES *entering*

Yes, master?

CINESIAS

What do you want?

MANES

You called me back.

CINESIAS

Oh, get out. Just go away. [*Manes exits.*] Myrrhie, darling! [*Enter Myrrhine.*] Here's the baby. Here he is. [*She comes over to him.*] Ah, diddicumbs.

MYRRHINE

But, Cinie, I can't see his face.

CINESIAS

He's in there, darling. He's asleep.

MYRRHINE

But I can't see him.

Cinesias turns his back and makes baby sounds.

CINESIAS

There you are. You can hear him now. You heard that, didn't you?

MYRRHINE

He sounds very uncomfortable. He's suffocating in there. Let me hold him.

CINESIAS

No. He'll only start bawling his head off.

MYRRHINE

I don't believe there's anything in there. You're having me on, aren't you?

CINESIAS

Of course I'm not having you on, darling. Of course he's in there. Manes! Manes! [*Manes enters.*] Manes, take the baby away. Your mistress has seen him now. [*To Manes, sotto voce.*] Start crying, you fool. Start crying.

MANES

Eh?

CINESIAS

Start making baby sounds.

MANES

Glug glug glug.

CINESIAS

There, you see! You've woken him up now, you fool. Take him away.

MANES

Glug glug glug.

CINESIAS *under his breath - it's too unrealistic*

Stop it! [*Aloud*] You've woken the baby up.

Cinesias cuffs Manes who drops the 'baby.'

MYRRHINE

Ohh!!

CINESIAS *picking up the bundle*

Oh, he's all right, darling. Just a little bruise on his head. He's all right.

MYRRHINE

Cinesias, if you've hurt that baby, I'll never speak to you again.

CINESIAS *rocking the baby*

There there there! Daddy's little treasure. Manes, catch! [*He throws the baby to Manes, who catches it.*] Now, off! [*Manes goes off with the bundle.*] And now ... [*He grabs Myrrhine by the wrist.*] ... how about a little kiss? [*Myrrhine stamps on his foot.*] Oww!!!

MYRRHINE

You filthy little liar!

CINESIAS

What?

MYRRHINE

There was no baby in there and well you know it.

CINESIAS

Myrrhie, darling!

MYRRHINE

And to cap it all, you were prepared to sell me for a thousand drachma!

CINESIAS

I assure you ...

MYRRHINE

Don't lie! Stratyllis told me everything. [*She punctuates the following with well-aimed blows to his body.*] You're just a no good ... good-for-nothing ... puffed up ... trumped up ... pompous speaking ... non-event ... and you can gowithout!!

She hits him with every phrase and stomps off...

EXTRACT SEVEN

The men start shouting at the Leader. Suddenly all freeze. Death has snapped his fingers. Death and the Magistrate walk about amongst the characters, who stand in statue-like poses.

MAGISTRATE

How did you do that then?

DEATH

Easy, man. I just freeze time.

MAGISTRATE

And they can't hear us?

DEATH

Not an alpha or an omega.

MAGISTRATE

Well, that's truly amazing. You know, I'm beginning to enjoy this ... being dead. It's not like being dead at all.

DEATH

It's a cinch, man. It's the business.

MAGISTRATE

Could I do that trick?

DEATH

What - freezing time?

MAGISTRATE

Yes.

DEATH

Sure. Just click your fingers and they'll move. Click your fingers and they'll freeze.

The Magistrate clicks his fingers. The characters all begin to argue volubly. He clicks his fingers again. They all freeze. Play with this idea a little.

MAGISTRATE

That's great! Hey, look at Lysistrata, all hot and bothered. The old bag! I never did like her much. [*He sticks his tongue out at Lysistrata, who is completely frozen.*] Hey, I'm really getting into this being dead lark. And look at Propyllea! What a woman!

DEATH

Now, now! You're supposed to be past that sort of thing. Remember your condition.

MAGISTRATE *sadly*

Oh yes. I can't do anything, can I?

DEATH *highly pleased*

That's right. You're sort of ... without your equipment up here ... if you take my meaning. Ha ha ha ha ...

MAGISTRATE

I couldn't just go back for a few minutes, could I? As a ghost?

DEATH

Well ... I don't know.

MAGISTRATE

Oh, go on. Give 'em the fright of their lives. Let me go back.

DEATH

Well, all right. Just for a few seconds. It's possible you could influence the outcome of this debate. Now. What's the formula for ghosts? [*He thinks.*] Ah, yes! Are you ready?

MAGISTRATE

Ready!

DEATH

Go!

Blackout. Lights up. Magistrate and Death have gone and everybody is arguing with Lysistrata and the Leader as before.

LEADER

No, no, no, no, no! I don't care how many Propylleas you put forth, I will not jeopardise this country's safety by giving up war.

LYSISTRATA

You miserable little man. You're no better than the Magistrate - before his conversion.

LEADER

The Magistrate went mad.

LYSISTRATA

And died of a heart attack.

The Women laugh.

LEADER

Do not blaspheme the dead. He was a grand old boy. Even though he ended his days supporting your cause I attribute it to his advanced years and the mellowing of his ageing brain. [*The Magistrate comes in and stands beside the Leader.*] But essentially he was on the side of right and the right side is the side of war. [*He looks at the Magistrate.*] Isn't that right, Magistrate?

MAGISTRATE

Quite right.

LEADER

There. You see?

LYSISTRATA

What?

LEADER

AAAAHHH!!! [*He points.*]

ALL

What is it?

LEADER

It's him! The Magistrate!

CINESIAS

Another one for the loony bin.

LEADER

Look at him ... He's there ... just going out ... there ... there ...

The Magistrate goes out and the Leader faints.

NICHARCHUS

Look, men. None of us want war. We want our womenfolk back, don't we?

MEN CHORUS

Yeah!

NICHARCHUS

Then let us sign the blessed treaty and be done!

MEN CHORUS

Yeah!! [All clap and cheer.]

CINESIAS

Let's forge the Leader's signature while he's asleep...

EXTRACT from Production Notes

PRODUCTION NOTES AND TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.

INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION.

Lysistrata is one of those plays which will always be topical, simply because, somewhere in the world wars exist which have a greater or lesser effect on us in the west. Its cry for peace, an end to fighting, is as relevant today as it was when originally written, at the time of the Athenian wars with Sparta. With the growing unrest between Europe, the United States and the Arab nations, or between Arab and Jew, what could be more topical?

The play has been used for many reasons in the recent past. Mainly it has been a vehicle for feminism, since it is the women in the play who sue for peace. Really, though, there is only one 'feminist' character - that of Lysistrata herself, who is on a level of sound common sense above both the men and the other women in the play. The other women in the play are exposed as having all the faults commonly levelled at womankind - vanity, gossip and moral 'silliness' being the main ones.

Sex is the main theme of the play - because it is sex that Lysistrata proposes to withhold from the men until they concede defeat and give up war. To make this possible she has appealed to the women of Athens and to those of the enemy state - Sparta. The Spartan women [who were famed in their day for being as warlike as their men] are comic masterpieces - huge butch women with coarse manners and accents. This satire would have caused much merriment amongst the Athenian audiences for whom Aeschylus was writing but it is still funny today - and can be made funnier and more up-to-date by perhaps making these women bodybuilders, fitness fanatics, or similar. The point is that both women and men are as addicted to sex as each other. The women have to show superior strength of character in order to withstand temptation - driving the men wild with desire without giving in themselves. The comic possibilities are obvious - and timeless. And because the women often begin to weaken, Lysistrata's role is to 'glue their courage to the sticking-post.'

The women cover different 'types' and classes - from the upper-crust Myrrhine with her household of slaves to organise, to the stripper Propyllea. Likewise, the men cover the classes from the Magistrate to the ordinary soldiers. All, though, have one thing in common - their enjoyment of sex. Only Lysistrata is above all that, being unlinked with any man and in some way classless too. She talks equally firmly to

Myrrhine as to the Spartan Lampito; her message is to all classes and types and her impatience with the shortcomings of both men and women is extreme - and often a source of more humour.

This new rendering of the old classic is lively and funny, using modern language without fixing it to a particular period. It is larded from the outset with sexual references and innuendos, so is not for the faint-hearted or for the lower echelons of the school, perhaps. However, it is not offensive and only the most prickly of managements will object to it, I feel.

The play's accessibility is stressed by its modernisation. It is not fixed in the jargon of a particular culture. It would be simple to do this play in whatever context you desire - in a particular country or a particular period; the options are wide.

THE CHARACTERS

LYSISTRATA - A very strong character needing a good voice range. She is domineering, scornful of others and prepared to go to any lengths to gain peace. Care must be taken not to make her unlikeable. It helps that she has a weak moment of despair where we see her cast down and in tears. She seems to have no husband, though she has 'done all that' as she refers to a husband earlier on. Presumably he is dead - perhaps killed in this same war, which would give her a clear motivation. Perhaps she ought to be dressed at first in black, as a widow. The fact that she has shared the trials and desires of all women must be the source of her strength - she has risen above it all and reached a status which is almost 'godlike.' It is significant that no man 'fancies' her - she is 'above' the sexual needs of the others and from this elevated position her vision of peace is clear and the means to obtain it all too simple - if only they would all listen to her. Much of her anger stems from the frustration of the leader whose vision is not understood.

CALONICE - a young woman, just married to Nicharchus. She should be the embodiment of the state of young passionate love, unable to take her mind off her husband or off the newly found joys of sex. She is an upper-class character so speaks well. Perhaps she could be giggly and breathy - to emphasise her youth - with over-emphatic body language.

MYRRHINE - Older than Calonice, she should exude the worldliness of the experienced society woman. Drawling upper-class voice, emphasising long vowel-sounds and 'darling's. Affected mannerisms - air-kissing, little flutterings of the hands, and so on. In her scene with her husband in Act Two, we see a different side to her. Her anger at Cinesias' betrayal of her - which she reveals only at the end of the scene - in fact colours all her voice and actions in this scene. There should be a coldness and deliberation about her movements that is obvious to us and confusing to her husband.

LAMPITO - the talkative one of the Spartans, though still more ready with fists and feet than with words. Should be played by a large actress - all her movements should emphasise her butchness; she is the one who wears the trousers at home and has her husband cooking for her. Cocky combative stance, legs apart, strides rather than steps. Voice heavily accented.

ISMENIA - always around though rarely speaking, there is still a lot of room for comedy with her physical presence. She is exceedingly slow and as butch as Lampito. Perhaps her body is more slouched - gorilla-like - arms hanging. Mouth slack, often hanging open. Reactions to what is happening on stage always a couple of beats after everyone else. The rhythm of the character is a challenge, especially set against the pacey rhythm of the others. guaranteed she will cause laughter; the trick is to keep working the character so that she gains the laughs still as the play progresses. When she does speak it is painfully slow and, of course, with the same heavy accent as Lampito.

STRATYLLIS - Lysistrata's 'old friend' and most trusted confidante among the women. She is forthright and strong in her movements and her speech. Of an indeterminate class and social standing, she should be played in a no-nonsense practical way with perhaps a touch of a regional accent. She is older than Calonice and Myrrhine, but still attractive - as witness the Magistrate's lust for her. This sexuality puts her on a lower standing than Lysistrata herself, who otherwise she might resemble too much. Her lower standing is further emphasised by her blame of Lysistrata when their financial shenanigans are exposed by Cinesias. An initially strong character, who is gradually exposed for her weaknesses.

THE OTHER WOMEN - As with the men, these need to be differentiated so that they become individualised - from flirts and teases like Fatima and Propyllea to workers and ardent feminists - a wide range of types and of ages. Once again, they should have regional accents, different ways of walking and talking, standing and using head and eyes.

LEADER OF THE MEN - the leader is the only person with [almost] as much strength and determination as Lysistrata, but his stance is made ridiculous by the laughter that is often levelled at him and by his own pompous high-handedness. He is not as bright and as quick as Lysistrata; he is, in fact, rather stupid - falling back on traditional responses and refusing to see any other point of view. He is the type never to change his mind - which is why, it is only his unconsciousness at the end which saves the day for both sides. He should be played as a sergeant-major type - military in his bearing. Impatient, bad-tempered and increasingly maddened by the stalemate, he often speaks through gritted teeth and bodily tension, nervous pacing, etc. should be major characteristics.

MAGISTRATE - is the archetypal doddery old fool. He rambles into interminable boring stories, loses his grip regularly on what is going on whilst retaining a ridiculous and entirely inappropriate dribbling, lip-licking, ogling and leering sexuality. The highest character in social class, his voice could be that of the upper-class bore, but needs to add to it all the vagueness, stammering after words and other vocal tricks that can indicate age and senility. His mannerisms, too, need to be equally vague - contrasting with a sharpness and sparkle of tone and eye when confronted with, for instance a pretty woman or attractive idea. Herein lies his comedy - in these contrasts and in the clarity of the caricature. Everyone will recognise the type. After his death, he remains much the same, though less vague. The likeable side of his character is his unwillingness to give up on life as represented by sexual love.

DEATH - is played as a 'dude.' Language gives the clue - he is super-cool, laden with streetwise mannerisms. He should walk to an inner rhythm, as if always listening to a rap-beat, head nodding, finger clicking. Could be played with an American accent - but then it needs to be that of ghetto New York - the Bronx, for example, or Harlem.

CINESIAS - insufferably full of himself, he likes to lord it over the lesser creatures he sees around him, such as Nicharchus. He is boastful and stuck-up. We do not like him and are delighted at the way Myrrhine puts him down and exposes him for what he is. He could strut around, chest thrust out, looking down his nose at others. His voice is upper-class.

NICHARCHUS - an upper-class twit. He needs to contrast with the older Cinesias, by being a little bit puppyish, enthusiastic. Perhaps he is a little clumsy and gangly. He could be played much like 'Hugo' in 'The Vicar of Dibley.'

LAMARCHUS - is Lampito's husband. It would be fun if he were half the size that she is, so that when they embrace at the end, she picks him up physically. His accent should be the same as theirs but he is even less able to speak 'Greek'. Thus he

speaks in monosyllables and his face will reflect a 'Manuel' type eager misunderstanding of everything said. His walk and stance needs to be soldierly - he and his companions need to look more disciplined than the Greeks.

MANES - needs a shambling gait and delayed reactions to show his slow stupidity. He should look dull-eyed, head hanging and dogged, but painfully slow in carrying out orders. For instance, his crying like a baby needs to be so bad that it is comical - he lacks the imagination to have a clue what Cinesias is up to. In fact, he doesn't even realise he is supposed to be imitating a baby, so the crying will be of the wrong sort. He will also look affronted and put-upon when his master reacts with impatience at him; his whole attitude is long-suffering and 'Why me?'-ish.

THE GUARDS AND OTHER MEN - try to make these look like individuals. They are of lower classes than the other characters, so need to have regional accents - which can cover a wide variety of regions perhaps. They need to be worked on as a group to suggest individuality - not just physical differences, but differences in reaction, understanding, ways of standing and so on.

Work should be done with both choruses to establish separate character identities. I don't mean by this, the kind of detailed inner work common to the Stanislavski System but rather the finding of comic types - different mannerisms, different ways of walking and standing - which can perhaps be best discovered by using different rhythms - somebody slow and a bit goofy contrasted with someone mercurial and fuelled by anger, for example.

SETTING

The author gives us his own idea which would be easy enough to follow: 'The scene is an open space outside the Athenian Acropolis. To the left, a couple of pillars indicate the entrance to the shrine. To the back, a parapet overlooking sea and sky. Down right, a stone seat.'

The staging for the play is very straightforward, only one setting being needed throughout. The above idea can be used if set on a traditional stage. Alternatively, the play would work very well in the round or in the arena form - with the audience seated in a horse-shoe shape around the playing area - which leaves the potential for some 'scenery' - pillars or whatever - at the back...