Greek satire a play for all time

THEATRE

Lysistrata
By Aristophanes
Third-year Acting
WAAPA Roundhouse
Review: Stephen Bevis

Director Chris Bendall calls Lysistrata the play that keeps on giving.

As long as there is war and sex and a little something called the human condition, its relevance probably is assured for another 2500 years.

What does change, however, is the vast number of interpretations of Aristophanes’ ribald satire about a high-born Athenian wife who leads Hellenic women in a just-say-no conjugal rebellion to force their menfolk to lay down their swords.

Bendall has chosen Germaine Greer’s 1972 translation, with additional text from Phil Willmott’s 1999 London production, to breathe throbbing life into this timeless anti-war, proto-feminist classic.

The serious themes of gender, class and political power are delivered through a riotous comedy, translated with larrikin gusto by Greer in her sharp, vulgar contemporary vernacular.

Setting his play in a bathhouse, Bendall draws on the youthful virility of his talented student cast to create a delightful revel that is as lewd as it is learned.

This production looks a treat, with the diaphanous costumes owing as much to a European disco as to the disciples of Dionysus. The raunchy dance scenes and the thumping cabaret and European house music of Adam Broons’ sound design adds to the burlesque atmosphere.

In the Greek comic tradition, the men of Sparta and Athens don phalluses that take on positively Pinocchio qualities as their frustrations rise.

The ensemble is uniformly strong, but special mentions should go to Alexandra Fisher as the unshakable sex-strike leader Lysistrata, Cheree Cassidy as her brassy, hornbag friend Kalonike and James Beck, who almost steals the show as a battleaxe in drag in a comical chorus of cleaning women.

Problems with pacing after the interval allowed the proceedings to drift for a short while but this should tighten up as the season continues.

Bendall recently moved from Melbourne to run Deckchair Theatre and Lysistrata is the first opportunity for WA theatre-lovers to get a taste of his aesthetic.

Judging by this production, his first venture with Deckchair will be something to look forward to.

Lysistrata ends on Thursday.

Woman power: Third year acting students hold centre stage in Lysistrata.