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THEATER REVIEW | 'A VERY NAUGHTY GREEK PLAY'

Tickling a Modern Audience With an Ancient Comedy

By [ANNE MIDGETTE](#)

Published: March 7, 2005

How do you update a comedy written more than 2,400 years ago so it will be funny to a modern audience? The Aquila Theater Company's answer: by having your leads play inflatable sex mannequins like air guitars.

The aim of "A Very Naughty Greek Play (Utopia Parkway)" is to create a modern version of Aristophanes' "Wasps" that conveys the spirit of the original. And indeed, this piece, billed as a musical comedy, does have Aristophanean elements. Aristophanes was a raunchy, irreverent, foul-mouthed satirist of his society. His "Wasps" is about the conflict between a politically conservative father and his liberal son. Red state-blue state, get it? You will after the Aquila Theater Company gets through with you.



Richard Termine

Robert Richmond, left, and Alex Webb in "A Very Naughty Greek Play (Utopia Parkway)," a musical comedy based on Aristophanes' "Wasps."

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Language, for once, is not the sticking point. Many translations of Aristophanes get bogged down to the point of senselessness in trying to reflect his complex Greek. But Peter Meineck, the company's founder and a classics professor, has made a translation-cum-adaptation that is laudably direct, especially in the mouths of British actors, like Robert Richmond (the reactionary father), who roll words deliciously off their tongues, having actually been trained in old-fashioned things like diction. (There is little Method to the Aquila's madness.)

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Seldom is so much talent and energy expended on so slight a product. This one emulates the dumbness of "Saturday Night Live" and the wackiness of Monty Python without capturing the flashes of brilliance of either. Anthony Cochrane's music is negligible; the piece seems to lose interest in its identity as musical theater about halfway through. The audience is literally dragged into the action, enlisted to do things like hold a rubber chicken, or get sprayed with a sub-water-gun by Alex Webb, who has a great time as the Chorus, if they fail to shout and salute at each mention of the name of the political leader Thamnos (that's Greek for "small leafy shrub"). Get it?

The production seems geared to a teenage audience and may work for that demographic; but a teenager might also point out that it's not really naughty if you have to work this hard at it.

"A Very Naughty Greek Play (Utopia Parkway)" runs through March 20 at the Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Avenue, at 25th Street, (212) 239-6200.

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