

THE GREENWOOD THEATRE
KING'S COLLEGE LONDON PRESENTS

ARISTOPHANES

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12TH – 14TH FEBRUARY 2014



INTRODUCTION

By Rosa Wicks, Director



My love of music, laughter and Greek drama propelled my desire to pitch a comedy to the department to direct as the 61st KCL Greek Play in the summer of 2013. Having had the role of Antigone in that year's play, Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, I knew full well the level of effort and commitment involved in staging a fully-realised entertaining drama in an ancient foreign language with a cast of people of varying experience in that language, and yet I still remained fully determined to bring my take on Aristophanes' Wasps to the stage. I am so lucky, then, to have been gifted with a cast who are utterly dedicated to exploring a variety of performance techniques, including movement, character development and singing, and committing themselves to the study of performance in Ancient Greek. I have also been lucky enough to have a wealth of resources to explore the dimensions of this drama, as well as the wonderful Michael Silk who has composed the play's swinging jazz score, bringing life to the chorus, the drama's very foundation.

My vision for the play came from a place of mimicking Aristophanes ability to take the relatable and fashion it into something absurd – just as he occasionally juxtaposes entirely incongruent language, convention and setting, I too have juxtaposed genres, time periods and set pieces, hopefully to bring you a memorable, witty and occasionally entirely bizarre show.

So I hope you enjoy the music and dancing, appreciate the Ancient Greek and have fun giggling at some of the obscene jokes. After all, a day without laughter is a day wasted!

CAST

Xanthias
Sosias
Bdelycleon
Philocleon
Boy 1
Boy 2
Demadogue
Victim
Myrtia
Accuser
Chorus leader (Boss wasp)
Nostalgic wasp
Excited wasp
Angry wasp
Wise wasp
Worry wasp
Quiet wasp
Cow
Slaves

Labes the dog
Cheese grater
Puppies

Dardanis the “flute player”
Witness
Chaerephon

*Emmeline Downer
Maaria Ahmed
Ben Foulston
Matthew Partridge
Sana Malik
Lucy Mudie
Harry Sharpe
Isabel Scadeng
Thea Smith
Vanessa Szymanska
Zara Tso
Stefani Simeonova
Elena Konstantinidi
Azura Farid
Olivia Wilson
Marie Julian
Hannah Fulford
Georgina Miller
Caroline Ferguson
Konstantinos Kydros
Laurence Hall
Catherine Rhodes
Sana Malik
Lucy Mudie
George Ellis
Anouk Wetzel
Alex Cook*

CREW

Director

Assistant Directors

Producer

Executive Producer

Stage Manager

Business Manager

Publicity Manager

Music

Set Design, Construction & Lighting

Surtitles

Costume

Props

Poster, Flyer & Programme Design

Stage Hands

Rosa Wicks

Oliver Harrington

Gemma Rayment

Sofia Vicente

Rosie Wyles

Gemma Rayment

Sarah Kehoe

Claire Norton

Michael Silk & Jamie Masters

Courtney Galgano

Rebecca McNamara

Katerina Velentza

Laura Smithson

Elisa Rovelli

Hugo Raymond

Robyn van Blankenstein

Ella Braidwood

Konstantinos Kydros

SYNOPSIS

By Rosa Wicks, Director

The Wasps opens with two slaves, Xanthias and Sosias, asleep in the courtyard of a house that has been barricaded and surrounded by nets. Sosias wakes Xanthias and chastises his laziness, and they discuss how they have been positioned there to guard 'a wild animal'. They go on to introduce the play to the audience. A man asleep on the roof is revealed to be the master of the house, and the son of the man whom they are guarding. The slaves take guesses as to the nature of the old man's affliction before admitting that he suffers from an addiction to the jury service. The symptoms of the old man's addiction are described, and we learn that the son has tried many treatments to solve his father's problem, but all in vain, and so he has turned to fashioning the house into a prison to keep the old man away from the law courts. The old man is introduced as Philocleon, and his son Bdelycleon.

Bdelycleon wakes from his sleep as he hears Philocleon attempt to escape through the sink drain, and calls Xanthias and Sosias to help. Instead Philocleon pops up through the chimney pretending to be smoke in order to get away, but Bdelycleon notices him and barricades his exit through the chimney too. Philocleon attempts both to persuade Bdelycleon that he is needed at the law courts, and devises other plans to escape, including biting his way through the nets and hiding behind their cow to flee to the market place, where she is being sold. All of his plans are thwarted by Bdelycleon and his attentive slaves. Xanthias suggests that the trio take a nap to celebrate their victory over Philocleon and although Bdelycleon notes that the jury of old wasps will be arriving soon, he soon too succumbs to sleep. The chorus of wasps arrives on the scene, travelling towards the court house and picking up members along the way. The roads are muddy and it is not yet light, so the chorus are accompanied by two of their sons holding lamps and guiding them. The chorus chat about the day ahead in the court, the weather and the good old days of yonder, and reprimand the boys for their behaviour. They then arrive at Philocleon's house, where he is nowhere to be seen, so they agree to sing a song in order to coax him out. They sing of the misery of Philocleon's absence, speculating as to why he might not come today. Philocleon hears them, and emerges from an open window to join in the song.

Philocleon reveals his predicament to the chorus, who offer ideas as to how he might escape. He chooses to try his hand at chewing through the netting surrounding the courtyard and then bungeeing down the side of the house to

join his fellow jurors. The wasps promise to come to his aid should Bdelycleon be alerted to this escape attempt. Sure enough, Bdelycleon hears the sound of the wasps and wakes up the sleeping Xanthias and Sosias to drag Philocleon back inside, but the wasps stand their ground, and eventually a fight breaks out. The chorus make a show of getting into rank and readying their stings for attack, but are eventually abated with the aid of a bit of fly spray. At the end of the struggle, Philocleon is still barely in his son's custody and both sides are willing to settle the issue peacefully through debate.

The debate between father and the son focuses on the advantages that the old man personally derives from voluntary jury service. Philocleon says he enjoys the flattering attentions of rich and powerful men who tend to bribe him for a favourable verdict, he enjoys the freedom to interpret the law as he pleases since his decisions are not subject to review, and his juror's pay gives him independence and authority within his own household. Bdelycleon responds to these points with the argument that jurors are actually subject to the demands of petty officials and they get paid less than they deserve. These arguments have a paralysing effect on Philocleon. The Chorus is won over.

Philocleon however is still not able to give up his old ways just yet so Bdelycleon offers to turn the house into a courtroom and to pay him a juror's fee to judge domestic disputes. Philocleon agrees and a case is soon brought before him - a dispute between the household dogs, Demadogue and Labes, involving the unlawful consumption of a Sicilian cheese. Bdelycleon says a few words on behalf of the accused and ushers out Labes' puppies to soften the heart of the old juror with their plaintive cries. Philocleon is not swayed but his son easily fools him into putting his vote into the urn for acquittal. The old juror is deeply shocked by the outcome of the trial, but his son promises him a good time and they exit the stage to prepare for some entertainment. The chorus sing a song lamenting their loss of youth and vigour, yet they assert that they are still proud to be wasps.

Father and son then return to the stage, now arguing with each other over the old man's choice of attire. He loves his old juryman's cloak and shoes and is suspicious of the fancy woollen garment and the fashionable Spartan footwear that Bdelycleon wants him to wear that evening to a sophisticated dinner party. The

SYNOPSIS (CONT.)

fancy clothes are forced upon him and then he is instructed in the kind of manners and conversation that the other guests will expect of him. Philocleon declares his reluctance to drink any wine, but Bdelycleon assures him that sophisticated men of the world can easily talk their way out of trouble and so they depart optimistically for the evening's entertainment.

Xanthias arrives with news for the audience about the old man's appalling behaviour at the dinner party: Philocleon has got himself abusively drunk, he has insulted all his son's fashionable friends and now he is assaulting anyone he meets on the way home. The slave departs as Philocleon arrives, now with the aggrieved victims on his heels and the pretty flute girl Dardanis on his arm. Bdelycleon appears moments later and angrily berates his father for kidnapping the flute girl from the party. Philocleon pretends that the naked lady is in fact a torch. His son isn't fooled and, after a struggle, sends the girl back to the party. Myrtia and another accuser then arrive with their witnesses, demanding compensation and threatening legal action against Philocleon for his grievances against them. He makes an ironic attempt to talk his way out of trouble like a sophisticated man of the world but it inflames the situation further and finally his alarmed son drags him indoors. The chorus sings about how difficult it is for men to change their habits and commend the son for filial devotion. Then, finally, the entire cast returns to the stage for a good ol' shindig.

CAST BIOS



Xanthias – Emmeline Downer

Hello! I am a first year Classics BA student from Cornwall. I haven't done much acting in the past but enjoy playing the piano and trumpet. I have only just started learning Ancient Greek from scratch and so have found acting in this play challenging, yet hugely enjoyable, especially playing Xanthias! I have made many good friends during this time and hope that you enjoy the play!

Sosias – Maaria Ahmed

I wanted the role of Sosias because he is a slave, and my favourite songs are 'Slave 4 U' and 'Slave to the Rhythm'. I enjoy curry, rice, Michael Fassbender, languages, travelling and partying. I think the best thing about Aristophanes was how he achieved an effect resembling natural speech through the use of iambic hexameter. What a bro.



Bdelycleon – Ben Foulston

It is an absolute pleasure to be performing in an Aristophanes play, who is my favourite playwright not only from Attic literature but from literature as a whole. I do hope that you enjoy our somewhat contemporary and musically enhanced version of the Wasps!

Philocleon – Matthew Partridge

I am a third year Classics undergraduate and having participated previously (in 2011's Hecuba) I knew this would be a brilliant experience in my final year. This play is the product of a great team effort, and I have immensely enjoyed rehearsing with people who have come to be close friends.



CAST BIOS (CONT.)



Chorus leader (Boss wasp) – Zara Tso

I study Ancient Greek with English and I play the Chorus leader in the play. I just love the lack of subtlety in Greek comedy. I love working (mainly laughing if I'm being honest) with people in my department, it's been great fun.

Excited wasp – Elena Konstantinidi

Hello! Growing up in Cyprus, watching and studying ancient Greek Theatre was a big part of my culture. "The Wasps" has always been one of my favourites, so I'm really excited to be a part of this production.



Angry wasp – Azura Farid

I'm Azura, a first year Liberal Arts student from Singapore, and I play the Angry Wasp. I don't know any Greek, but I joined the Greek play because I sing in foreign languages a lot and I thought it would be an interesting challenge to try ancient Greek. I also enjoy acting and singing, and I've particularly enjoyed learning and singing the songs for this play!



Quiet wasp – Hannah Fulford

I'm playing the Quiet Wasp, for whom everything in life is just that little bit more difficult. I'm so glad to have been a part of the play as I've made some great friends along the way. Nothing bonds a group of strangers together faster than the hilarity (humiliation?) of spending your first rehearsals with a huge pencil balloon attached to your trousers in lieu of a phallus. I'm also very pleased to have an answer to that perennial question which plagues Classicists everywhere: 'What is the point of studying a language you can't even speak?' - 'Ah-hah! Come see my play'.





Worry wasp – Marie Julian

I study Classical Studies BA at Kings and have previously performed in the West End musical 'The King and I' and so thought the Greek play would be a good opportunity to mix my two interests. I also hadn't studied Ancient Greek before and despite being thrown in the deep end having to learn lines and songs in Ancient Greek, the process has been new and exciting.

Wise wasp – Olivia Wilson

As a Classics student I have to face so much daily abuse about the pointlessness of studying an ancient language. So I thought why not take part in a play in which I'm able to speak and even sing in that language? I can assure you that nothing can make you more aware of the continued power and life of a classical language than in Greek Old Comedy, where the jokes actually make you laugh. And, you know, strutting around with a giant phallus stuck between your legs does wonders for the self-esteem too. Wise words indeed.



Nostalgic wasp – Stefani Simeonova

I decided to audition for the cast because it seemed like such an interesting play and unique experience. I can honestly say that I am so glad that I did because I've had so many wonderful moments with my cast-mates and the plot itself is so good! Greek drama is unlike any other, it can make you laugh and move you in ways which you never thought possible. One of my favourite experiences was blocking the wasps' scenes – it's amazing to see it coming all together! And the music rehearsals of course ;)



ARISTOPHANES' WASPS

By Professor Michael Silk

Wasps was first produced in 422 BC, when its already established author was around twenty-eight. Like most of Aristophanes' plays, extant or lost (he composed over forty in all; we have eleven), *Wasps* belongs to what critics in later antiquity, and modern scholars in their wake, call 'Old Comedy', a kind of comic drama very different from the comedy of manners of later centuries ('New Comedy').

From Menander to Plautus and Terence to contemporary sitcom, comedy of manners follows the laws of realist logic. Character, plot, external reference, social setting, theatrical assumptions and, not least, language are all recognisably related to what an audience can identify as real life and, often, ordinary life. More precisely, character, plot, language and the rest are constructed, not just at a seemingly short distance from real life, but at a constant distance from it, such that a reassuring sense of a coherent and orderly world is established at the beginning, and then confirmed by everything that follows. Within this orderly world, the tone tends to be restrained, the language polite, and the fallibility of typical human behaviour in restricted social settings the usual theme or target: everything tends towards restriction and restraint.

Aristophanic Old Comedy is different: not realist but recreative. Like a range of later literary and dramatic expression, from Rabelais to Monty Python, it may make use of any or all realist elements, but then feels free to abandon their logic and their coherence at a moment's notice. It has its own coherence, though: the coherence of exuberant possibility. In the course of a play – in the course of a single scene, or conversation, or sentence – realist logic can be suspended in favour of expansive incongruity: characters can change, suddenly; plots can jump; settings can shift; the norms of living (social or existential) can be challenged; language can switch from the polite everyday to the paratragic, from the fruitiest obscene to the delicately poetic; the comic spotlight may fall on typical fallibility, but more characteristically, and more memorably, on satire of real-life individuals or institutions – only to switch from negative satire to positive celebration of human freedom beyond all individual or institutional constraint. This is an art-form, or popular entertainment, or both, that helps to immortalise some of the tawdrier aspects of late-fifth-century Athens – and immortalise itself by its capacity to transcend such concerns altogether.

In these terms, *Wasps* is a supreme example of Old Comedy – and of Aristophanes’ comic vision. Initially, the play offers a satirical treatment of a peculiar phenomenon of contemporary Attic political life, the jury courts. These courts had the power to attack powerful individuals; and a premise of the play is that Cleon (Aristophanes’ *bête-noire* and one of the leading politicians in contemporary Athens) manipulates the courts, and specifically the ordinary citizens who manned the juries, to ‘sting’ his political opponents. In the opening scenes of the play, these jurymen are represented by the wasp chorus and their friend, old Philocleon (‘Love-Cleon’), the opposition to Cleon and the system he thrives on by the old man’s earnest son, Bdelycleon (‘Hate-Cleon’). The father is – exuberantly – devoted to the courts and especially to convictions, and the son to putting a stop to this obsession; but the clash of generations is not at all straightforward in the event. Bdelycleon’s successive attempts to bring his father round (or up? or down?) to his own take on life constitute a typical combination of the realist and the recreative: locking him up in his house, arguing forensically against the system, persuading him to set up a miniature court at home (a dog is prosecuted – and, to the father’s dismay, acquitted – for the theft of some cheese), and finally trying to teach him social graces. The suitably incongruous effect of that last manoeuvre is that the old man gets high on drink and converts the whole company to party mood: song, dance, exuberance, wins through.

That last transformation is characteristic – of this comedy and of Aristophanic comedy in general. Transformation is a leitmotif of the play, from start to finish. In the opening scene, two slaves swap accounts of their dreams in which (in Lewis Carroll fashion) one creature turns into something else. The chorus switch from helpless old men to fierce jurymen-wasps, to wistful narrators of the old days when they fought and won at sea, to admirers of the earnest son – and then to carriers of Philocleon’s dance in the closing scene. The most inimitably Aristophanic switch of all (and an embarrassment for single-minded scholars who suppose that the anti-Cleon satire is ‘the’ point of the play) is the way that, after his domestic defeat, Love-Cleon triumphs over the satire, as well as over his son, by translating the ‘Love’ in his name into irresistible togetherness in the end.

PREVIOUS PERFORMANCES

1953	<i>Hippolytus</i>	1985	<i>Thesmophoriazusae</i>
1955	<i>Medea</i>	1986	<i>Bacchae</i>
1956	<i>Electra</i>	1987	<i>Ajax</i>
1957	<i>Orestes</i>	1988	<i>Frogs</i>
1958	<i>Ajax</i>	1989	<i>Electra</i>
1959	<i>Hercules Furens</i>	1990	<i>Clouds</i>
1960	<i>Dyskolos</i>	1991	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
1961	<i>Alcestis</i>	1992	<i>Acharnians</i>
1962	<i>Frogs</i>	1993	<i>Electra</i>
1963	<i>Electra</i>	1994	<i>Agamemnon</i>
1964	<i>Trachiniae</i>	1995	<i>Lysistrata</i>
1965	<i>Thesmophoriazusae</i>	1996	<i>Ajax</i>
1966	<i>Iphigenia in Tauris</i>	1997	<i>Medea</i>
1967	<i>Hippolytus</i>	1998	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
1968	<i>Acharnians</i>	1999	<i>Choephoroi</i>
1969	<i>Alcestis</i>	2000	<i>Birds</i>
1970	<i>Peace</i>	2001	<i>Antigone</i>
1971	<i>Frogs</i>	2002	<i>Bacchae</i>
1972	<i>Antigone</i>	2003	<i>Hippolytus</i>
1973	<i>Andromache</i>	2004	<i>Acharnians</i>
1974	<i>Thesmophoriazusae</i>	2005	<i>Rhesus</i>
1975	<i>Hippolytus</i>	2006	<i>Ecclesiazusae</i>
1976	<i>Medea</i>	2007	<i>Trachiniae</i>
1977	<i>Clouds</i>	2008	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
1978	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	2009	<i>Lysistrata</i>
1980	<i>Trojan Women</i>	2010	<i>The Persians</i>
1981	<i>Wasps</i>	2011	<i>Helen</i>
1982	<i>Birds</i>	2012	<i>Hecuba</i>
1983	<i>Hercules Furens</i>	2013	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>
1984	<i>Hippolytus</i>	2014	<i>Wasps</i>

Power and Passion in Greek Theatre: A lecture by Frank McGuinness

Safra Lecture Theatre,
Strand Campus,
King's College London

22nd May 2014 at 18:00



Please register at:

frankmcguinness.eventbrite.co.uk

Please direct enquiries to:

chsevents@kcl.ac.uk

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Professor Frank McGuinness, who is convinced of the close connections between Irish and Greek literature, is one of the foremost adaptors of ancient Greek drama for the contemporary stage. His libretto "The Thebans", based on tragedies of Sophocles, for a new opera by Julian Anderson, will receive its premiere at the English National Opera in May 2014.

Writer-in-Residence in the Department of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin, McGuinness was born in County Donegal in 1953. He is the author of over thirty plays, translations and adaptations and screenplays including: *The Factory Girls*, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, *Carthaginians*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

The influence of ancient Greek tragedy on his plays is pervasive; most recently, *The Match Box* (2012) is a heartrending modern transposition of Euripides' *Hecuba* to Liverpool and Ireland. His many translations of Greek tragedy include Sophocles' *Electra* (Chichester Festival Theatre, starring Zoe Wanamaker), Euripides' *Hecuba* (Donmar Warehouse, starring Clare Higgins), Sophocles' *Oedipus* (National Theatre, starring Ralph Fiennes), and Euripides' *Helen* (Shakespeare's Globe, starring Penny Downie).

For more information about this performance, and the history of the annual KCL Greek play please visit:

www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/classics/about/greek

DVD

Soon to be joined by this year's performance, Euripides' *Helen* and *Hecuba*, Aristophanes' *Clouds* and *Frogs* and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* are available to purchase on DVD via Paypal or cheque (UK only).

For further details please contact us at: greekplay@kcl.ac.uk

CREDITS

Michael Silk and Jamie Masters for providing the music for this production

Ioli Andreadi as Advisory director

The KCL Classics office, Alumni Office and student mentors of the Classics department, Prof. Fitzgerald, Prof. Mayer, Prof. Rathbone, Prof. Trapp and Dr Tor, for all of their support during the production of the play

Mixam for their printing services

Everybody at the Greenwood Theatre

Victoria Solomonais and the Greek Embassy

All those who have attended the Greek play this year, in previous productions and we hope that they will continue to attend and enjoy the play in years to come!

Thank you!