

## THOUGHTS ON *LYSISTRATA* IN 2013—

Last fall, when Andrew asked what I was interested in directing this summer, I told him I wanted to do something to address the war in Afghanistan, about which most Americans seem to have an agreed-upon cultural amnesia. Andrew suggested *Lysistrata*. I was intrigued, and one of the first things I read was Brian Jones's superb essay about the play, in which he writes:

“*Lysistrata* was written 21 years into the Peloponnesian War, when the carnage on all sides had become appalling. The play might seem a lighthearted romp, but it was written out of the poet's grief over the thousands of Greeks who had recently lost their lives in the defeat of the Athenian army and fleet at Syracuse.”

I was struck by the fact that the original audiences for this earthy, raunchy comedy were composed of citizens who were living in the midst of a terrible war. I asked myself: what Americans are in this situation, in the actual, physical state of war 24/7, and desperately needing the release of laughter? I remembered interviews I did with veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan two years ago, and the profound sense of grief that was evident in them. However, most of them also had surprising senses of humor, and shared with me stories of pranks, friendships and some of the most disgusting jokes I have ever heard. I also learned that the Army put on a “Soldier Show” every year, created and performed by active service

members. I thought—What if we created a play within a play, set on a working Army base? What if the soldiers put on a Soldier Show, but had decided to do an actual play and that play was *Lysistrata*? When I told one of my now-friends who had served in Iraq the story of *Lysistrata*, his exact words were “That's hilarious, we would eat that sh\*t up.” He also had shared with me that the men and women at his base loved to do karaoke. Given that sections of Greek plays were often sung, we thought it would be fun to pepper the play with songs soldiers would want to sing, and that worked within the telling of the story.

I would be remiss to not talk about *Lysistrata* and gender: we have had a grand old time in the rehearsals getting to make fun of the opposite sex. Parts of the script are directly generated by the cast, with such questions as “What is something men/women do or say to you that drives you insane?” The word-for-word translations of the original *Lysistrata* are absolutely filthy, scathingly critical of politicians, and quite morbid in their humor. There are also terribly sad moments. Ultimately, *Lysistrata* has remained relevant over the years for, yes, its potent criticism of the politics that create and drive wars, but more than that it speaks to our human need to come together and laugh, even in our darkest hours.

—SHEILA DANIELS',  
DIRECTOR

