

**Wilson's School
presents**



**the
Birds** by

**Aristophanes —
in translation**

**December
8 9 10 1977**

THE PLAY

Historical Background

"The Birds" was first performed in Athens in 414BC at the Festival of Dionysus, where the judges awarded it second prize. The Athenians were at this time fighting the Peloponnesian War which was to end with their defeat by the Spartans, and the tribulations of the war were being felt particularly keenly. Aristophanes hated the war and several of his plays illustrate this. In "The Acharnians", the hero concludes a private treaty between himself and Sparta; and in "Lysistrata" the Athenian women decide to refuse to make love with their husbands until peace is established.

In comparison with these plays, the satire in "The Birds" is whimsical. There is hardly a reference to war; instead we have what seems to be an escapist fantasy which many of that first war-weary audience probably enjoyed at face-value. But some may have had time to reflect on the plot: two middle-aged drop-outs, disillusioned with life among their fellow-Athenians, seek a more pleasant life among the birds. To them, the birds' way of life represents a leisure-loving simplicity and symbolises man's yearning to relieve himself of responsibility, to fly away and escape.

However, as soon as one of the two, Pisthetairos, has the idea of founding a city of the birds, he increasingly shows those very Athenian weaknesses that he had previously rejected. He becomes a tyrant, waging war on the gods and dominating a population which gladly submits. This development of Pisthetairos' character is an ironic comment on the most outstanding quality of the Empire-building Athenians: a restless energy which had both created the Athenian civilisation with all its achievements and was also in the very process of destroying that civilisation with internal strife and protracted war.

Moreover, in the conduct of this war, the people whose democratic form of government has been admired ever since behaved in a highly undemocratic way towards their allies and others. Pisthetairos accurately represents this kind of behaviour [in fact, his idea of blockading the gods is presented in the text as "a Melian starvation", referring to the Athenians' recent blockade of the small neutral island of Melos and their massacre of its inhabitants]. The scope of Pisthetairos' ambitions is so vast that we have every reason to suppose that, through him, Aristophanes is making a tongue-in-cheek comment on Athenian imperialism.

This Production

Aristophanes' humour is of many different kinds. Besides his satire, there is his love of word-play and puns (Cloudcuckooland is built on untranslatable puns, most of which we have replaced entirely). He parodies other poets and playwrights; he is shamelessly and uproariously obscene; and he frequently launches attacks on people known to be in the audience..

The task of recreating the impact that the play would have had on its first audience is virtually impossible, so our solution has been to produce the play in

CAST IN ORDER OF SPEAKING AND SQUAWKING

Euelpides	John Nicholson
Pisthetairos	Tim Hudson
Butler-bird	Mike Bickerdike
Hoopoe	Tim Rayment
Chorus-leader	Tim Crowley
Flamingo	Frances Connors
Acolyte	Nick Fairbrother
Priest	Ian Collins
Poet	Nigel Hooton
Prophet	Andrew Friend
Surveyor	Adam Mason
Inspector-General	Dan O'Neill
Solicitor	Mark Chilcott
Messenger	Andrew Friend
Sentry	A Guest Appearance
Iris	Yvonne Scullion
Ambassador	Mark Chilcott
Delinquent	Nick Fairbrother
Singer	Dan O'Neill
Informer	Peter Rees
Prometheus	Tim Rayment
Poseidon	John Macnamara
Hercules	Nigel Hooton
Triballian	Adam Mason
Miss Universe	Yvonne Scullion

Chorus of Birds

Peter Arnold, Ceiridwen Bandres, Barrie Barrett, Alison Bradley, Andrew Clarke, Amanda Fauchaux-Morris, Ian Huckle, Jonathan Issberner, Jonathan Lebihan, Nicholas Losseff, David Nicholson, Nicholas Poulson, Neil Poynter, Jeremy Rayment, Simon Scales, Nicholas Tarn, Bradley Walter.

ACT ONE: A DESOLATE WILDERNESS

Awake from sleep, O my love	Hoopoe
Birds of fellow feather, come!	Hoopoe
Advance the wings and charge the flank!	Chorus
Whereas now you've been downgraded	
(recit)	Pisthetairos
Stranger, forgive us if we cry	Chorus
For birds don't want any shrines (recit.)	Pisthetairos
And now, presuming you concur	Chorus
INTERLUDE: Invocation	Solo
Anthem: O poor mankind	Chorus
So elect us as your gods	Chorus Leader
O woodland muse	Chorus
The birds agree	Chorus Leader
Again we raise	Chorus
HYMN: Praise ye the birds, O mankind	Flamingo & Chorus
	Leader

ACT TWO: CLOUDCUCKOOLAND

Now words are weak	Chorus
The gods' attack	Chorus Leader
Upon thy head, Cloudcuckooland	Chorus
FIRST DISCOURSE: We birds have flown	
all over	Chorus
SECOND DISCOURSE: We saw an	
impoverished nation	Chorus
THIRD DISCOURSE: Beneath the clock	
in a classroom	Chorus Leader
FINALE: Wedding Dance	
Wedding march: To such a	
song as this	Chorus
O lightning flash of livid fire	Chorus
Let us fly!	Chorus

There will be an interval of 20 minutes during which refreshments will be available.

modern dress and use William Arrowsmith's translation, which is lively while remaining remarkably faithful to the original Greek.

However, we have made various amendments to the script. For example, the Athenian obsession with law-suits has become the modern obsession with bureaucracy, and the obscenities have been drastically toned down. But the main casualty has been topical allusion: we have removed nearly all the gibes at fifth-century Athenians as obscure and unfunny (although some are replaced as modern equivalents, e.g. illegal immigrants); and we have completely rewritten the three satirical discourses near the end of the play for the same reason.

Perhaps our most daring experiment lies in the music, so essential to any Greek play. Here the settings are intended to provide the alternations between parody and seriousness which Aristophanes' clever, but often very beautiful lyrics need. However, we do know that the playwright himself was musically conservative. Roll over, Aristophanes . . .

Producers	Mr J.M. Shaw, Mr L. Smith and Mr K. McDermid
Music composed and directed by	Mr J.M. Shaw
with assistance from	Albertson arts Mr C. White
Band	
Guitars	Adrian Robertson and Robin Tate
Bass Guitar	Neville Rose
Piano, Organ, Synthesiser	Colin Butts
Drums	Mark Curtis
Stage Manager	Mr K. McDermid
	assisted by Ian Bailey and Peter Gleaves
Lighting	Mr J. Gibbons
	assisted by Graham Cope and Mark Oglethorpe
Sound	Mr R. Ward
Scenery designed by	Mr J.M. Shaw
built by	Mr G. Parkinson, Mr A. Cunningham
	Mr G. Cope and Mr D. Tribe
Properties	Stephen Cunningham, Peter Lingley and Jeff Brown
Call-boy	Mark Hamilton
Prompter	Alec Mason
Costumes	Judy Lambert, Caledonian Costumes
	Mrs Bailey, Mrs Friend and Mrs Smith
Make-up	Mrs Munden, Mrs Chequers, Mrs Glass
	Mrs Jarman, Mrs Laws, Mr Cave, Mr Hooton, Mr Parkinson
	Simon Furman and Russell Munden
House Managers	Mr J. Rankin and Mr A. Hanscomb
Assistant House Managers	Andrew Galway and Martin Wilks

Our thanks are due to St. Philomena's School for 'birds' of a different feather! We are also grateful to the Wilson's School P.T.A. for the interval refreshments.