

2-24-2003

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Recommended Citation

Lawrence University, "Lawrence University Faculty, Students Join International Reading of “Lysistrata” as Protest to Possible War in Iraq" (2003). *Press Releases*. Paper 219.

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Lawrence University Faculty, Students Join International Reading of “Lysistrata” as Protest to Possible War in Iraq

Posted on: February 24th, 2003 by Rick Peterson

Lawrence University faculty and students will participate in a reading Monday, March 3 of Aristophanes’ ancient Greek anti-war comedy “Lysistrata” as part of a worldwide initiative.

Sponsored by the New York-based Lysistrata Project, Lawrence’s reading is expected to be one of more than 620 readings conducted in all 50 states and 38 countries to voice opposition to the possible war in Iraq. Many of the readings will be used as fund-raisers for charities working for peace and humanitarian aid in the Middle East.

Lawrence’s reading of “Lysistrata,” organized by faculty members of the Gender Studies Program, will be conducted at 2 p.m. in the Science Hall atrium. Other readings are scheduled throughout Wisconsin, including UW-Madison and UW-Steven’s Point.

“Lysistrata” tells the story of women from opposing states that unite to end a war by refusing to sleep with their husbands until the men agree to lay down their swords. Powerless in their society and distraught over too many of their children being slaughtered in battle, the women take the only tactic available to them: they withhold sex.

The project grew out of a concept to provide people from around the world a dramatic means to publicly voice their opposition to military intervention in Iraq and the prospect of massive loss of human life — both Iraqi and American.

In New York on Monday, dozens of teams of actors and directors will read “Lysistrata” in public spaces throughout the day. The

Lysistrata Project will then present an evening all-star performance of the play featuring Mercedes Ruehl reading the title role. Others scheduled to participate include F. Murray Abraham, Kevin Bacon, Peter Boyle, Kathleen Chalfont, Delphi Harrington, Kyra Sedgwick, Lori Singer and David Strathairn.

On the west coast, Julie Christie, Alfre Woodard, Christine Lahti, Mary McDonnell, Barbara Williams, Eric Stoltz, Ed Begley Jr. and Jose Zuniga will appear in a reading at The Los Angeles Filmmaker Cooperative's Powerhouse Cultural Space.

In addition to readings in international cities such as London, Berlin, Paris, Beirut and Jerusalem, groups from nearly every state are hosting events as part of this worldwide theatrical act of dissent. Other activities associated with the grassroots project include:

- College students in Texas will hold Lysistrata-reading marathons on a conservative campus;
- Midwestern homemakers will conduct readings with their book clubs;
- Teachers will use the study guide from the Lysistrata Project's web site in their classes;
- A man in Beirut will put on his own adaptation of the play that incorporates Arabic and English anti-war poetry;
- A woman in California will stage her reading with the patients and staff in the hospital where her partner is undergoing cancer treatment.

The Lysistrata Project was conceived in early January of this year, by New York actors Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bower.

“Before we started Lysistrata Project, we could do nothing but sit and watch in horror as the Bush Administration drove us toward a unilateral attack on Iraq,” said Blume. “So we emailed all our friends and put up a web site. The response has been enormous. Our purpose is to make it very clear that President Bush does not speak for all Americans. Our message is simple: If you oppose this war, then speak up!”

Co-founder Bower adds, “Many people have emailed us to say how distraught they feel about the war. Now they feel empowered to do something and foster dialogue in their own communities.