



The Birds is a hoot
from the past

Description

Dramatis Personae presents an ancient yet timely Greek comedy

By **Byron Toben**

Two thousand four hundred and thirty one years ago, **Aristophanes** wrote (presumably with a bird quill) the riotous comedy, **The Birds**. Last weekend, it was brought to life again by Westmount's community theatre, **Dramatis Personae**, in a translation by **Peter Meineck**.

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Aristophanes was one of the four greatest ancient Greek playwrights. Unlike the other three – Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles – who ranted and cried about the inevitable injustice of the Gods, Aristophanes was a funny guy. I have long felt he was the literary ancestor of Shaw or Wilde so I was pleased to see that Meineck has added such current political satirists as Doonesbury and Monty Python to the list.



Here,

nine talented but non-professional actors undertook 23 roles, not even counting the recurring chorus. Two Athenians, Makenmeda (**Clive Brewer**) and Goodhope (**Jenny Chopra**), fed up with life in crowded, bureaucratic and Hippocratic Athens, wander to the distant mountains to join the free flying birds among the clouds.

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The leader of the birds is Hoopoe (**Bill Gilsdorf**) who helps

the initially suspicious bird public to allow the two humans to join them. Part of the successful pitch is to establish a *Cloud Cuckoo Land* between Earth and Heaven so ascending souls would have to pay tribute to get to the higher plane.

Practical construction problems intervene, creating multiple roles for the troupe's regulars:

Ellen Rubin plays a prophet and two Goddesses;
Ann Elbourne, a priest and a poet;
Fanny Dvorkin, a mathematician and Heracles;
Malcolm McRae, an inspector and Poseidon;
Karen Sauder, a lawyer;
and **Carly Terreault** as a foreign god named Jerkoffalot.

'... nine talented but non-professional actors undertook 23 roles, not even counting the recurring chorus.'



Aristophanes is quite risqué... witness the giant penises in

Lysistrata and the play on words of his bird's 'peckers', here watered down in director **Chris Moore's** well paced family production.

Anyway, "All ends well" as in Shakespeare a millennia later, with a wedding between Makemedo (now finally a 'birdman' long before the Oscar winner) and a Divine Princess.

Lots of clever bird masks and hand puppets were used, but none were abused in staging this show.

The Birds ended its normal 4-show run on May 29.

See theatrewestmount.com for more information.

Images: Michel Degré

Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.

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Date Created

May 2017