

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer



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## 'Birdonia' never gets off the ground

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NEW YORK -- In his latest Pick Up Performance Company production, David Gordon reconstructs and deconstructs an ancient Greek comedy in which two men attempt to escape corrupt Athens for a utopia among the birds, midway between heaven and Earth.

But Gordon's usually sure touch in splicing dizzying language with everyday movement fails him in this heavy-handed satire of contemporary American politics and culture, and "Aristophanes in Birdonia," now running at Danspace Project in St. Mark's Church, never really gets off the ground.

There are moments of pure poetry, such as when the chorus of birds, their arms decorated in plaid "feathers," first learns of the outsiders' intention. The four dancers scatter to the perimeter of the stage, alighting on Gordon's ever-present folding metal chairs in a wonderful evocation of the flight of birds into trees. Karen Graham is particularly adept as the startled, birdbrained Ver-wren-ica, leader of the Greek Bird Chorus.

But such visual treats are all too few in what is essentially a series of speeches - with plenty of riffs, interruptions and asides - set to utilitarian movement. Chief among the speechifiers is Valda Setterfield, Gordon's wife and creative partner, who functions as narrator in the weary and wry guise of Aristophanes. It's not enough that the director resurrects a 4th century B.C. play, Setterfield quips, but Gordon must use the playwright's "finger to do the pointing."

This pointing is generally aimed at all things related to the Bush administration, as well our media- and celebrity-saturated consumeristic society. Because Danspace is in the East Village, the chorus is most likely preaching to the choir, but whether one agrees with the critique or not, it feels rather old-hat in 2006. Gordon's simplistic barbs and silly puns do little to advance the debate. Nor, sadly, do they amuse.