

**C. W. MARSHALL**

**Walter Leigh's Music for *The Frogs of Aristophanes***

The tradition of the Cambridge Greek Play began as a triennial performance in 1882 and has included many of the most important performances of ancient drama in the original language that have taken place in modern times. In this paper, I propose to discuss some aspects of the music of the 1936 production, *The Frogs of Aristophanes*. The music was by Walter Leigh (1905-42; he was killed in war action in Libya), a young composer who wrote classical music, including a sonatina for viol and piano (International Music Festival, Vienna, 1932; Leigh had studied under Paul Hindemith), as well as more modern forms including some jazz and comic opera. His diversity of interest and musical range in many ways made him the ideal composer for *Frogs*, which of course concerns matters of 'high' and 'low' art in fifth-century Athens, as well as the correspondence of these terms in the play with 'old-fashioned' and 'newfangled'. Leigh's music engages with Aristophanes' text in a number of sophisticated ways for 1930s Britain, and these techniques offer a new understanding of how verbal humor can be reinforced through music. This dimension is often lost in discussions of Aristophanes today, but it must always be remembered how much of an Attic comic performance was musical. By examining how humor was created in the 1936 performance (and in the 1947 revival), with particular emphasis on the literary/musical contest between Aeschylus and Euripides, it becomes possible to open avenues of interpretation of the Greek that have been missed by the commentators (Stanford, Dover, Sommerstein). Multiple reviews exist and it is also possible to document a number of aspects unique to the first performance of the work in 1936.

By dealing with a performance of an ancient text in the original language, this paper also raises a set of larger questions for the panel, concerning the nature of 'adaptation,' 'translation,' and what constitutes a 'modern version.' For example, by setting Aeschylus' pastiche of Euripidean monody (lines 1309-22) as a Blues torch song—an idea I believe is inspired by the song's final line, *periball' ô teknon ôlenas*, 'Throw your arms around me, baby'—Leigh effectively re-contextualizes any associations the audience may have had with the passage previously, creating it anew, and (more importantly) creating it as a piece of modern musical comedy.

This paper will include musical excerpts, from a recording of Leigh's music I have conducted (I know of no commercial recording of this work). The paper draws on the resources of the Cambridge University Library's Greek Play Committee Papers.