

Peninsula Players finishes season with light satire

By Jodie Jacobs <http://chicagotheaterandarts.com/category/theater/>

FISH CREEK, Wis. 3 Stars

Certainly while in NYC it's great to fit in a Broadway production but it can also be interesting, fun and rewarding to see a show while vacationing in other destination towns. In August, I visited Spring Green, WI to see "Book of Will" by the fine contemporary playwright, Lauren Gunderson as performed by American Players Theatre.

Then, while visiting Door County, WI, this past weekend, I went to Peninsula Players, a longtime, professional resident theater, to see "George Washington's Teeth," a new comedy by Mark St. Germain who typically chooses historic subjects.

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Although not in the same excellent-play category as Peninsula Players' August offering of "Silent Sky," a serious, "Hidden Figures" type of revealing-history play by Gunderson, or the fascinating "Freud's Last Session" by Germain, "George Washington's Teeth" worked on a couple of levels – humorous and satirical.

It's a hilarious spoof about how self-importantly historical societies and town's founding residents take themselves and the falsehoods that are sometimes believed and promoted.

Because the New Bunion Historical Society's museum is in financial trouble, it needs an item or couple of exhibits to draw attendance or for use in a tour.

Thus, the desire to obtain a set of G. W's teeth supposedly owned by a resident. BTW George Washington's false teeth are a reality. He did have at least four sets of dentures, none of wood as some rumors said, but of ivory, other materials and human teeth.

Directed by Greg Vinkler and performed by equity actors who have often been seen in top Chicago area venues, the action includes Pythonesque absurdities such as historical society member, Edie, delightfully interpreted by the talented Penny Slusher, dressing as the Liberty Bell so she could help hold off the "British" during a re-enactment of the American Revolution's non-existent, Battle of New Bunion.

Other absurdities include such museum treasures as a giant hairball and the actions of the museum's newest member, Jess (Emma Rosenthal), a young kleptomaniac who sees the society as a way to do community service according to her probation terms.

Chicago stage veteran Ora Jones plays the serious Louisa, a black resident who not only has the famed teeth, but also corrects the starchy historical society president, Hester Bunion (Carmen Roman), on several points.

Rounding out the cast is Katherine Keberlein as Ann, a trophy wife who used to be an art restorer and ends up helping Louisa with an exhibit supposedly going to the Smithsonian along with the teeth.

The stage is set with a perfect re-creation of a historical museum room by J Branson and believable and comic costuming by Kyle Pingel. Nice contemporary touches include asking Siri for certain music and information.

About the venue, at age 84, Peninsula Players is the country's oldest professional summer resident theater. The campus spreads across 16 acres along Green Bay in Wisconsin's Door County.

DETAILS: "George Washington's Teeth" is at Peninsula Players, 4351 Peninsula Players Rd., Fish Creek, WI, through Oct. 20, 2019. Running time: 80 minutes. For tickets and other information call (920) 868-3287 or visit Peninsula Players.



Photo Credit: Carmen Roman, Ora Jones, Katherine Keberlein, Penny Slusher and Emma Rosenthal.
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