



Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

“Miss Holmes” (Peninsula Players Theatre)

Door County theaters add stories and sparkle to summer nights

Mike Fischer, Special to the Journal Sentinel Published 7:30 a.m. CT July 11, 2018

What if Sherlock Holmes had been a woman, with all the additional challenges that would pose for a Victorian? Christopher M. Walsh’s “Miss Holmes” goes there, in a smart and fun play that’s now on stage at Peninsula Players Theatre in Fish Creek, under Elizabeth Margolius’ direction.

Played with verve by Cassandra Bissell – excellent as the lead in the recent Renaissance Theaterworks production of “Top Girls” – this Sherlock is as fiercely bright as her renowned male counterpart.

But this Sherlock has also been periodically confined to an asylum by her own brother (Sean Fortunato) – reflecting how readily intelligent women then and now are marginalized as mad hysterics.

And also routinely underestimated.

Sherlock sidekick Dorothy Watson (Maggie Kettering) must continually remind the men surrounding her – including a well-intentioned if haplessly conventional suitor (Dan Klarer) – that she’s a doctor with a career. As a wife, Lizzie Chapman (Erica Elam) is much more than the sweet angel in the house that she initially seems.

In Walsh’s play, women like Lizzie aren’t just underestimated. They’re also apt to be murdered. Lizzie herself is third wife to a creepy Scotland Yard detective (Karl Hamilton) whose first two wives died under mysterious circumstances.



Maggie Kettering and Cassandra Bissell perform in "Miss Holmes," staged by Peninsula Players in Door County. (Photo: Len Villano). Related: 'Top Girls' keep others down in excellent Renaissance production.

Continued ...



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The game's afoot as Sherlock tries to discover why, in a fast-moving plot involving rapid-fire dialogue between Bissell and Kettering as well as quick, adeptly handled transitions on Jack Magaw's set.

That set is dominated by an upstage wall of painted glass with revolving panels, lighted by Jason Fassl in lurid and shifting colors suggesting a phantasmagorical Turner seascape. Shadows loom large and danger lurks behind those walls, true to a London in which characters feel alone and lost – and in which no one is quite who they seem to be on the surface.



Peninsula Players perform "Miss Holmes" in Door County.
(Photo: Len Villano)

Those psychological mysteries are always larger than material clues in the best Holmes stories, among which I'll count this one. Its gender-bending focus on Victorians' fear of, fascination with and violence toward women introduces a mystery that this Sherlock both embodies and intrepidly works to solve, proving anew that you can't keep a good woman down.

“Miss Holmes” continues through July 22 at Peninsula Players Theatre in Fish Creek.

Program Notes:

Multiple Selves: Excepting Bissell and Kettering as Holmes and Watson, every actor in “Miss Holmes” plays multiple characters – true to a psychologically repressed and deeply hypocritical Victorian world in which every individual inhabits multiple selves. It's Oscar Wilde, on steroids.

Dandy Costuming: Speaking of Wilde, such multiplicity extends to Rachel Lambert's outstanding costume design, through which characters express a great deal that they can't say. It's vibrantly colored; for the leads, it's also androgynous, smudging gender-based distinctions in much the same way as this play's title, premise and plot consistently do.