

# Warren Gerds/Critic at Large: Review: A New Sherlock Is Afoot in a Door County, My Dear Watson Peninsula Players Theatre's 'Miss Holmes'

By: [Warren Gerds](#)

Posted: Jul 05, 2018 08:02 AM CDT / Updated: Jul 05, 2018 08:02 AM CDT



Cassandra Bissel, left, stars as Sherlock Holmes, and Maggie Kettering stars as Dr. Watson in Peninsula Players Theatre production of "Miss Holmes." (Peninsula Players Theatre image) FISH CREEK, Wis. (WFRV) - Say "Sherlock Holmes," and what springs to mind? Male. Smart. Mannered. Alert. Shrewd. Decisive. Quick-witted. Natty.

And what about "Dr. Watson"? Male and all of the above, but a step or two down or behind. Plus affable.

Playwright Christopher M. Walsh takes such basics from Arthur Conan Doyle and molds a new Sherlock and Watson, starting with gender. The result is the ingenious murder mystery play "Miss Holmes," running through July 22 at the professional Peninsula Players Theatre.

Bare bones: Walsh has come up with a take on Sherlock Holmes that feels new yet familiar at the same time.

Characters from Sherlock and Watson's life are part this story. Also present is the London fog, though somewhat problematic to re-create. The Victorian era of the late 1800s is present in look and cultural tone. A dawning age of expanding roles for women in society is present – though not just an asterisk in this play's reason to be.

The main raison d'être is a crime to solve. That arrives when a woman makes her way to 221b Baker St. to ask Sherlock Holmes' help in getting behind a series of warning letters she has received. A murderous trail unfolds.

The audience already knows Sherlock is a bit wacky. She has been manipulated by her brother, Mycroft. Dr. Watson has been inveigled into Sherlock's path. Both being sharp-minded women, Sherlock and Dr. Watson hit it off as a detective duo on their first case together.

Cassandra Bissel and Maggie Kettering deliver a whole lot of zing as Sherlock and Dr. Watson.

Bissell has a steely way about her acting. There is a bit of barbed wire about her Sherlock, too. Bissell delivers Sherlock's whip-smart lines at speed. Imagine a kettle of water boiling angrily. Bissell's Sherlock has an impressive aura couched in an abrasive edge. Smartness to an off-putting level is natural to this Sherlock.

Kettering's Dr. Watson is the more human of the two. Kettering's Dr. Watson also is miles away from the male version imprinted on us from the Basil Rathbone-Nigel Bruce movies. This Dr. Watson is not a bumbler. She may not deduce as swiftly as Sherlock, but she is more than a quaint sidekick. And in much of Act II, it's Kettering/Dr. Watson who owns the stage.

This and that:

+ The one-piece set is two stories of steel-framed faux windows. Different areas represent different places, by way of a few props, some lighting effects and a lot of audience imagination. Metal staircases lead to rooms of such places as Sherlock's apartment, the murderer's home and the home of the mother of a victim. Cleverly, the orchestra pit becomes the stairway leading to and from the entrance to 221 Baker St.

+ For the opening, mood music plays as a shady character drifts across the stage in what is to be a foggy London town. Nothing happens, it seems. The guy is just there as the haunty music takes hold. But something does happen. The buzz of the settling-in audience wanes. An aura takes over. The play owns the house. Then, after necessary housekeeping announcements, attention zeros in on Inspector Lestrade (Tim Monsion) and smarmy Inspector Chapman (Karl Hamilton). Soon, Mycroft Holmes (Sean Fortunato) is coyly engineering Sherlock's future.

+ Except for Bissell and Kettering, the players play multiple roles (and exercise different acting muscles). Erica Elam importantly is the wife of Inspector Chapman, Neil Brookshire the sketchy Edwin Greener, Barbara Robertson the fragile mother of a victim and Dan Klarer the "almost nine"-year wannabe amore of Dr. Watson.

+ Humor slips in in a few ways. Dr. Watson suckers her amore, Dr. Stamford (Klarer) to make believe he is an esteemed German brain researcher with an attitude; suddenly, there's a scene with German-speak gushing as a ploy. Flash-humor whooshes in the way the gale of Sherlock's personality sweeps Dr. Watson along like a leaf caught in the wind.

+ Director Elizabeth Margolius and the cast make a lot of hay with the times-have-changed-for-women aura of this play. Certain lines cause rustles. One: "I understand how hard it can be for a woman in your position." That is delivered with errant well meaning. Another set: Dr. Watson, after Dr. Stamford tries to propose again to her and offers a life away from her fulfilling hospital career: "What would I do?" Stamford: "Run the house" – and that's it.

+ Costuming suits the era (and the shoes are eye-catching). The main costume of Bissel is a visual expression of Sherlock's commanding character. One impression is the costume is a variation of a British military officer's uniform that includes pants, a vest and a cut of coat with a frontal flair and sweeping long tails. As it speaks, it says Sherlock is distinctive and different among women.

+ As is typical of a Sherlock Holmes story, "Miss Holmes" suggests that there – real or not – a sequel is out there someplace.

\*\*\*

**Creative:** Playwright – Christopher M. Walsh, based on characters of Arthur Conan Doyle; director – Elizabeth Margolius; costume designer – Rachel Lambert; scenic designer – Jack Magaw; lighting designer – Jason Fassl; properties designer – Amanda Hermann; sound designer – Christopher Kriz; scenic artist – Eileen Rozycki; stage manager – Richelle Harrington Calin; production manager – Cody Westgaard; fight designer – Dan Klarer; managing director – Brian Kelsey; artistic director – Greg Vinkler

**Cast** (order of appearance): Lizzie Chapman/Peggy/Martha – Erica Elam; Thomas Chapman/Orderly – Karl Hamilton; Mycroft Holmes/Vagrant; Superintendent/Edwin Greener – Neil Brookshire; Gregory Lestrade/Orderly – Tim Monsion; Sherlock Holmes – Cassandra Bissell; Dorothy Watson – Maggie Kettering; Anderson/Mrs. Hudson/Eudora – Barbara Robertson

**Running time:** Two hours, 23 minutes

**Remaining performances:** To July 22 – 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; 7:30 p.m. Sundays, except 4 p.m. July 22

**Info:** [peninsulaplayers.com](http://peninsulaplayers.com)

\*\*\*

**NEXT:** “The Drowsy Chaperone,” a musical, July 25-Aug. 12.

**THE VENUE:** The location of Peninsula Players Theatre’s Theatre in a Garden is about atmosphere – tall cedars and pines and shoreline vistas along the bay of Green Bay. Flowers and other decorative foliage grace footpaths that weave through the grounds, which have been extended to the south. Driving along Peninsula Players Road and passing farms and trees, the thought may occur: “This theater is in an unusual place.” The 621-seat theater house features Door County limestone in its interior décor. When the weather is friendly, the wooden slats of the side walls are rolled open to the outside. For cool fall nights, the theater floor is equipped with radiant heating for comfort. While the company dates back 83 years, the theater building is of 2006 vintage. The playhouse and theater were built on the site of the previous structure, which got wobbly with age. The location on the shores of Green Bay provides playgoers with pre-show picnicking and viewing the sunset. Here’s a theatrical rarity: The Players’ website provides sunset times. *Contact me at [warren.gerds@wearegreenbay.com](mailto:warren.gerds@wearegreenbay.com). Watch for my on-air Critic at Large editions on WFRV-TV at 6:20 a.m. Sundays.*