



From left, Tom Mula, Maggie Carney, Steve Koehler, Katherine Keberlein, Matt Holzfeind, Katherine Duffy and Penny Slusher in Peninsula Players' production of Agatha Christie's "The Hollow" on stage through July 24.

## Agatha Christie magic works at Players

FISH CREEK, Wis.

Say "Agatha Christie," and a lot of people pay attention. Attention was paid especially keenly Wednesday night by a near full house as Peninsula Players Theatre opened a run of Agatha Christie's "The Hollow." What happened was interesting to experience.

Sitting in an audience that is gone – totally involved, with it, enraptured, silent, hanging on every word – has a sanctity to it.

This is a day of sound bites, multitasking, waves of input from texts and voicemails, a ping of an email at any moment and a taxing of the ol' noggin all the time.

An Agatha Christie play slows that all down.

The tasks boil down to one: Solve who murdered a jerk

*See back for more ...*

**Creative:** Playwright – Agatha Christie; director – Joe Foust; scenic designer – Sarah E. Ross; costume designer – Rachel Lambert; lighting designer – Emil Boulos; sound designer – Rick Sims; properties designer – Amanda Herrmann; wig master – Kyle Pingel; stage manager – Richelle Harrington Calin; production manager – Laura Eilers; scenic artist – April Beiswenger

**Cast:** Henrietta Angkatell – Erica Elam; Sir Henry Angkatell – Tom Mula; Lady Angkatell – Penny Slusher; Midge Harvey – Katherine Duffy; Gudgeon, the butler – Mark Moede; Edward Angkatell – Matt Holzfeind; Doris, the maid – Ashley Lanyon; Gerda Cristow – Maggie Carney; John Cristow, M.D. – Steve Koehler; Veronica Cray – Katherine Keberlein; Inspector Colquhoun – James Leaming; Detective Sergeant Penny – Joe Foust

**Running time:** Two hours, (3)50 minutes

**Remaining performances:** Through July 24: 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. July 10 and 17, 4 p.m. July 24

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

of a guy right in front of us. We all heard the fatal shot that came from out of view and saw the guy stumble toward us and fall to the floor with blood on the front of his shirt. We all saw everybody who possibly wanted him dead show up to look upon him as he struggled before raising his head and saying in his last breath, “Henrietta.” Whodunit?

By gosh and by golly, we’re going to sit and watch and listen so this thing gets solved.

And so it was Wednesday, sitting in a rapt audience.

The professional Peninsula Players Theatre sets everything up grandly in look, and the actors climb into their roles and British accents to complete the illusion to make Agatha Christie’s “The Hollow” a worthy investment of almost three hours of escape.

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The set by Sarah E. Ross is a major selling point for the audience to buy into the production. The set is massive – shoulder to shoulder of the stage and up 2½ stories – representing a great big great room of an English manor that says: Money, well established. Active. Refined. Accustomed to the best. Well read. Artistically inclined. Appreciative of vistas. Inviting. Elements include walls filled with paintings of landscapes and portraits, book shelves that include some two stories high, a chandelier, two-story draperies on expansive windows, a fireplace, wall sconces, a patio outside with a wall, with the room further filled with a sofa, two soft chairs, a writing desk, table lamps and a serving desk. The place looks exactly like... an English manor where Agatha Christie would set a story with foible-filled characters and an opportunity to kill, a place like this, called The Hollow.

In pacing, Agatha Christie’s thoroughbreds finish last in a steeplechase. Like other Christie plays, “The Hollow” is about first carefully putting all the necessities on the horse – the saddle and blanket, the bit, the stirrups – and then taking it out for a trot. There’s no mad gallop to the finish.

The story of “The Hollow” finds brash and nattily dressed medical doctor John Cristow (Steve Koehler) with a wife, Gerda (Maggie Carney); a mistress, Henrietta (Erica Elam); and a former lover, movie star Veronica (Katherine Keberlein). Put the four together during what’s supposed to be a relaxing weekend getaway in a posh place, and things are bound to happen. The lady of the house, Lady Angkatell (Penny Slusher), is dotty, and her husband, Sir Henry (Tom Mula), finds pleasure in guns. Other visitors are an heir with a wannabe-respected load to bear, Edward (Matt Holzfeind), and a yearning young woman, Midge (Katherine Duffy). Mark Moede is the precise butler, and Ashley Lanyon plays the maid – with both figuring in what becomes a mess. The cleanup guys, the keen-minded police inspector and his colleague, are played by James Leaming and Joe Foust.

Performances are smooth. They have a rhythm. Wireless headsets on the actors help with the hearing as they move around the spacious set.

Side note that’s neither here nor there: Many of the characters smoke, or create an illusion of doing so. It was the thing to do, once upon a time. The smoking doesn’t factor into the story except that it establishes a time well past.

While Wednesday’s audience was extremely quiet for the most part, there were eruptions. In one case, a simple line – “A dozen box of matches” – produced a gale of laughter. That was delivered by Slusher, whose character is comic relief amid a thicket of romantic entanglements, fading upper-crust glory and investigation of a murder.

The name “Agatha Christie” brings an expectation. The story and the Players deliver.

You may email me at [warren.gerds@wearegreenbay.com](mailto:warren.gerds@wearegreenbay.com). Watch for my on-air Critic at Large editions on WFRV between 6 and 7:30 a.m. Sundays.

**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. 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 81 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.