



Review: Fortunato hilarious in Players' 'The Nerd'

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When I previewed the Peninsula Players 2012 season with artistic director Greg Vinkler, he noted that their first two shows, “Opus” (about the relationships between members of a string quartet) and “The Nerd,” are in completely different worlds. From my perspective they strike me as being at opposite ends of the universe.

“The Nerd,” written by the late Milwaukee native Larry Shue, tells the story of a veteran of the Vietnam War, Willum Cubbert (Paul Slade Smith), who has become a successful architect. He and his girlfriend, Tansy McGinnis (Erin Noel Grennan), live in Terre Haute, Ind. We find out early in the play that Tansy is an aspiring weather reporter and is about to abandon him to accept a job in Washington, D.C. Obviously, Willum would like her to stay but she sees the job as an opportunity of a lifetime.

We also quickly learn that when in the war, Willum’s life was saved by a fellow soldier, Rick Steadman. Rick dragged him 1½ miles through a jungle after being shot. Because Willum was in shock, he had no idea who Rick was. They wound up in different places and Willum was not sure how to contact him. Rick became an enigma.

Suddenly and without warning, Rick (Sean Fortunato) shows up at Willum’s apartment. At first Willum is thrilled that he finally gets to meet the man who saved him, but the nightmare quickly unfolds. It turns that Rick is more than a nerd — he’s obnoxious, offensive, inappropriate, insensitive to others and unaware of how his actions affect other people. As they say, Rick is a real piece of work, and he gradually causes Willum’s life to fall apart.

A Players newcomer, Smith just came off a long run with a touring company from the wonderful musical “Wicked.” He plays Willum with humor and sensitivity. I also enjoyed Erin Noel Grennan, who plays Tansy.

The players are rounded off with Tim Monsion, Lee Ernst and Karen Janes Woditsch. Sevastopol seventh-grader Bennett Rabach works well with his fellow actors.

I saved the best for last. Fortunato’s over-the-top performance as Rick is fun and hilarious. His physical and verbal mannerisms are just what Shue must have expected. Fortunato keeps the audience laughing.

“The Nerd” is one of the funnier shows the Players have offered.

“The Nerd” runs through July 22 at Peninsula Players Theatre, 4351 Peninsula Players Road, west of Wisconsin 42, Fish Creek. Curtain times are at 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 7:30 p.m. Sundays, except for matinees Wednesday and July 22. Individual ticket prices are \$33 to \$39; group rates and season tickets are available. For tickets or more information, call (920) 868-3287 or visit www.peninsulaplayers.com.

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