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PLAYERS' 'NERD' GOES FOR CARTOON-LIKE COMEDY

By Warren Gerds

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FISH CREEK — Some plays are like cartoons animated, over the top, comical. "The Nerd" qualifies in a frothy Peninsula Players Theatre production that continues to July 22.

The sitcom-style show by Larry Shue paints its main character into a corner. The audience watches his futile attempts to tip toe to freedom without making a mess. Good luck when a nerd is involved.

The nerd in this case is a chalk inspector who turns up at the doorstep of an Army buddy whose life he saved in Vietnam. The buddy swore eternal do-

anything-for-you gratitude, and now frustrated architect Willum Cubbert (Paul Slade Smith) tries to make good on his promise to nerdy Rick Steadman (Sean Fortunato) no matter what the cost.

The cost is a perpetual visitor who lacks social graces and possesses abundant weirdness. No matter what Willum does or says, Rick responds with a bizarre comment or act. The topper is Rick ruins a final rendering of a building by adding a chimney and a hole through which cigarette smoke is blown for effect.

It's interesting to watch director Linda Fortunato and the Players pros work this

material. You know it's ridiculous, that it's beyond-belief fun. But, 31 years after "The Nerd" saw light, society says be careful what we say and do in the presence of a Rick Steadman because his behavior has reasons. There's a layer of unfunny with Rick Steadman today, even though we know "The Nerd" is just a play.

At any rate, Fortunato and Smith pour high-energy actions and reactions into their roles. The rest of the cast feeds on mad-cap situations — Tim Monsion as Willum's droll theater critic friend, Erin Noel Grennan as Willum's grounded girlfriend and the oddball family of Willum's dragon of

PLAY REVIEW

Peninsula Players Theatre: "The Nerd": Through July 22: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m. July 15, 4 p.m. July 22 at Theatre-in-a-Garden, three miles south of Fish Creek. \$33-\$39. (920) 868-3287 ★★★ (out of 4)

a client — Lee E. Ernst as the voluble father, Karen Janes Woditsch as the mother with pent-up psychoses and Bennett Rabach (a seventh-grader at Sevastopol Middle School) as the true brat son.

The set by Sarah E. Ross is fitting of an architect's house, with a tip of the hat to Wisconsin great Frank Lloyd Wright.

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Sean Fortunato, front, and Paul Slade Smith are featured in Peninsula Players Theatre's production of "The Nerd."

SUBMITTED