

weekend stage right

Players' 'Opus' opens season on strong note

By Warren Gerds
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FISH CREEK — Sophisticated, erudite, searching, artistic and a bit earthy, the classical music-minded and engaging "Opus" suits Peninsula Players Theatre's audience.

Michael Hollinger's dramatic comedy opens the company's 77th season with a statement. The troupe doesn't have to prove anything or say anything at this point, but the production proves its professionalism and speaks of its passions.

What better way than through the inner workings of a classical music quartet that's good enough to catch the attention of the White House and good enough beyond that to want to

PLAY REVIEW

Peninsula Players Theatre: "Opus": Through June 24: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m. June 17, 4 p.m. June 24 at Theatre-in-a-Garden, three miles south of Fish Creek. \$33-\$39. (920) 868-3287. ★★★★★

put forth its most-demanding piece in front of a national TV audience of 15 million?

You know this is fiction. When was the last time you saw a string quartet play live on network TV? But it's a grand illusion with musical and theatrical delights.

The music is recorded, with the actors playing "air violin" and such effectively enough. The theatricality is theatrically real, performed by a winning cast that

explores five richly defined characters.

Greg Vinkler and Tom Mula are outstanding as lovers Dorian (viola) and Elliot (first violin). Their performances are as nuanced as the music.

Also strong with notable reputations that precede them are Cassandra Bissell as determined newcomer Grace (viola), Lee E. Ernst as romantic Alan (second violin) and Tim Monsion as Carl (cello), who is not one to suffer fools gladly amid his medical challenges.

Brendon Fox is director. He's new to the Players but not to theater nor this play. The fullness of the performances speak to his skills.

In one scene, Hollinger offers the actors a plum opportunity: Describe a person as would

the personalities of five individual instruments. It's funny and amazing.

The production includes a visual effect that puts the acoustic-tile scenic design of Jack Magaw and lighting effects of designer Steven Roy White into play. The scene is an expression of success at the White House performance.

The story explores brilliance. Dorian is scary gifted. He's also destructive. Likewise, the quartet is brilliant, gifted and destructive.

This is fascinating stuff for an audience interested in being taken inside an ensemble that puts together fine music with not-so-finely-tuned personalities.

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Cassandra Bissell and Greg Vinkler perform in Peninsula Players Theatre's first show of the season, "Opus."

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