

DIAL M FOR MURDER Rings Up Classic Suspense at Peninsula Players



From left: Jay Whittaker, Tim Monsion, Katherine Keberlein, Matt Holzfeind in Peninsula Players' *Dial M for Murder*.

Ever wondered what was going to happen when the phone's ring wakes someone from a drowsy sleep? While technology may have changed since the 1950's, the premise and fear of the unknown ring-ring and who might be calling remains equally fascinating. After sipping a drink under the stars before the performance at Peninsula Players Theatre (PPT) and silencing those cell phones, eagerly enjoy their thriller on stage this July written by Britain's Frederick Knott, his iconic *Dial M for Murder*.

A play set in London during the 1950's, the psychological murder mystery entered movie fame when legendary Alfred Hitchcock directed Grace Kelly and Ray Milland and became a cult film for Hitchcock aficionados. PPT lives up the play's illustrious pedigree with exquisite sets designed by Sarah E. Ross, costumes designed by Kärin Simonson Kopischke, and an experienced cast directed by Joe Foust to be equally enthralled.

For theatergoers unfamiliar with the classic film or play, *Dial M for Murder* centers around Margot and Tony Wendice--a wealthy socialite and a former Wimbledon tennis professional who married Margot for

her money. When Tony discovers Margot might leave him poorer for the devoted attention of American mystery writer Max Halliday, Tony invents what he considers the perfect murder to collect his wife's inheritance. However, as Max claims, "In murder stories, the crime always turns out as the author plans, in real life, they never do."

This premise sets up an slightly inverted mystery story where the audience knows the crime and murderer before the characters do --where the prim British detective who solves crime with astute attention to detail pre-dates America's popular detective, Columbo, which played to television audiences from 1968-2003 and actor Peter Falk immortalized. In *Dial M for Murder*, a buttoned up Inspector Hubbard unravels Tony Wendice's plot after Margot's fate has been decided. The handsome writer Max, who Margot had a brief tryst with, helps the story along in an interesting love triangle setting the murder in motion.

Actors Katherine Keberlein, the favored blonde women Hitchcock idealized in his films, and athletic Jay Whittaker keep the audience guessing where Margot and Tony's true loyalties lie. Their elegant London apartment filled with mid-20th century chic furniture decorated in gold brocade wallpaper accented by blood red walls creates an ambiance for murder. Matt Holzfeind offers Margot a comforting shoulder in the role of Max, while also repressing his passionate feelings for her under his proverbial collar.

Neil Friedman's Captain Lesgate plays his character close to the vest, hiding his real motives, while Tim Monsion's Inspector Hubbard steals the second act with his stiff upper lip intelligence that indubitably plays to these partners in crime. Carefully unraveling Tony's plans before his eyes provides the suspense in how the criminal will be undone rather than who actually committed the murder--which revisits the pure pleasure in watching Colombo unseat the perfect crime for someone who believed they were the perfect criminal, unable to be punished and too faultless for any proper law. Monsion's Hubbard becomes critical to the audience's intense attention to the play in the second act, and PPT's production provides equal suspense and chills up until the last scene.

As illustrated in the play, often life's momentum rests on a few choice circumstances which *Dial M for Murder* proves with certainty---the unexpected waits behind every corner each day. While the consequences might be less tragic than for Margot, Tony and Lesgate, the tiniest of actions or decisions can transform a life. To confirm this presupposition, spend an engaging evening reveling in the beauty of Fish Creek's shorelines, and then celebrate Peninsula Players 80th summer season enticed by the thrill of the criminal chase.

Peninsula Players Theatre presents Dial M for Murder in Fish Creek on Peninsula Players Road through July 26 under the Artistic Direction of Greg Vinkler and Managing Director Brian Kelsey. Their next production, Lend Me A Tenor opens July 29.

For information, special programming or tickets, please call 920.866.3287 or visit www.peninsulaplayers.com