THEATER REVIEW

Lack of harmony plays quite well in fine ‘Opus’

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

Minor chords meet major disord in ‘Opus,’ a play that starts with a static chamber piece and concludes like a Who concert.

No reason that classical music shouldn’t also get to act like human beings, but it’s still a guilty little thrill to watch those exemplars of high culture sqlite, subsume and generally act as petty as the rest of us.

Somewhere atop all the hide-and-clog, they manage to make some sweet music, and so does the Globe with this smart, twirling and (here come the pun) expertly tuned production of Michael Hollinger’s play about a string quartet coming unsprung.

Kyle Dunn is directed by an excellent quartet of actors who somehow did not get around to becoming instrumental virtuosos in rehearsals. (Blacksmirch.)

Instead, the actors pretend to play their instruments, as they audience hears recorded passages by a professional quartet.

While this might seem a major obstacle to authenticity for a show so immersed in music, the five minutes in a precise but gently stylized way that don’t all come off as cliche.

It also helps that even in success without music, the cast performs together like its own human fugue, with moments of harmony and sharp counterpoint and a chance for each character to be heard.

If the performers work as one piece, the character who sets the story in motion is one piece of work. That would be Dorita, the prodigiously talented and proudly unbalanced violinist, played with a quirky verve by the versatile Mark H. Dauk.

Dorita has recently been fired from the fictional Lazza String Quartet, and as the play opens he has ominously vanished. The remaining members have forged ahead, assimilating a young violinist named Grace.

She shuffles first at the Lazza’s instromonth trio, but as played by Katie Siglman with quiet depth and a disarming charm, Grace quickly reveals some pluck. (Oh ... pluck?)

Beyond gender politics, what Hollinger seems interested in exploring with ‘Opus’ is the essence of music and life, and how trying to hold on too tight—to possessions or people or even a dream—a⻘ing note—a lot of suspension (a funny and down-to-earth Jeffrey M. Hembree).

The emerging cellist Carl rounds out the ensemble, his character seems an afterthought at first, but Carl’s health becomes pivotal to the story, and Corey Brill’s role solidly portrayed describes a surprising arc from engaging young upstart to tough and decisive survivor.

Some familiar musical pop-up: When Grace first crashes a priceless violin made by the quartet’s namesake, she plays a fragment of Bach’s charming Cello Suite No. 3 in G major. Later, we hear strains of “God Only Knows,” composed by Beach Boys Brian Wilson, another troubled genius.

We also hear a bit of Beethoven’s Cello Concerto, which Elliot dismisses as “dumber music” and whose admirers he defies as Philistines. Those admirers happen to include the president and his wife, for whom the quartet is about to perform on national TV. Elliot calls the piece in favor of Beethoven’s difficult Opus 131, the String Quartet No. 14. The moment proves both triumphant and, in its aftermath, shattering.

Hollinger’s up-right violinist, with both a plot and a theme that’s arguably unnecessary. But it doesn’t take away from a tightly crafted play that’s generous with humor, suspense and other pleasures. In other entertainment, ‘Opus’ is just about note-perfect.
It's an 'opus' Katie Sigismund and Mark H. Dold in the Old Globe Theatre staging of Michael Hollinger's "Opus," which runs through April 26 in Balboa Park. Craig Schwartz
Opus
(James S. Copley Auditorium; 227 seats;$59 top)
By BOB VERINI


Elliot, First Violin - Jim Abele
Alan, Second Violin - Jeffrey M. Bender
Dorian, Viola - Mark H. Dold
Carl, Cello - Corey Brill
Grace, Viola - Katie Sigismund

While many if not most performing artists are temperamental, on the evidence of "Opus" a string quartet's members may be the most high-strung. Scribe Michael Hollinger sees them as four leaderless individuals sawing their way toward self-expression and group harmony, in an environment of charges and confrontations: chamber music emerging from a chamber of horrors. Former violist Hollinger seems to know whereof he speaks, for despite over-the-top plotting, his fictional Lazara Quartet thrums with believability in Kyle Donnelly's impeccably detailed, sturdily acted Old Globe arena staging.

That a drama about a quartet features a cast of five already hints at the complex skein of conflicts at work within the long-established, Grammy-winning ensemble. At rise they're auditioning to replace violist Dorian (a manically charismatic Mark H. Dold), the explanation of whose absence is one of several reveals up the author's sleeve, some too easy to see coming, others a neat surprise.

With chosen virtuosa Grace as our surrogate (Katie Sigismund charmingly progressing from intimidated novice to assured co-equal), we chart her fellow artistes' stories encompassing survived cancer, a couple of failed relationships, two extraordinarily valuable instruments and a series of life-and-death quarrels over phrasing in Beethoven's Op. 131.

Flashbacks, both enacted live and projected as documentary video, explore the Lazaras' past, even as present-day
events drive toward a nationally televised White House appearance (a canny choice on Hollinger's part to raise the stakes amidst all the rehearsal wrangling).

Through rhythmically overlapping dialogue and expressive physicalization -- even the scene changes are executed with elegance -- Donnelly brings out all the suspense inherent in a team's efforts to work through their differences and create beauty.

Because the specifics are so carefully attended to, veterans of any workplace tension should readily find themselves represented here. Even a musically unsophisticated audience can appreciate the impact of a debate over an unmarked crescendo in Beethoven's score, or the anguish of a player's late entrance at bar 10 while the recording tape is rolling.

Thesps' dynamics parallel those of the quartet, each making a strong impression while meshing with the others (and all five mime their prerecorded music with studied finesse). Dold, and Jim Abele as the testy first violinist, make the most of their flamboyant diva opportunities, while Sigismund, Corey Brill and Jeffrey M. Bender are no less persuasive in more subdued roles.

York Kennedy's lighting effectively sets off the public and private exchanges, though poorly dressed overhead cables cast weird shadows and block some views of the video screens. It's the only sloppiness to be found here, the kind that'd send any of the quartet's stalwarts into a hissyfit.

Sets, Kate Edmonds; costumes, Denisa D. Bilzakova; lighting, York Kennedy; sound, Lindsay Jones; stage manager, Diana Moser. Opened March 26, 2009. Reviewed March 28. Runs through April 26. Running time: 1 HOUR, 30 MIN.

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Katie Sigismund as "Grace" and Corey Brill as "Carl" in The Old Globe's production of "Opus" by Michael Hollinger, directed by Kyle Donnelly, playing in the Globe's Arena Theatre at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium on March 21 - April 26 (Photo courtesy of Craig Schwartz)

REVIEW: Globe's well-tuned 'Opus' is fine composition

By PAM KRAGEN - Staff Writer

Beethoven's 14th string quartet, Opus 131, was one of the composer's favorites, a sinuous, melancholy seven-moment piece prized for both its subtlety and its innovation.

It's also devilishly difficult to perform and it proves the undoing for the Lazzara Quartet, the fictional ensemble that comes unstrung in Michael Hollinger's well-written play "Opus." The five-character drama is making its San Diego premiere in a zippy, expertly cast production at the Old Globe this month.

Hollinger was inspired to write the play by the real-life Guarneri Quartet, which is retiring this year after 45 years of near-seamless togetherness. His play looks behind the music to examine the symbiotic near-marriage between the members of a string ensemble, the tug-of-war between artistry and business, and the secret to finding perfect harmony, at least onstage.

Running a tight 90 minutes (just 50 minutes more than the actual Op. 131), Hollinger's script is rich with musical insight, natural dialogue, humor and a few surprise twists. Director Kyle Donnelly keeps the pacing swift and has cast a quintet of actors who fit their roles perfectly.
The play hopscotches back and forth through time between a few years ago — when the 10-year-old, Curtis Institute-born Lazzara Quartet was at its peak, fresh off a Grammy win and the subject of a then-in-progress film documentary — and the present day, when the now-infamous quartet is auditioning musicians to replace their recently fired violist, the brilliant but unstable Dorian, whose fiery artistic temperament and insatiable perfectionism has given the group a fractious reputation, and has scuttled their efforts to finish a CD of Beethoven's complete quartets.

The Lazzara survivors find their ideal match in the brainy young violist Grace, who signs on just six days before the group is scheduled to play on live television at the White House, an opportunity the group hopes will put them back on top again.

Sparks fly between Grace and the quartet's second violinist, the divorced lothario Alan; cellist Carl, a married father of two and five-year cancer survivor, is faced with some life-changing decisions; and the group's combative leader, first violinist Elliot confronts his secret, longtime affair with Dorian, his role in the group's demise and his limitations as a musician. And Dorian? He has disappeared without a trace. Could he be dead? Or could he hold a hidden ace that will change his and the quartet's future.

The script is strong and the music that underscores each scene gives the play an intellect and fluidity. But the fine cast make it honest.

As Grace, Katie Sigismund is the most authentic musician of the group, with her ramrod-straight posture, sensitivity and eagerness to please. As Dorian, Mark H. Dold steals all his scenes, credibly portraying a passionate, manic-depressive artist. Jeffrey M. Bender is thoroughly endearing as Alan, the likable lug with warm eyes and a shy smile. Corey Brill has a nervous, quiet energy as the secret-keeping Carl. And as the controlling, self-loathing Elliot, Jim Abele nimbly handles the play's linchpin role, believably self-destructing during the course of the play.

The play's a good fit for the Globe's borrowed in-the-round Copley theater at the San Diego Museum of Art. It requires little in the way of scenery (just a few chairs and music stands, with video screens on each wall showing snippets of the infamous documentary. Denitsa D. Bliznakova designed the costumes, York Kennedy created the basic lighting and Lindsey Jones designed the sound. The prerecorded string quartet music was created by the Vertigo String Quartet in Philadelphia, where the play had its world premiere in 2006.

If you're a musician, you'll love the interweaving of music and musical language in the script, but you don't even have to like classical music to appreciate "Opus," which tells a very human story about the human elements that combine to make the music.

"Opus"

When: 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; through April 26

Where: Old Globe at the Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park;

Tickets: $29-$66

http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2009/04/01/entertainment/theater/z942f82271f5e1e79882... 4/16/2009
Opus

Dorion, the violinist and most gifted member of the all-male Lazza String Quartet, has disappeared six days before a command performance at the White House (the President, a raging Philistine, wants "Hall to the Chief" and Johan Pachelbel’s sonnolence-inducing Canon in D). Young Grace auditioned far better than her résumé promises. She joins the group and, amid Stephen’s hangovers about "four equal voices," wonders if all the rumors about the group’s legendary bickerings, some life-threatening, are true. Opus moves pretty much as expected: out of backstage chaos comes harmonic order. Although the script unfolds as if written in haste (including a coda that’s a gratuitous fula), the Old Globe’s staging, by Kyle Donnelly, emphasizes its strengths, especially the passion with which an art becomes crafted. As if each actor were an instrument and each scene a different tempo, the director has melded a fine ensemble cast into the fidelity of music. Former UCSD students Casey Brill and Katie Sigismund shine as Carl (the cellist player whose bad news fuels the plot) and Grace. Sigismund’s portrayal of the young woman, thrust into a male fraternity and having to find her place, is so precise you’d swear she’s based on an exact model. Also amazingly precise: Lindsay Jones’s sound design. In the symphonic equivalent of “air guitar,” the actors fake playing the music. And Jones has the “performed” notes emerge, it would seem, from the instruments themselves. Sometimes he moves the music from the stage to speakers behind the audience: It drifts up and then out, as if, in the case of Beethoven’s Opus 131, it’s handed home to heaven.

Opus at the Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park, 619-234-5623. Thursdays, 8 p.m.; Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m. Tuesdays, 7 p.m. Wednesdays, 7 p.m. through April 26.
NOT one wrong note in Globe’s ‘Opus’

BY DIANA SAENGER
Contributor

History shows that artistic geniuses are often high-strung, and this rings true in Michael Hollinger’s “Opus.” A four-member, world-renowned string quartet is about to prepare for a prestigious performance at the White House when its violist disappears. A standout audition by a female admits her to the quartet, but she soon discovers there are many sour notes among the group’s personalities that she may not be able to handle.

The Old Globe’s production of “Opus” runs through April 26 in the Globe’s Arena Theatre at the San Diego Museum of Art.

What’s so intriguing about “Opus” is the underlying layers of the characters. As professionals, they are one unit — deciding who will remain, where and what they will play and even what they will wear. Yet each member has a completely different life situation that must be silhouetted as a backdrop to his or her career.

How these layers are peeled back is part of the play’s fascination. I also enjoyed learning some of the music lingo and getting a peek into the lives of how creative musicians need to be precise to a fault for their art. The fact that the actors mimic playing the selections of Bach, Beethoven and others that are heard is insignificant. There’s not one wrong note in “Opus.”
Music, human behavior intertwine in Globe's turbulent, brilliant 'Opus'

by CHARLENE BALDWIN

Michael Hollinger’s ‘Opus,’ at Old Globe Theatre piece playing through April 26 at Copley Auditorium in Balboa Park, is as thrilling, well-constructed and turbulent as any Beethoven string quartet.

Playing in a string quartet, says fictional first violinist Eliot, should be “a discourse among four reasonable people.” The reality is quite different. Because it is written out, with tempos and dynamics usually indicated as well, classical music is controlled. Human behavior is not.

Hollinger ought to know. He trained at Oberlin College as a violinist and then switched to playwriting. ‘Opus’ presents a gripping, intriguing character study of five musicians, each sensitive and, in varying degrees, volatile.

String quartets, especially younger American quartets, are less automatic than before, even though some still believe the first violinist is the boss. Eliot (an extraordinarily sensitive yet restrained performance by Jim Abbe, who played the second husband in The Globe’s ‘The Pleasure of His Company’) may yearn to command, but in truth, the Lazara Quartet is run democratically; a majority, preferably unanimous, determines the group’s personnel and playlists.

Having rest as students at Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute of Music, the quartet is named for an 18th-century stringed-instrument maker. As part of their community property, they possess two Lazara instruments, a violin and a viola. Second violinist Alan (Jeffrey M. Bender) and cellist Carl (Corey Bell also UCSD MFA) are voices of reason, and yet they express strong opinions as well, ultimately deciding who stays and who goes. In the case of Violist Dorian, they agree with Eliot to send Dorian the violist.

With his tousled hair and romantic good looks, Dorian (Mark H. Dold) is a perfectionist and the most emotional of the quartet. The audience learns in later flashbacks that he disrupted the final scene in Lazara’s complete recordings of the Beethoven string quartets.

After being released from his contract, Dorian disappeared, off his mood-swing meds, his longtime, verobien affair with Eliot ended.

When the play begins, the remaining three are auditioning for a new violist. A White House command performance booms, so the position needs immediate filling. They choose a young woman named Grace (excellent Kate Sigmund), a USC MFA graduate, who hesitates, and not because she knows the quartet’s inner strife. She has an audition the following week for first chair viola in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. The others berate her, asking, “You’d trade playing in an orchestra for this?” She changes her mind.

In live performance, quartet playing is most exciting for players and audience alike. One never knows when a string will break. In a 1999 interview, Emerson Quartet cellist David Finckel said the audience doesn’t pay to see perfection. “You want to be spontaneous,” Finckel said. “The concert is the place to take chances. It should be unpredictable, alive and fresh.”

The scene can be said for Hollinger’s play, which unfolds, like director Kyle Donnelly’s sure hands, like a piece of chamber music, rice with movement, interweaving and overlapping dialogue, solo and duet sections. Although the actors do not play their instruments, they do a believable job of mimicking, a motif without hard video, which kills the illusion for regular concertgoers.

Because the players switch places around the playing space and the placement of speakers is phonetically stationary, it’s sometimes unclear who’s on first (as intended).

Lindsay Jones’ otherwise appearing sound design uses music of Bach, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff and even The Beach Boys. Kate Edmunds’ scenic design is composed largely of music stands. Denise D. Bloomer’s costumes are attractive, and York Kennedy’s lighting design is immaculate.

Grace (Kate Sigmund) is obviously less than thrilled with Dorian’s (Mark H. Dold) advice in The Old Globe Theatre’s ‘Opus.’

The dress rehearsal is 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays; and 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through April 26 at the Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, 1450 El Prado, $20-$30. Visit oldglobe.org or call (619) 234-0808.
Of music and contract murder

BY JEAN LOWERISON
Published Thursday, 09-Apr-2009 in issue 1111

‘Opus’

Goethe once defined a string quartet as "a discourse among four reasonable people," and in a good performance, that’s certainly the way it sounds.

But discord is common in quartets, and while second violinist Alan (Jeffrey Bender) says "At its best, it's like a marriage only with more fidelity," volatile violist Dorian (Mark H. Dold) counters with "At its worst, it’s like swallowing Drano."

Right now, the fictional Lazara String Quartet is in a time crunch: days away from an important gig at the White House, it is auditioning recent graduate Grace (Katie Sigismund) to replace the brilliant but "buggy" Dorian (Mark H. Dold), fired by headstrong first violinist Elliot (Jim Abele) for his erratic behavior.

Creativity, artistic temperament and personal quirks collide in Michael Hollinger’s Opus, onstage in a riveting Old Globe production through April 26 at the San Diego Museum of Art’s Copley Auditorium. UCSD theater professor Kyle Donnelly directs.

Hollinger knows musicians: an ex-rocker, he trained as a violinist at the Oberlin Conservatory. Fortunately for us, he has found his forte in playwriting.

Hollinger gives us a complex group of distinct personalities: Elliot the acid-tongued drama queen; Alan the charming lothario; Carl the laid-back family man; the mercurial but brilliant Dorian; and timid newcomer Grace, who just wants a regular job so she can defend her choice of a music career to her doubting family.

I suppose Opus could be faulted for its heightened, almost soap opera-like characters and situations, a melodramatic ending, and the occasional unhelpful intrusion of a TV camera for an interview, but overshadowing these is the considerable joy of watching artists at work. In the Beethoven Opus 131, for example, Alan questions Elliot’s interpretation of the marking “ma non troppo.”

“I know what 'ma non troppo' means,” snaps Elliot.

“Well, that was clearly troppo,” Alan retorts. “It sounds like we’re smothering a baby.”

It’s a tribute to sound designer Lindsay Jones that the actors, who bow but do not finger their instruments, almost convince us they are playing the recorded music from the sound booth.

There is no real set; the actors move four folding chairs as needed. Donnelly intelligently plays into the in-the-round stage configuration by changing the seating order each time the quartet sits down to play, and a large TV screen on each theater wall adds another viewing possibility.

These actors may not be musicians, but they understand

PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

the concept of ensemble performance. Each contributes to and takes what's needed from the whole. It's a lovely piece of work all around.

The joy and sorrow of live music is that it is recreated anew every performance, but gone forever as soon as the music dies — much like an actor's performance. Opus is a fascinating glimpse into the life of those who are lucky enough to make a living creating music.

Opus plays through Sunday, April 26, at San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium. Shows are Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinées Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m.

For tickets call 619-23-GLOBE or visit www.theoldglobe.org.
San Diego Arts

"Opus" at the Old Globe Theatre

**The Music is Everything**

By Welton Jones

Posted on Fri, Mar 27th, 2009

Last updated Fri, Mar 27th, 2009

There’s no place to hide in a string quartet,
Four lines of music, imagined by some genius composer, and one
is now yours. Yours alone. And the other three need you to be there,
just as you need them.

Quartet playing looks like great fun. Serious, professional quartet
playing looks impossible: Four voices merged into one with nobody
in charge, consistently providing music that works not only for
the players but for the world.

Plenty of room for drama there, decided playwright Michael
Hollinger. And he was right, provided he could find an acceptable
way to show music being made by actors who don’t play.

That’s where Kyle Donnelly came in, a director with a simple but
effective plan: Teach the actors the body language, render the
instruments silent, play a good recording and away we go.

Thus “Opus,” a bright and entertaining new play at the Old Globe’s
temporary playhouse in the San Diego Museum of Art through April
26.

Donnelly and his cast of five having solved the basic visual
conundrum by hard work, good taste and letting Sarah Nematiullah (billed as “quartet adviser”) keep things looking as right as possible.
The decks are cleared for some good old melodrama.

This particular quartet is on top of their game, winning prizes, earning
acclaim, selling their product and bringing themselves artistic
satisfaction despite a predictable bag of real-world annoyances like
romances, illness, jealousies, commitment issues and individualism.

But cracks have appeared. Bonds have burst and changes are
required. Like a miracle from music heaven, the answer appears
in the form of a brilliant conservatory girl, all cats and herb tea, able to
sight-read Beethoven at a world class level.

There’s never been a female in the band before and she brings the
inevitable complications. But she also brings the music, and at a
level so high that even major complications won’t really matter.

That’s the central issue of the play: Nothing finally matters except
the music. But the music MUST happen. Otherwise...

Well, as one member of the quartet is forced to say to another:
“You’re not good enough to be unpredictable.”

In the end, hard decisions must be made. No, BRUTAL decisions.
And there’s an excellent chance that they won’t work out. The magic
may be gone. But the effort must be made for the sake of the music.

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These five actors may not be musicians but they certainly understand their own art’s ensemble playing. Hollinger has given them the words, a most plausible mixture of jargon and attitudes from a rarified world, and Donnelly has found a comfortable shape for some very harmonic acting.

Jeffrey M. Bender’s second violinist is as comfortable as an old shoe. Corey Brill’s cellist is a family man with solid practical instincts. Jim Abele as the intense first violinist and Mark H. Dodd as the violist are where the sensitivity starts to jab. And Katie Sigismund is the new violist, charmed and charming. Good work by each though what’s important is the even better work by all. It helps make the author’s point while allowing the play to come alive.

Ninety minutes isn’t really enough with these people, though Hollinger is a very efficient story-teller. Some additional information would brace some effects. Devices such as recording studios with unseen engineers and fragments of television documentaries, tossed in randomly as flashback filler, could be better done with more imaginative stagecraft.

Kate Edmunds’ scenery is a missed opportunity. Bare realistic essentials only. York Kennedy’s lighting is competent without being much help and Denitura D. Blizzakova’s costumes? Well, what can you do with rehearsal clothes and performance blacks? Miss Sigismund does get a nice dress for the White House performance.

(Some juicy stuff there. Obviously, it’s the president before the one we have now. The compromise; The quartet will substitute Beethoven’s hefty C-sharp minor Opus 131 for the request Pachelbel Canon. “It feels like playing a Tampon ad,” somebody notes. But they must agree to play “Hail to the Chief.”)

The indifferent decor isn’t really a problem, though. The play’s the thing, just as, for the quartet, the music’s the thing.

Take along a classical music nut – preferably one who has played chamber music. They’ll love right up to the moment when the one guy grabs the other’s instrument and...

No. I don’t want to relive THAT.
Pat Launer: Spotlight on Theater
On April 2, 2009

Hanging by a String

THE SHOW: “Opus,” a smart, savvy backstory of a string quartet, at the Old Globe

Katie Sigismund and Mark H. Dold in “Opus.” (Photo by Craig Schwartz)

Some folks just don’t want to play second fiddle. That’s one theme, among others, that runs through the intelligent, often-thrilling “Opus,” written in 2006 by former violist Michael Hollinger.

The fictional, world-renowned Lazara Quartet has just fired its brilliant, visionary but mentally unstable violist, who was the secret lover of the first violinist. Now the violist is missing, and the group has six days before they appear at the White House, on television, to be seen by 15 million viewers. So while their newest audition, the gifted Grace, would like a few days to think it over, there’s just no time. She’s forced to join this testosterone-driven company on the spot. And she has to master Beethoven’s very challenging String Quartet No. 14 in C-Sharp Minor, Opus 131. What she learns — as we do — is what it’s like to be “one of four equal voices.” At its best, a string quartet, we’re told, “is like a marriage, only with more fidelity,” “like a living organism, copulating with itself.” At its worst, “it’s like swallowing Drano.” We see the best and worst, the conflict and consonance, in this sharp, witty, riveting look at how music is made and how harmony is maintained. There are matters of friendship, loyalty, sexual attraction, outstanding instruments, dazzling vs. workmanlike talent, artistic creativity vs. fidelity to the composer, but above all, there is the music, the striving for excellence, or perhaps even perfection.

Under the assured and outstanding direction of Kyle Donnelly, head of the acting program at UC San Diego, there are fine-tuned nuances of situation and character. The cast is magnificent, each a virtuoso performance, together a wonderfully tight ensemble. And in this marvelous invention, every person mirrors the role of the instrument s/he plays. Elliot (Jim Abele) is the first violist: dominant, aggressive, in control, setting the pace. He’s followed by Alan (Jeffrey M. Bender), the second violinist, committed to harmony. The more mournful, thoughtful violists are Dorian (Mark H. Dold) and Grace (Katie Sigismund). The cellist, Carl (Corey Brill) is more mellow (or so he seems) grounding the others in “terra firma.” But as the situation heats up, the balance changes dramatically.
Abele is wonderful as the acerbic control-freak, who tries to call all the shots and thinks he’s a better musician than he is. Bender is endearing as a nice-guy who takes a special shine to Grace. Sigismund plays her a bit like a wide-eyed fawn, buffeted by the stronger winds (strings, actually) around her. And Brill starts out cool, slightly distant, a little taciturn, but it’s he who winds up playing the shocking final note. An extra bonus for local audiences is that both Sigismund and Brill are UCSD alumni who did exceptional work while they were students here a few years back.

Now they have a quartet advisor (Sarah Nematallah), and the magnificent music of Bach, Beethoven and Bartok to sustain them (pre-recorded by The Vertigo Quartet for the world premiere at the Arden Theatre Company in Philadelphia). The way the cast mimes the playing of the instruments (sans fingering) is transporting and convincing. The technical aspects of the production (set by Kate Edmunds, lighting by York Kennedy, sound by Lindsay Jones, costumes by Denitsa Bliznakova) are all first-rate.

This is one performance that merits an encore and a standing ovation.

**THE LOCATION:** The Old Globe’s temporary arena stage, in the auditorium of the San Diego Museum of Art in Balboa Park; 619-23-GLOBE; [The Old Globe](#)

**THE DETAILS:** Tickets: $29-59. Performances: Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m., through April 26

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** BEST BET
Five a crowd when Elotl (Jim Abele, left), Aran (Jeffrey Bender), Grace (Katie Sigismund) and Carl (Corey Brill) confront Dorian (Mark H. Dold), an ex-member of the fictional string quartet in the Old Globe's "Opus." Craig Schwartz

THE (SONIC) OFFICE

By James Hebert
THEATER CRITIC

"Opus," about a classical music quartet, has larger issues in mind (say, rage at your co-worker)

The frayed edges. The fits of bidding. The late nights, the long journeys, the general malaise of being away from home with a group of people whose habits you've maybe come to know too closely.

Michael Hollinger knows the territory. He's been in a rock band, after all. Except that's not the experience he's talking about when he cites those hazards of the creative life.

Hollinger is speaking of telling a classical-music ensemble, which happens to be the subject of his play "Opus."

"There are a lot of documented cases of murder and discord among quartets," says Hollinger, whose play about a fictionalized group called the Lazara Quartet begins its run at the Old Globe this weekend.

"I think it's interesting, because we expect it to be this great, great life. We expect to learn from rock bands, we don't expect it from quartets." Hollinger knows from quartets, besides being an ex-rock好消息, the playwright and assistant professor of theater at Villanova University is an accomplished violinist who was once on track for a career in classical performance.

Though he left that world a number of years ago - Hollinger is now the author of a full-length play and still has vivid memories of what it was like to live the sort of life depicted in "Opus."

"I have to say that when I've been playing regularly and well, and I'm playing with a group of good people, playing string quartets to me, there's no greater art form as a participant," he says.

"That said, I feel as though playing is the only thing I've got that I can actually aspire to be really, really good at. And so it's the thing I devote my life to - seeing if I can do it again and do better and do it differently."

In "Opus," the relationships among the quartet's members are tested mightily as they lose one member under mysterious circumstances and recruit a replacement who brings a whole new set of troubles.

Hollinger acknowledges that the situation the Lazara Quartet finds itself in is "an extreme world," although he notes there's something of a parallel in the turmoil that consumed the Audubon String Quartet a few years ago (a case the playwright hadn't heard about before he started writing "Opus").

But in the play's focus on a classical quartet is simply a means to explore issues that people deal with in reality, in outside music, even outside the genre.

"The play is about a creative endeavor, but I think it's a lot of people who see the play recognize it as a workplace play, even though it's got typical workplace," Hollinger says.

That makes it an apt companion piece for the Globe's other current show, a reimagined version of the musical "Working." Hollinger notes that his play's title, besides referring to a piece of music, comes from the Latin for "work."

It also makes "Opus" a good fit for Kyle Dunnally, who's directing the play on the Globe's Arena Stage.

"I was attracted to it by the idea of how a group of artists works on an ongoing basis with each other," says Dunnally, who heads the UCD's graduate string program and has directed two previous Globe productions. "How do they collaborate, how do they maintain relationships?"

And, of course: "How do they not kill each other?"

Navigating such artistic collaborations is something Dunnally says she confronts every day in theater. And theater and music share something else as well, as Hollinger points out. A sense of the ephemeral, of creating art that only lasts as long as a performance.

DETAILS
"Opus"
The Old Globe Theatre
When: Performances begin Saturday, opens next Thursday.
Schedule: Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 7 p.m.; Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m.
Where: Arena Stage at the Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art
Tickets: 619-578-3717
Phone: (619) 234-5623
OnLine: TheOldGlobe.org

"These musicians are constantly in the presence of musical works and their own musical instruments that have endured for generations or centuries," Hollinger says. "And yet, as performers, they're creating work nightly that disappears instantly and gossamer."

In that way, "I think the soul of the play is very much about a life in the theater, too."

Except, of course, that theater people aren't alone.
PLAYBILL

CRITIC'S CHOICE

"Working" The latest version of Stephen Schwartz and Co.'s take on the Studs Terkel work has a swell set, fine cast and an ace band. But the story (about Americans and their jobs) can stray into cliché and misfiring satire, and the music — though it features two good new tunes by Lin-Manuel Miranda of "In the Heights" — tends to have its Birkenstocks planted firmly in '70s soft-rock. (James Hebert) The Old Globe, 1633 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park. Through April 12. 619-234-5623 theoldglobe.org. $53-$79.

"Opus" The bickering musicians of Michael Hollinger's play manage to make some sweet music, and so does the Globe with Kyle Donnelly's smart, involving and (there come the puns) expertly tuned production of the work about a string quartet coming unstrung. As sheer entertainment, the show is just about note-perfect. (James Hebert) Coply Auditorium, 1450 El Prado, Balboa Park. Through April 25. 619-234-5638 theoldglobe.org. $29-$59.
Full Cast Set for Old Globe's *Opus*

By: Dan Bacalzo · Mar 13, 2009 · San Diego

The cast is set for the Old Globe's production of Michael Hollinger's *Opus*, to play the Globe's Arena Theatre at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium, March 21-April 26, with an opening set for March 26. Kyle Donnelly will direct.

The play focuses on a world-renowned string quartet preparing for a high-profile performance, complicated by the disappearance of their brilliant but unstable violist and the hiring of a gifted young woman as his replacement.

The cast will include Jim Abele as Elliot, Jeffrey Bender as Alan, Corey Brill as Carl, Mark H. Dold as Dorian, and Katie Sigismund as Grace.

The creative team will includes Kate Edmunds (scenic design), Denitsa D. Bliznakova (costume design), York Kennedy (lighting design), and Lindsay Jones (sound design).

For more information, visit www.TheOldGlobe.org.
Abele, Bender, Dold and More Cast in Old Globe's Opus; Donnelly Directs

By Kenneth Jones
March 16, 2009

The dysfunctional string quartet — plus one added player — of Old Globe's production of Michael Hollinger's Opus, directed by Kyle Donnelly, includes Jim Abele as Elliot, Jeffrey Bender as Alan, Mark H. Dold as Dorian, Corey Brill as Carl and Katie Sigismund as Grace.

The music-infused play will run March 21-April 26 in the Globe's arena stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium. Opening is March 26.

According to Old Globe, "A world-renowned string quartet struggles to prepare for high-profile performance at the White House when their brilliant but unstable violist mysteriously disappears. When they hire a gifted young woman as a replacement, the rehearsal room becomes a pressure cooker as passions rise, personalities clash and the musicians contend with the evanescent nature of their life's work. But no opus will ever be as complex or compelling as the offstage travails of these five extraordinary individuals, as they wrestle with feuds, ambition, mortality, and their passion for the music."

The creative team includes Kate Edmonds (scenic design); Denitsa D. Bliznakova (costume design); York Kennedy (lighting design); Lindsay Jones (sound design); and Diana Moser (stage manager).

Hollinger's Opus has been seen around the country at Arden Theatre, Florida Stage, Off-Broadway and elsewhere. His plays include An Empty Plate in the Café du Grand Boeuf, Red Herring, Tiny Island, Tooth and Claw and Incorruptible. His Arden Theatre production of Opus was nominated for seven Barrymore Awards, winning for Outstanding New Play. Opus also received a 2007 Harold and Mimi Steinberg New Play Citation from the American Theatre Critics Association.

Donnelly directed the Globe's productions of Orson's Shadow and A Midsummer Night's Dream. Recent credits include Lisa Kron's Well at Arena Stage, where she previously served as associate artistic director from 1992 to 1998 and directed such productions as She Loves Me, Born Yesterday, Tom Walker, The Women, Lovers and Executioners, The Miser, Molly Sweeney, A Small World, Dancing at Lughnasa (winner of Helen Hayes Award for Best Production), Summer and Smoke, A Month in the Country, The School for Wives, Missalliance, Polk County (Helen Hayes Award for Best New Musical) and others.
San Diego's Old Globe Announces Cast of OPUS; Runs March 21 - April 26

by BWW News Desk

Old Globe Executive Producer Lou Spisto is pleased to announce the cast of The Old Globe's production of Opus, by Michael Hollinger, directed by Kyle Donnelly, to run in the Globe's Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium March 21 - April 26, 2009 (press opening: Thursday, March 26 at 8:00pm). Tickets are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, online at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the Globe Box Office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

The cast of Opus features Jim Abele as "Elliot," Jeffrey Bender as "Alan," Mark H. Dold as "Dorian," Corey Brill as "Carl" and Katie Sigismund as "Grace."

A world-renowned string quartet struggles to prepare for high-profile performance at the White House when their brilliant but unstable violist mysteriously disappears. When they hire a gifted young woman as a replacement, the rehearsal room becomes a pressure cooker as passions rise, personalities clash and the musicians contend with the evanescent nature of their life's work. But no opus will ever be as complex or compelling as the offstage travails of these five extraordinary individuals, as they wrestle with feuds, ambition, mortality, and their passion for the music.

The creative team includes Kyle Donnelly, director; Kate Edmunds, scenic design; Denitsa D. Bliznakova, costume design; York Kennedy, lighting design; Lindsay Jones, sound design; Diana Moser, stage manager, Marie Natoli, PA.

Michael Hollinger's (Playwright) plays include An Empty Plate in the Café du Grand Boeuf, Red Herring, Tiny Island, Tooth and Claw and Incorruptible. His Arden Theatre production of Opus was nominated for seven Barrymore Awards, winning for Outstanding New Play. Opus also received a 2007 Harold and Mimi Steinberg New Play Citation from the American Theatre Critics Association. He has written seven touring plays for young audiences, as well as numerous short works. For PBS, he has scripted three short films and co-authored the feature-length Philadelphia Diary. Other awards include the Roger L. Stevens Award from the Kennedy Center's...
Fund for New American Plays, the F. Otto Haas Award for an Emerging Theatre Artist, a Mid-Atlantic Emmy Award, the Frederick Loewe Award for Musical Theatre, a commission from the EST/Sloan Science and Technology Project, and fellowships from the Independence Foundation, Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Hollinger is a resident playwright of New Dramatists and Assistant Professor of Theatre at Villanova University.

Kyle Donnelly (Director) directed the Globe's productions of Orson's Shadow and A Midsummer Night's Dream. Recent credits include Lisa Kron's Well at Arena Stage, where she previously served as Associate Artistic Director from 1992 to 1998 and directed such productions as She Loves Me, Born Yesterday, Tom Walker, The Women, Lovers and Executioners, The Miser, Molly Sweeney, A Small World, Dancing at Lughnasa (winner of Helen Hayes Award for Best Production), Summer and Smoke, A Month in the Country, The School for Wives, Misalliance, Polk County (Helen Hayes Award for Best New Musical) and others. She directed the American premiere of Brian Friel's Give Me Your Answer, Do! for Roundabout Theatre and worked at Williamstown Theatre Festival, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Huntington Theatre, American Conservatory Theatre, Seattle Rep, McCarter Theatre, Berkeley Rep, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, and many other regional theaters around the country. She founded her own acting studio called the Actors' Center in Chicago which was a leading training center for actors in that city. She is a faculty member of UCSD's Department of Theatre and Dance, a member of SSDC and winner of the Alan Schneider award from TCG.
‘Opus’ opens Saturday at Old Globe

The Old Globe presents “Opus,” a drama about a world-renowned string quartet struggling to prepare for a performance at the White House when their brilliant but unstable violist mysteriously disappears. The play opens Saturday and runs through April 26 at the Old Globe's satellite space at the San Diego Museum of Art's Copley Auditorium in Balboa Park. Showtimes are 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Tickets are $29-$66. Call (619) 234-5623.
DAME: Performing Arts
Through 3/6: Peter and the Starcatchers
See the on-stage play in the lobby of the La Jolla Playhouse, UCSD Campus, laplayhouse.org

3/1-4/5: Killer Joe
The play by Smith and JoeIraqig, about a wealthy, Killer Joe, to kill her mother for her insurance money. See the play at the Compass Theater, Hilo, hilo.com, compasstheatre.com

3/7-20: Grease (See Page '14)
The show is on at Rydeen High's favorite couple comes to the Civic Theatre, downtown, brendaedgew.com

3/7, 8, 9: Just Balanchine
City Ballet presents three George Balanchine masterpieces to celebrate the late choreographer's life and work. Birch North Park Theatre, North Park, cityballet.org

3/10: Moon Over Buffalo
Ken Ludwig's screwball play tells the story of a married couple struggling to maintain their acting careers in the 1950s. What they learn that they may lose their final shot at stardom, everything starts to go wrong. Aria Playhouse, Vista, skylightlive.com

3/7-13: Mendelsohn: A Midsummer Night's Dream
A dramatic presentation of Felix Mendelssohn's best work, narrated by music, and acting. Downtown, La Jolla and Rashly Square Pk, edgel.org

3/17: 15: Rent
The original story of Rent but rent the themes they later became on Broadway, by the story of two songwriters and. music students struggling to make it in New York. Civic Theatre, downtown, brendaedgew.com

3/19-4/1: Facing East
The both of a gay couple know a Mormon trouble to purchase their 33rd floor apartment. University Theatre, directionmary.org

3/21-4/16: Open
After their reporter disappears, a world-renowned string quartet struggles to perform for their performance in the annual. The 【House. The 【House is showing in the Old Globe, 2007 expert, downtown, theoldglobe.org

3/24-3/30: Hip Hop Saved My Life
See hip-hop culture creates value for the marginalized, bridge global communities and empowers young women. Civic Building, downtown, neshart.org

3/20-3/31: 3/8: Rigoletto (See Page '14)
A Duke's warrant goes wrong lead to murder and jealousy. Civic Theatre, downtown, bandleaders.com

2/24-3/9: The Threepenny Opera
Legendary playwright Bertolt Brecht's masterpiece tells the story of a thief,eson and greed with colorful choreography, a Broadway cast and a sold-out show. Cygnet Theatre, Horton Plaza, edgel.org

3/7-17: Tonya's Libido
This Grammy nominated Cuban band's signature sound has been described as rock en español, blending Latin music with R & B, hip-hop and rock to create high-voltage latino flair. Cygnet Theatre, Balboa Park, soldoutlive.com

3/7-4/12: Working
This beloved musical explores the feelings of teachers, corporate executives and school teachers about their day-to-day lives. Old Globe, downtown, theoldglobe.org

3/15: Spanish Harlem Orchestra
Latin rhythm from a Grammy-winning, 13-member ensemble blend with fiery salsa dancing to set the nightlife. Birch North Park Theatre, North Park, birchnorthparktheatre.net
"Opus"
「オプス」

クラシック楽団の美しいハーモニーの裏に隠された内情

1. 世界的に有名な弦楽四重奏団の第1バイオリニストのエリオットと、同じ楽団のバイオリニストのドリアンは長年の恋人同士。ある日2人は破局を迎え、エリオットは精神的に不安定なドリアンをクビにするべきとメンバーに訴える。やがて、ドリアンは行方不明となり、自殺体となって発見される。新しくメンバーに加わったグレースは、才能に恵まれているのが経験が少ない。彼らは全国テレビで放映されるホワイトハウスでの演奏会を控えていたが、グレースは演目であるベートーヴェンの「弦楽四重奏曲第14番作品131」を演奏したことがなかった。切迫した雰囲気の中でリハーサルが始まる。
2. 国宝とも称される超一流の弦楽四重奏团单の中で、野心、敵対心、嫉妬、情熱が互いに重なり合った内幕が次々と浮かび上がった。一大イベントである演奏会のシーンを同時に、リハーサルの様子をフラッシュバックで振り返りながら、メンバー4人の苦悩や対立を描く。脚本は元バイオリニストのマイケル・ホリンガー。

THE GLOBE THEATRES (Old Globe Theatre), 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park / 619-239-2255(T), 期間〜3/21(土)〜4/28(日) 上演火・水曜7pm, 木・金曜8pm, 土曜2pm & 8pm, 日曜2pm & 7pm, チケット-TBA。 http://www.oldglobe.org
“Opus” — The Old Globe presents this drama about a world-renowned string quartet struggling to prepare for a performance at the White House when their brilliant but unstable violist mysteriously disappears; runs through April 26; 8 p.m. (also 2 p.m. March 22); Copley Auditorium, San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park; $29-$66; (619) 234-5623.