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Opus

Reviewed by David Cote for NY1's "On Stage"
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The music world has long provided playwrights with a tuneful backdrop for their human dramas: think of *Amadeus*, *Side Man* or the musical *Jersey Boys*. Now Michael Hollinger has put his years practicing viola to excellent use in *Opus*, a clever, bittersweet new comedy-drama about the politics and passions that threaten a classical string quartet.

The fictional group is the Lazara Quartet, a foursome of musicians who have played together for about 20 years and who have been invited to perform before the President at the White House—a gig that could catapult them to national fame. There's just one problem: their brilliant but mentally unstable violist, Dorian, played by Michael Lawrence, has disappeared. The remaining members quickly audition the young and talented Grace, portrayed by the charming newcomer Mahira Kakkar. But lurking in the background is the question of why Dorian left the group and if it can really continue without him. Hollinger switches between flashbacks and interviews the musicians give to a documentary crew which fill in the blanks. And he skillfully develops his characters and story line through rehearsals in which the players bicker, bond and flirt with each other. He also weaves in a thoughtful thematic opposition between virtuosity and technical competence. Throughout, director Terrence J. Nolen and the excellent cast, which includes Richard Topol, Douglas Rees and David Beach, maintain our interest in the characters without resorting to plot gimmicks or excess histrionics. In the end, we really care about these instrumentalists and the beautiful sounds they create together.

As you might expect, there's plenty of music to hear in *Opus*, snatches of famous chamber pieces by Beethoven, Pachelbel and Bartok. But even if you're not a classical fan, you should find yourself intrigued by the suspense and witty interplay in Hollinger's script. Like a good quartet, it's an intimate, intense and profoundly musical conversation among artists. David Cote of Time Out New York for NY1.