



Wednesday, August 15, 2007

## Reviews

### Opus



**ON A SOUR NOTE**  
Kakkar, center, brings disharmony to the group.

★★★★★

**Primary Stages at 59E59** (see Off Broadway). By Michael Hollinger. Dir. Terrence J. Nolen. With ensemble cast. 1hr 40mins. No intermission.

The music world has long provided playwrights with a tuneful backdrop for their dramas—*Amadeus*, *Side Man* and *Jersey Boys* all exploited the story behind the score. Now ex-violist Michael Hollinger trades his bow for a pen in *Opus*, a tart and witty chamber piece about the politics and passions that threaten a classical string quartet.

The four instrumentalists of the Lazara Quartet are strung out over

the sudden disappearance of Dorian (Michael Lawrence), their brilliant but mentally unstable violist. Dorian's timing couldn't be worse: Lazara has just been invited to play the White House, a chance at national exposure. The remaining members—prickly diva and first violinist Elliot (David Beach), regular-joe Alan (Richard Topol) on second violin and the bearish, joke-cracking cellist Carl (Douglas Rees)—find a replacement in freshly graduated prodigy Grace (Mahira Kakkar). She inherits Dorian's multimillion-dollar fiddle, along with the ensemble's emotional and musicological baggage.

Hollinger cuts between flashbacks and interviews the musicians give to a documentary crew, filling in the blanks about this quartet's subtly dysfunctional dynamics, and also weaving in a thoughtful argument about erratic virtuosity and technical competence. Keen-eyed director Terrence J. Nolen and his fine actors maintain our interest in the complex characters, guiding our sympathy and allegiances with subtle power. Like a good quartet, *Opus* is an intimate, intense and profoundly moving conversation among artists.—*David Cote*