



OWEN CAREY

Elliot (Chris Coleman) and Dorian (Matthew Boston) wrestle for power while Grace (Sarah Stevens) ponders the depths of the Lazara Quartet's dysfunction in PCS's production of *Opus*.

icon and the show fostered a relationship between the theater and Atlanta's gay community.

Today is a "different moment" in the arc of the community as a whole, he says. Whereas 15 or 20 years ago he knew virtually no gay parents, today many LGBTQ individuals are raising children. When marriage equality champion Evan Wolfson began advocating for gay marriage in the 1990s, Coleman says his reaction was, "It's a pipe dream, [will] never happen in my lifetime." Now, he notes, things feel different.

In making the video, Coleman looked back decades to bring up emotions and recall a time of his life to which he does not return often. He spent so much time trying to overcome the pain, shame and difficulties of being gay that purposely conjuring those experiences was unsettling, he says: "It's something I don't do everyday, and it's something I haven't done in a long while."

Unlike Elliot, Coleman is not an explosive person, but he admits to understanding a lot about the character. In recent years, Coleman has addressed his own experiences with anger and hurt. When the Gerding Theater at the Armory opened in 2006, it was a huge success for PCS. He thought, "I should be elated, I should be thrilled," he says, "and in some ways I was."

But Coleman also felt angry—and he didn't know why. Now he believes that reaching that goal opened up space for him to realize painful elements of his past he had smoothed over with his accomplishments.

"Then you realize, 'Oh, I've been carrying that anger around all my life,'" he explains, adding that, in recent years, efforts to excavate and heal past experiences have been productive.

In addition to engaging with their characters psychologically, the actors in *Opus* had a skill to learn. They must mime their instruments convincingly—no small task, Coleman notes. When he first heard a dissonant, rhythmically jarring Béla Bartók piece the group would be performing, he remembers thinking, "How am I ever going to be able to count that, let alone bow?"

Cast members worked with coaches to learn how to authentically embody the musicians. "Anytime you're playing a role or a new play, you're really learning a whole new world," Coleman says.

His lengthy break from acting caused him to wonder: "I'm 12 years older than the last time I was on stage ... Does my brain still work? Do the muscles still work?" he continues.

Anxieties aside, Coleman is most looking forward to putting the play in front of a live audience and "hearing the humor," he says. "The audience teaches you so much about how the story is unfolding." 

Opus runs through May 8, Tues.-Sun., 7:30 p.m., Sat.-Sun. matinees at 2 p.m., Thurs. matinee at noon; Gerding Theater at the Armory, 128 NW 11th Ave.; \$18-\$58, 503-445-3700 or pcs.org.

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