

# Hearts Melt for Final Play of Ninth Season At The Studio

“Qualia,” described as a “radioactive love story,” runs now through April 26 at The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Audiences are calling the final play of The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol’s ninth season, themed “Longing to Belong,” a thought-provoking sci-fi romance.

Set in a dystopian world 100 years in the future, “Qualia” follows Alex and her compassionate AI companion, Dominic, who are the only sentient creatures for miles.

Written by Central Florida playwright Ashleigh Ann Gardner and directed by Sara Oliva, “Qualia” is aptly described as a “radioactive love story.” The play explores themes of depression, isolation, loneliness, love, belonging and what it means to be human in the modern world.

“This play is a love letter to that feeling of choosing to stay in a relationship, choosing to stay in a situation that you have full faith and confidence in, especially if you love someone so much that you choose to stay and work things out with them,” Gardner said. “It’s also about being a person who doesn’t understand other people that much because of things that are going on (in her head), and trying to connect with other people in a way you find familiar but maybe they don’t find familiar as well.”

Studio patrons may recognize the story of Alex and Dom from Gardner’s 2020 reading streamed on the theater’s Facebook page during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scarcely a season goes by at The Studio without seeing Gardner grace the Black Box stage. She has appeared in myriad productions throughout the theater’s past nine seasons, including audience favorites like “Ada and the Engine,” “In the Next Room (or The Vibrator Play),” “These Shining Lives” and, most recently, “Cry it Out.”

Now, The Studio veteran returns not to star in a play but to instead premiere The Villages’ first full-fledged production of “Qualia.”

“I thought it was wonderful,” said Reene Gleckner, of the Village of Hadley. “It was very different. I thought the actress was amazing and the computer voice, the interaction between them was terrific.”

Alex, played by Lorena Cohea, has been stuck in an underground lab for five years, ever since a wave of nuclear explosions destroyed the United States. Subsisting on a diet of microwaved ramen,



Lorena Cohea, previously seen in “La Cage aux Folles,” “Urinetown, The Musical” and “The Cake,” returns to The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol as the lead in “Qualia,” the final play of the theater’s ninth season.

“It was thought-provoking, and the acting was great. It just held your interest throughout the production.”

JEFF KOLTENUK  
Village of St. Charles

canned corn, carrots, black beans and rice, she passes the time trying to build a body for Dom, played by Studio newcomer K.P. Powell, her sentient computer system and only friend.

The unusual pair enjoy a relatively comfortable life together, safe from the irradiated surface and its roving bands of murderers, mutants and other post-apocalyptic ne’er-do-wells.

Until one day, Seth, played by Matt Katzenmeier, locates the subterranean shelter. He’s a biologist, an AI expert and most importantly, human.

Seth’s arrival shakes Alex’s carefully constructed, artificial world. Soon, she must choose between escaping her insular existence and braving the world above or staying with Dom and facing an uncertain future.

“I thought it was very entertaining,” said Jeff Koltenuk, a Village of St. Charles resident who attended with his wife,



“Qualia,” written by Central Florida playwright Ashleigh Ann Gardner and starring Lorena Cohea as Alex, is a post-nuclear play running now through April 26 at The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol.

Adrienne. “It was thought-provoking, and the acting was great. It just held your interest throughout the production.”

The play takes place inside the shell of a futuristic bunker better suited to the world of “Fallout” than the Cold War-era bomb shelters. “Qualia” also marks a return to the theater-in-the-round staging The Studio is best known for, with actors moving through the audience over the course of the play.

“I really liked it,” said Steve Tanny, of the Village of Sanibel “I thought the staging was incredible. I thought the topic was interesting. I just sat focused on the show the

whole way through.” “Qualia” runs now through April 26. Multiple showtimes are available, and tickets are \$40.

To purchase tickets, go to thevillagesentertainment.com or visit the nearest The Villages Box Office location.

Before “Qualia” ends its run, Gardner and Oliva will hold a Playwright and Director Q&A at 1 p.m. April 24 at The Studio, where audience members can gain new insights into the development of “Qualia” from the creative minds who brought the play to life.

Tickets are \$10 for subscribers and \$15 for non-subscribers.



Michael Fortuna | Daily Sun

Jim Wicks, left, of the Village of Gilchrist, and Paul Carmignani, of the Village of Lake Deaton, play a song during The Villages Accordion Players’ session Jan. 25, 2024, at Big Cypress Recreation. The group recently gave an impromptu concert in honor of St. Patrick’s Day at Lake Sumter Landing.

## Accordion Players Hope To Stage More Pop-Up Concerts

The resident group recently celebrated St. Patrick’s Day with an impromptu show at Lake Sumter Landing.

By MICHAEL FORTUNA  
Daily Sun Staff Writer

For a couple of hours on St. Patrick’s Day, passersby found themselves in the middle of an impromptu concert to celebrate all things Irish.

Nine members of The Villages Accordion Players gathered March 17 at Lake Sumter Landing near the WVLG building, playing such songs as “McNamara’s Band,” “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling,” “Danny Boy,” and “My Wild Irish Rose.”

“Anything you’d hear at a St. Patrick’s Day parade in New York,” group leader Jim Wicks said. “Everybody walking by stopped. They were singing along, some were dancing. It was a lot of fun for us and the public.”

Jon Dzak, who’s been with the Accordion Players for two years, was one of the club members there that day.

“It was the highlight of my week,” said Dzak, of the Village of Lake Denham. “It was hot sitting in the sun, and I got a sunburn on my head. But it was a great day.”

Dzak has been playing the accordion from the time he was 12. He happened to spot the instrument sitting in his grandmother’s attic and wanted to figure it out.

“It’s hard to learn,” Dzak said. “It took a lot of years. I went away from the accordion for a while, then I started back up 25 years ago. It was like riding a bicycle.

“You can play more than one note,” he said. “You can play by yourself or with a group.”

Anne Andricosky, who also was part of the pop-up band, hadn’t played a lot of the Irish tunes on the set list before.

“It was a little challenging, but I had a great time,” said

Andricosky, of the Village of Bradford.

She joined the Accordion Players three years ago, right around the time of its inception. She originally played the tuba, but about 20 years ago she switched over to the accordion.

“The right hand is easy because I played piano,” Andricosky said. “The left hand is the hard part. Your arm gets tired.”

The group is contemplating heading out on Dyngus Day, a Polish tradition held the Monday after Easter, to play some polkas. Wicks said the group might make it a monthly event.

“I thought we should go out and do something in public,” said Wicks, of the Village of Gilchrist. “We’re building on the flash mob thing.”

The Accordion Players have been around for about three years, giving people who didn’t have enough time to play the accordion during their working lives a chance to make up for that. The group has attracted people of various levels of ability, from beginners to professionals to those who hadn’t played in a few years.

Each week, the format follows a spontaneous route. Someone may come in with a particular musical idea, or they may bring in some sheet music for everyone to practice. On other occasions, members will give presentations on different playing techniques.

“We help each other to improve our skills and learn new songs,” Wicks said. “If someone is looking for a song, someone may have it.”

Wicks started playing the accordion at the age of 8, but he stopped playing in high school because he thought accordions weren’t cool. After college, he found a way to make money playing professionally, including a 30-year stint in a polka band on Long Island, New York.

His father insisted Wicks learn the instrument.

“I was the first-born son of a Polish family,” Wicks said. “If you didn’t learn the accordion, you’d become a priest.”

The Villages Accordion Players meets at 1 p.m. Thursdays at Big Cypress Recreation. Villages residents who play the accordion, as well as those who just want to listen, are welcome to attend. For more information, call Wicks at 631-877-6970.

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<b>The Friend</b> (R)	11:15am, 2:00pm, 4:45pm, 7:30pm
<b>The Chosen: Last Supper Part 1</b> (NR) <small>FATHOM EVENT PREMIUM PRICE</small>	10:00am, 4:00pm
<b>The Chosen: Last Supper Part 2</b> (NR) <small>FATHOM EVENT PREMIUM PRICE</small>	11:00am, 2:50pm, 4:10pm, 6:40pm
<b>The Notebook</b> (PG-13) <small>FLASHBACK CINEMA</small>	1:00pm, 7:00pm
<b>The Penguin Lessons</b> (PG-13)	10:45am, 1:25pm, 7:00pm
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