

## Brash bold and bombastic “The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity” delights at Asolo Repertory Theatre

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Brash, bold and bombastic- "The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity" by Kristoffer Diaz is a truly original theatrical experience produced by the Asolo Repertory Theatre. Directed by the indomitable Jen Wineman, the black box Cook Theatre was transformed into a wrestling arena complete with laser lighting and rock music to pump up the excitement.



Garrett Turner (Photo by Cliff Roles)

My experience with the sport is entirely limited to the Mickey Rourke movie “The Wrestler,” and “The Elaborate Entrance” provides a quick and dirty education about the world of wrestling suitable for even for the uninitiated like me. Entertainment within entertainment can become a forced convention; however “The Elaborate Entrance” lives up to the high energy of the hype. The “entrance” of each wrestler complete with a uniquely tailored promotional video was quite elaborate indeed.

Last year’s Asolo production of “The Disgraced,” approached issues of Islamophobia with an extremely difficult “in your face” style. In contrast, “The

Elaborate Entrance” skillfully dances around prejudice and fear of the other; yet amid the laughter, we find ourselves face to face with some awful truths about American culture.

Our narrator is the charming Macedonia “Mace” Guerrara (Pierre Jean Gonzalez), a kid from the Bronx, who shares his intoxicating love for wrestling with the audience. Gonzalez gives a muscular, robust performance as he pulls back the curtain to expose the political side of the business of wrestling. Mace discovers a clever kid from his neighborhood named Vigneshwar “VP” Paduar (Raji Ahsan) who represents a fusion of modern cultures – a millennial comfortable blending Indian, Latin, and American heritage. Mace’s boss, Everett K. Olson dubbed “EKO.” (Scott Aiello), the snake oil salesman of the wrestling industry, devises a disturbing scheme to manipulate V.P. into playing upon our country’s greatest fears in a post-9/11 world.



Raji Ahsan and Pierre Jean Gonzalez (Photo by Cliff Roles)

The play is carried valiantly on the broad shoulders of the All-American Chad Diety, portrayed brilliantly by Garrett Turner, who is the centerpiece of the wrestling world. He is a charismatic and witty showman with a garish persona fully embracing a love of capitalism. Flashing his pearly whites and flexing for the audience, Diety both profits from the mythology of the sport and is exploited by it. By becoming the symbol of all things American (you even hear a wry “chi-ching” every time he smiles), he normalizes the treatment of his ancestors by rich white males, the predecessors of his boss EKO. Wrestling, at least in EKO’s world, peddles in stereotypes and relies on a well-choreographed battle between good and evil. But our country has never been that simple. “The Elaborate Entrance” slyly pulls us in with high entertainment value and easy laughs, but at the end, you’re left wondering who’s holding the bag.

This insightful and entertaining show has a short run, so get ready to rumble at the Cook Theatre throughout the remainder of April.