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Theater review: Beauty, nuance emerge from wrestling backdrop in terrific 'Chad Deity'

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You could go to Capital Stage's giddy new production "The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity" for playwright Kristoffer Diaz's inspired blend of poetic storytelling and searing sardonic humor.

You could also go for the beautifully nuanced lead performance of Andrew Perez as Puerto Rican professional wrestler Macedonio Guerra (a.k.a. The Mace).

Ultimately, you'll get both.

With the heightened theatrical elements of professional wrestling as the backdrop, the Pulitzer-nominated script and Perez's arresting performance intertwine in director Jonathan Williams' assured and wildly entertaining production.

Guerra/The Mace slyly narrates the story, explaining his ongoing love affair with the art and craft of professional wrestling, which started when he was a boy growing up in the Bronx.

As Mace, Guerra's job is to make THE Wrestling champion Chad Deity (a magnetic Donald Paul) look good. THE Wrestling has a kind of a second-rate status in the world of pro grappling, but it's Mace's dream job so he doesn't complain.

Deity, an African American, is more handsome, more muscular and more engaging than Mace. Therefore, Deity is the champ and Mace is the fall guy. However, as Mace often wryly points out, he's the more skilled and accomplished wrestler, the one capable of selling Deity's victories.

THE Wrestling is run by Everett K. Olson (the perfectly severe Randall King), who goes by the handle of EKO. He's Caucasian, reptilian, and boasts the perfectly honed instincts of a pure capitalist, someone who believes in making money above all else.

When Mace brings the glib Vigneshwar Paduar (Rushi Kota), an Indian American Brooklynite known as VP, into the mix, EKO hits on a new foil for Deity, building a villain through ridiculous cultural mash-ups.

VP is transformed into a crass mix of Middle Eastern and Muslim stereotypes called The Fundamentalist, who enters the ring flanked by women in burqas as Indian snake charmer music plays. Mace becomes his "Mexican bandito" manager Che Chavez Castro.

Satirizing how racial identities in America can be manipulated and exploited, the play also exhibits unexpected and timely connections to recent events. When the wrestling czar emphasizes making The Fundamentalist a "credible threat" in the minds of the audience, George Zimmerman's acquittal in his killing of Trayvon Martin looms large in the space.

As VP and Mace realize how they're being used to tell a story they don't want to be part of, they re-evaluate their participation in THE Wrestling's reductive spectacle.

Ian Wallace's transformative scene and projection design, with a functioning wrestling ring at center stage, create a necessary aura for the technically savvy production.

The actors actually wrestle in "Deity" and work to sell the larger-than-life action.

Original cast member Rob August had to leave the production last week with a fractured rib. He was replaced by the effective James Long, who has experience as both a professional wrestler and professional actor. As the play often shows, there are times when there's not a great deal of difference between the two.

As brash and big as the story often is, the terrific production hangs on the appealing Perez and the poignancy of Mace's enduring purity.

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