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## The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity – Play Review

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A play about wrestling? I almost did not go to see this one. I would have missed one heck of a play. Makes one think about what wrestling represents in the minds of many of us. **The playwright Kristoffer Diaz has created an interesting juxtaposition of vastly different communities in this excellent play, masterfully directed by Jonathan Williams. Stage Manager, Meredith King and Set Designer, Ian Wallace have done an amazing job in recreating the environment suitable for wrestling matches, one of the oldest forms of combative sports.**

“The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity”, a 2010 Pulitzer Prize finalist, is not just a play about sports. It is a play about what it means to have an American dream and how certain sports and wrestling for sure, embody the American dream. In fact, after Virgil Riley Runnels, Jr., a son of a plumber, won multiple grand wrestling championships and various titles, he was renamed, “The American Dream” Dusty Rhodes. In this play, Macedonio Guerra, known as Mace, a wrestler of Puerto Rican decent, describes his childhood fascination with the art and the business of wrestling. He talks about what the sport meant for him and his brothers and how it molded his own aspirations.



Wrestling (Photo credit: fotobydave)

When he entered the game of professional wrestling however, he hit the glass ceiling, sooner than he had anticipated. He was rather short and not highly charismatic and was therefore deemed a non-championship material. Instead, he became a professional “looser”. He plays his character and is also the

narrator, in the play. Through him, we get a glimpse into the world of professional wrestling, buzzing with racism, jingoism, and xenophobia, not to mention, certain level of ignorance. And sometimes there are people who mask their smartness, to fit in. Mace almost calls on the ignorant and racist remarks of his boss, but then thinks better of it, and says, “I let my boss be right”. He says, as a professional loser, his job is to “make the winner look good”; to make the winner look as though he defeated the opponent with considerable force and strength. The pre-determined champion, in a sport where fights are frequently “fixed”, and body slams, mounted punches, backhand swings, and other moves are often rehearsed and faked, is Chad Deity, a charismatic, engaging, tall black man with an easy smile and a powerful voice.

Mace however, sees his big break that could help him inch closer to realizing the American dream, when he finds a charismatic champion hidden under the carefree Indian kid, Vigneshware Paduar. Mace presents VP to his boss EKO and tells him “I will do the heavy lifting” in prepping VP. VP fights the bad guy, Billy Heartland and then EKO fascinated by VP’s foreign decent and non traditional stance, starts planning the best way VP can be presented to the fans. He wants to present him as Muslim terrorist, even though VP is Hindu, building on the notion that sometimes, racial identity may be exploited, in pursuit of the American dream. **EKO presents VP as an evil Muslim, called the Fundamentalist, who with his sleeper cell kick, seemingly poses a threat to the American Dream guy Chad Deity. All the four wrestlers, Mace (played by Andrew Perez), Chad Deity (played by Donald Paul), Vigneshware Paduar or VP (played by Jaspal Binning), and bad guy Billy Heartland (played by James Long), and the owner of the wrestling team, EKO (Randall King) do an amazingly superb job. It is worth it to see the play just to see their fabulous wrestling moves and characteristic wrestling boasts.**

This beautiful, satirical, amazingly witty play also blends in tenderness and poetic storytelling. Towards the end, VP and Mace begin to realize that they are becoming parts of the exploitative machine, by accepting the soundbites, the racially charged epithets, and by readily abandoning the truth. **The satire is not just on the professional sport of wrestling. The joke is also on theater goers, who may have come to see this sport, with its loud music, bright lights, unusual attires, and rough language, as “lowbrow”. The fact that underneath the façade and faked exterior are real people, striving for the same things that make the American dream, some respect, recognition, and feeling of “having arrived”, is an eye-opener.**

“The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity” is a not-to-miss play of this season, and it is playing at The Stage in San Jose, until November, 10. For tickets, please go to <http://www.thestage.org>.