

Stage Review: The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity

The artifice and artistry of pro-wrestling at San Jose Stage

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One doesn't have to be a wrasslin' fan to

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Donald Paul (Chad Deity) and James Long (The Bad Guy) star in Kristoffer Diaz's Pulitzer Prize nominated play 'The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity' produced by San Jose Stage Company in association with Capital Stage.

enjoy the [The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity](#), but it wouldn't hurt. This play by Kristoffer Diaz stresses both the artifice and artistry of pro-wrestling, and its spectacle is fully utilized by San Jose Stage in a production directed by Jonathan Williams.

Echoing the visceral punch of last season's *Red*, in which Mark Rothko splattered real paint around the set, *Chad Deity* features real (if scripted) wrestling moves along with all the aggressive noises and garish colors of a televised match.

The semiotician Roland Barthes called wrestling "the most intelligible of spectacles" and observed that wrestlers represent identifiable "types" who enter the ring not to engage in a sport, but to tell a story. The audience buys the story knowing that it is scripted—and why shouldn't they? It doesn't upset us to know that *Swan Lake* was choreographed beforehand, or that *Hamlet* has a predetermined ending. *Chad Deity* understands this dynamic. It uses wrestling as a metaphor for the American Dream, but the question posed is not "Is it myth or reality?" but rather "What kind of narrative are we buying into?"

This is the problem that occupies Mace (Andrew Perez), the hero of the play. As a truly skilled wrestler, his job is to make star wrestlers like the prancing title character (a gloriously funny performance by Donald Paul) look better than they are. Mace is writing a narrative that glorifies Chad Deity as the successful, macho, all-American hero, even though the Chad Deities of the world couldn't exist without their fall guys.

Mace wants to tell a different story, so he recruits Vigneshwar Paduar (Jaspal Binning) off the streets of Brooklyn. A walking embodiment of multiculturalism, V. P. has the power to bring a more authentic voice to wrestling. Instead, money-grubbing executive E. K. Olson (Randall King) appeals to jingoistic fans by spinning V. P. as "The Fundamentalist," an America-hating terrorist wrestler destined to be righteously trounced by Deity, while Mace becomes Mexican revolutionary "Che Chavez Castro."

As much an affectionate tribute to this non-sport as it is a satire, *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* ultimately uses the the idiom of wrestling to expresses hope that America's underdogs will be able to script their own performances instead of being eternally cast as the villains.