

# Review: San Jose Stage scores a body slam with 'Chad Deity'

By Karen D'Souza

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POSTED: 10/25/2013 09:33:02 AM PDT | UPDATED: ABOUT 21 HOURS AGO

Kristoffer Diaz goes to the mat in "The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity."

This Pulitzer-nominated satire may lack something in the way of subtlety, but there's no way to resist its rollicking smackdown of the state of the nation. The playwright pummels every social ill from anti-immigrant sentiment to corporate greed through this raucous parable about the world of televised professional wrestling. Directed with gusto by Jonathan Williams, the body-slammng comedy runs thro Nov. 10 at the San Jose Stage Company in association with the Capital Stage Company.



Photograph courtesy of Dave Lepori/2013 Donald Paul, left, and James Long star in 'The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity' at the San Jose Stage Company.

The theater has been transformed into a wrestling ring (by Ian Wallace) where the audience is goaded into cheering for various and sundry acts of faux violence choreographed as painstakingly as "Swan Lake." Audacious physicality is the hallmark of this rowdy par that gets in your face (sometimes literally). Swagger and sweat drip off the actors from the first powerball to the chokehold.

Macedonio "The Mace" Guerra (Andrew Perez) is a nat born wrestler, a wiry Puerto Rican kid who clawed his w up from the Bronx, who gets pummeled nightly in orde make Chad Deity (Donald Paul), the blinged-out rock s

of the circuit look like the real deal. He's a showboat with a slick patter and an affinity for merchandising. Action figures and T-shirts, that's where the real money is.

The fact that Deity couldn't beat down a toddler doesn't matter. He's the all-American hero of the piece, and The Mace is the menacing outsider threatening to topple the status quo.

The stakes get even higher when Vigneshwar "VP" Paduar (Jaspal Binning) enters the ring. He may be a Indian-American lad with a love for hip-hop trash talk and Spanish pickup lines, but sleazy fight promc Everett K. "EKO" Olson (Randall King) sees an opportunity to play to ethnic stereotypes and milk a little more dough out of the rubes in the cheap seats (read: us). Soon VP has been transformed into "the Fundamentalist," a Middle Eastern terrorist-type on a holy mission to destroy America by threatening Deity's crown. His big gimmick is "the sleeper cell kick."

It hardly matters, however, because everyone is in the know in this con. The fights are all fixed, the wom

there's no one around with the guts to notice the emperor's new clothes. Complicity breeds silence.

As The Mace muses: "In wrestling, nobody takes the other guy down without the help of the other guy."

Perez delivers The Mace's monologues with a captivating earnestness. Paul radiates smugness as the eve preening champ. And Binning has the charisma to pull off VP's effortless melting pot patois.

Make no mistake, sometimes the lack of nuance grates. Diaz is rather heavy-handed with his themes throughout the comedy, so there's little need to restate the message quite so loudly in the closing scenes. much of the play also feels like a monologue instead of a vigorous discourse between characters. But there are quibbles when considering a play with the chutzpah to mash up the adrenaline of wrestling with the power of allegory.

The thing that sticks with you long after the closing bell is the unabashed theatricality of both the sportin' life and the American dream.

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'The elaborate entrance of chad deity'

By Kristoffer Diaz, presented by San Jose Stage Company

Through: Nov. 10

Where: San Jose Stage Company, 490 S. First St.

Running time: Two hours, one intermission

Tickets: \$25-\$50, 408-283-7142, [www.thestage.org](http://www.thestage.org)