

# SAN FRANCISCO

## *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* Wonderful Wrestling Fiction

San Jose Stage

Review by Jeanie K. Smith

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San Jose Stage has a well-earned reputation for taking on cutting-edge work, and their season opener further cements that honor with *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*, a new play by Kristoffer Diaz that's a slam-dunk success. Wait, I'm mixing sports metaphors, since the world of this one is wrestling, not basketball—but, truth is, you don't need to know anything about wrestling to have a rollicking good time at this wild, witty and eloquent show.

The production is the result of a partnership with Capital Stage in Sacramento, where it was a hit with critics and patrons alike; it's sure to garner more acclaim in San Jose, where its themes and politics will resonate well with audiences.



**Donald Paul and James Long**

Entering the theatre to find a fully built wrestling ring gives you a clue this will not be your average playgoing experience. Then we meet Macedonio "The Mace" Guerra (Andrew Perez), a likeable young pro wrestler in the THE Wrestling stable, who regales us with an entertaining story of how he became enchanted with wrestling as a child, and what he has since learned about the business, accompanied by some fun wrestling demos. Soon we meet his boss, Everett K. Olson (Randall King), infallible and savvy magnate in a sharkskin suit; and THE's current champion, the one and only Chad Deity (Donald Paul), whose status confers on him the right to an elaborate and crowd-pleasing entrance.

Mace's wrestling days are comfortable and predictable, even though he's the "heavy lifter," spending his time in the ring making other wrestlers like Chad look good, until an unexpected gift arrives in the person of Vigneshwar Paduar, aka "VP" (Jaspal Binning), whose multi-lingual charisma presents a glowing opportunity for Mace to step into a different role, pursuing potential fame and fortune as a manager.

The first act is weighed down with exposition, and unfolds slowly in spite of tremendous energy from

the cast, aided by pounding rock music and arena-type lights. Once VP arrives, the energy goes from descriptive to explosive, and the second act is lively and super action-packed. Wrestling matches come fast and furious, with Mace guiding us through the amazing panoply of cultural and ethnic stereotypes on which the world of wrestling depends. The script navigates the geopolitics of good v. bad guys adroitly and with great humor, exposing our collective willingness to look the other way in the name of "sport."

The creation of stereotypes and how they are "spun" by Olson is all pretty funny, but also darkly topical, especially with current debates in the news. But the true story arc belongs to Mace, and how he achieves resolution is both powerful and poignant.

Kudos to Capital Stage director Jonathan Williams and his excellent cast. Perez as Mace carries the action, and shows tremendous range and incredible energy. Paul moves surprisingly from empty-headed idiot Chad to savvy, perceptive and clever Chad—and he has the most perfect character laugh. King plays a familiar type of character, but gives him more depth. Binning is the new cast member in the mix and is delightfully hep as the charming, charismatic VP. It's hard to imagine the show performed anywhere without ringer James Long, who plays three different pro wrestlers with great humor and smooth moves—he's truly a treasure.

The flexible set and visually attractive video design by Ian Wallace is augmented by fantastic lights by Michael Palumbo, putting us "ringside" for the action.

This unique show only plays through November 10, and it's sure to sell out—get your tickets now.

*The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* by Kristoffer Diaz; presented by San Jose Stage Company, 490 South First Street, San Jose; through November 10, 2013. Tickets \$30 - \$50; at [www.thestage.org](http://www.thestage.org) or at 408-283-7142.

*Photo: Dave Lepori*

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- Jeanie K. Smith

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