

To the Mat:

Designing *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*

Following the wrap-up of the Broadway season, Off Broadway got an explosive surprise with *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*, which opened at the Second Stage Theatre in May. Kristoffer Diaz's raucously funny satire provides a fresh slant on the intersection between entertainment and politics in American culture. The title character is the reigning star in the firmament of THE Wrestling, a WWE-style entertainment empire that provides its fans with plenty of scripted thrills. The protagonist, Mace (short for Macedonio Guerra), occupies a place several rungs below Chad Deity—he mostly exists to get beat up, week after week, in one ersatz battle after another. But Mace's

stock in the company rises considerably when he discovers Vigneshwar Padnar (or VP), a funny, fresh-mouthed Indian-American from Brooklyn. VP has plenty of star power, but few or no wrestling skills, so Everett K. Olson, THE Wrestling's cynical CEO, transforms him into The Fundamentalist, an object of fear and loathing for wrestling fans across the nation. (Olson also turns Mace, who is Puerto Rican, into The Fundamentalist's wily Mexican assistant.) After that, it's anything goes, as Olson plays every racist and xenophobic card in the deck, pitting The Fundamentalist against opponents with names like Billy Heartland and Old Glory.

Brian Sidney Bembridge's set design places the wrestling ring at center stage, with a downstage playing area representing Olson's office. Upstage is a collage dominated by bold sun-ray motif along with images suggestive of male aggression, including roosters, sharks, guns, bullets, and a roaring lion. For the latter, Bembridge says he drew inspiration from the work of the artist and designer David La Chapelle. However, he notes, "We found images from all over—some we bought and some we found, then cut apart and put back together again. For example, the sun rays are from an ad for Dos Equis beer. They were all painted by the Daedalus Design and Production. Amanda Hagy is the charge there. She blew me away."

The production was originally designed for Victory Gardens Theatre in Chicago. In making the move to Second Stage, a smallish venue on the second floor of a Manhattan building (with all of the loading issues that entails), space became a priority. "We had an apron downstage of the proscenium at the Victory Gardens, and that gave us more room," Bembridge says, adding the ring was

built in Chicago. (The deck of the ring consists of a wrestling mat placed over a floor of two by four. The ropes are made from aircraft cable, wrapped in a material similar to that used in garden hoses and finished off with electrical tape.)

The ring is surrounded by plenty of box truss, the better for Jesse Klug, the lighting designer, to bulk up his rig. As anyone who has ever seen wrestling on television knows, each player's entrance is more elaborate than the one before it, with as many lighting effects—strokes, chases, and sweeps—as the traffic will bear. In fact, says Klug, "I remember sitting down at the original design meeting, and saying, 'This is a show about five entrances. We need to design them, and the rest will fall into place.'"

In Chicago, he says, "We talked about having a large truss over the stage. We ran out of money, so I had the electricians build our first truss out of Schedule 40 pipe. But, at Second Stage, we knew we had to have more, which is why we went with the three-portal structure of box truss. In this show, the lighting almost becomes the scenery; you want people to feel that they're at an arena show." At Second Stage, Klug discovered a house rig that consists mostly of ETC Source Fours, so, for additional glitz, he rented more gear from PRG, including four Philips Vari*Lite VL2500s, 100 Source Four PARs, Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlasts, and PixelRange PixelLine units. The VL2500s function as specials for the actors, and also provide ballyhoos for the entrances. The ColorBlasts and PixelLines act as truss warmers. Lighting is controlled by an ETC Obsession II console.

With its involved cue structure, Klug notes that the show's tech process moved fairly slowly: "It had to be that way. We had to stop and

