

Dorset Theatre Festival, Dorset, VT

*The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa Fasthorse. Directed by Raz Golden.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

***“'Dramatug? The holy grail of American Theatre titles.’”***

The Thanksgiving Play is a grade school tradition and for the four people in this Thanksgiving play that tradition stands on the chopping block when an actress hired through a grant for her Indigenous Peoples connection turns out to not be descended from American natives at all, but has merely played them elsewhere. Plays about people creating a play are not new and don't always speak to non-theater people, but this play is an exception. It is a very funny play and one that will touch anyone who has ever been to, or taught in, a public school anywhere. Larissa Fasthorse, the playwright, is from the Lakota Nation and she takes the four white people, and her own people as well, to center stage and shows them as they are. They all have theatrical egos; they all have strange talents and stranger interests. They are as outrageous as real people can be in such a situation and a third of the way through this silly play you just want to reach out and hug every one of them. That's who and what these mis-matched characters are.



(L-r) Isabel Pask as Alicia, Craig Wesley Divino as Caden, Stephen Stocking as Jaxton; Kate McCluggage as Logan; Photo: Joey Moro

Logan, the high school drama teacher and director of this seasonal play, is as earnest as anyone could be when charged with the responsibility of creating a play for children. She has her special ideas about what would work and what wouldn't, but she wants her company to bring to the project their own ideas and realities. She has hired Alicia for her indigenous qualities, as her grant requires a genuine personality, and she is horrified to discover that she has one more “white” person in her company. However, she has contracted the woman and is stuck with her. A decision is made to move on as though the decision was a correct one.

Kate McCluggage plays the hard-to-defeat Logan. Logan never falters or allows any sort of



Kate McCluggage, Isabel Pask;  
Photo: Joey Moro

difficulty come between her and her intentions. She has decided on a devised play and all of her players are going to make the event work as she attempts to tell the traditional Thanksgiving story in her own way. McCluggage is terrific in this role, playing the honesty of her character with no changes in attitude no matter what is thrown in her path. She is earnest, well-intentioned and determined to create the best show possible. McCluggage makes this all seem as reasonable as doable.

Isabel Pask is Alicia and her dark-haired beauty works to the character's advantage. She could easily be perceived as Native American, Spanish, or even Phillipine. Alicia has a resume for each conceivable ethnicity and Pask plays this insanity with such serious conviction that she makes the impractical seem so very probable. She is a comic foil and gets her own laughs saying some of Fasthorse's funniest line. Her sexual attractiveness works well for her flirtatious Alicia.



Stephen Stocking, Craig Wesley Divino; Photo: Joey Moro

Jaxton, the other teacher in the group, is played beautifully by Stephen Stocking who chatters on about research and theories until it is hard not shake your head and take a moment to wonder if this man can possibly have a teaching career at all. Stocking is both very attractive and very repulsive at the same time in this role. His sense of humor is an incredible asset to this production.

Craig Wesley Divino as Caden, a local street performer with a desire to be a real actor, is a marvelous addition to the company. Divino seem absolutely right for his role; he is agile and flexible and outrageously amusing, especially when his character is deeply concerned about the "devised" play they are all creating together. I think I would enjoy this actor in almost any role he chose to play; he is that good.

This fine company has been directed with a frenetic sense by Raz Golden who seems to have enjoyed this play and this troupe equally. Everyone holds the stage in her eyes and we can see what she saw when directing the play. There is a real sense of "giving thanks" in her work on this show. She has given Dorset an outright hit and it's a welcome one at this point in the summer season.

The production is fascinating. The set is the work of Sasha Schwartz and it is more fun than most sets this year. April Hickman's costumes define the characters perfectly. Krista Smith's lighting design work is factored into the complex production and worked very well with Joey Moro's projections which get almost as many laughs as the actors.

See this play and you'll never be able to sing "The Twelve Days of Christmas" again without smiling. It's that kind of play and its what we all deserve.

+ 09/03/2023 +

**The Thanksgiving Play** continues on the Dorset Theatre Festival stage, 104 Cheney Road, Dorset, VT through September 10. For information and tickets go to [dorsettheatrefestival.org](http://dorsettheatrefestival.org).