

Giving Thanks for Great Comedy

The Kitchen Theatre has elected to dash away the dreariness of an Ithaca November with side-splitting, fall-on-your-face-laughing comedy.

In *The Thanksgiving Play*, playwright Larissa Fasthose sends up the traditional elementary & middle school Thanksgiving pageant, ripping into the decades of happy Pilgrims and Indians mythology in this comedy of (mis)representation.

Ex-actress Logan (Ginna Hoben) is making her way as an artist-in-the-schools, though currently under fire for her production of *The Iceman Cometh* with middle-graders. Her current project is putting together a 45 minute Thanksgiving play for elementary students. She is determined to redress the distorted portrayal of Native Americans, and has received a grant to that effect, from which she hires an LA actor she thinks (wrongly) is Native American.

That actress, Alicia (Maggie Lou Rader) is the opposite of the tightly wound, intensely cerebral Logan. Alicia is all body, nonchalance, non-inquisitive and content with her lot, as long as she is acting.

Abetting Logan is her boyfriend Jaxon (Alex Curtis), a street performer/yoga practitioner, with his own brand of new-age male vapidness. Together the two have years of practice being “allies.”

Caden (Matthew Boston) is the odd one out in this odd quartet, many years their senior, a historian and third-grade teacher who is also an amateur playwright.

Fasthose (of Lakota heritage) interweaves the increasingly absurd attempts of Logan and company to represent the missing Native Americans with hilarious re-enactments by the cast of actual Thanksgiving lesson plans posted on YouTube. (She slips in a moment of actual First Nations protest, as well as the original racist lyrics of “Ten Little Indians” late in the proceedings, to lacerating effect.)

The comic complications descend with a gentle relentlessness as Fasthose skewers both liberal whiteness and US theatrical practice, all the while giving the actors an immensely satisfying physical comedy playground.

Hoben is all nerves and delicious determination as Logan, including two priceless moments—her attempt to learn to “meditate” a la Alicia (who advises looking at the ceiling while not thinking at all) and her explosion at Jaxon, taking his paternalism down several notches.

Curtis’s Jaxon weaves a spell of “understanding masculinity” around his strutting; his exchanges with Logan have the split-timing of a stand-up duo.

Boston has a field day with the outsider finally getting a taste of his dream (real actors, not 9 year-olds, reading words he wrote!) He runs nebbish to manic in zero flat.

Raden especially shines as the supposedly clueless Alicia, so buoyantly content and in-the-flow that she absolutely disarms the others. She is the archetype of the Fool, who blithely sails across obstacles by seeming chance.

Margarett Perry returns as director, and the show has the comic pace, tight scenes and zany anarchy of her best work.

Design is on spot; a realistic set by Barron E. Pugh dominated by a green blackboard (aka video screen) and floor tiling sits nicely in the Kitchen space, brightly lit by Jennifer Fox.

A special extra is the costumes by Lisa Boquist, who gets to throw in a absolute gem of four talking turkeys, as well as Charlie Brown style jerseys in the opening number ("9 Days of Thanksgiving").