

JUDY RICHTER



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Drama builds in ‘The North Pool’ at Dragon Theatre

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No high school student relishes being summoned to the vice principal’s office, especially when he isn’t sure why.

Hence 18-year-old Khadim’s (Salim Razawi) reluctance to say much to Dr. Danielson (Edward Hightower) in Rajiv Joseph’s “The North Pool,” presented by Dragon Theatre.

At first it seems the hoodie-wearing Khadim is merely guilty of ditching a class, so Dr. Danielson sends him to detention. Khadim can serve the detention then and there even though the school day has ended and spring break has begun.

Dr. Danielson quickly catches Khadim in lies and makes more accusations. He wants to know why Khadim abruptly left a prestigious private school to transfer to this large public school in the middle of the semester.

As the conversation continues, some serious issues arise. Because Khadim is a Syrian Muslim, he suspects Dr. Danielson of racism. It turns out that the vice principal, who is white, feels he’s the victim of racism, too, after a younger black woman was appointed principal, a job he wanted.

He makes other charges against Khadim, but soon the tables turn. Khadim makes his own accusations against the vice principal.

Finally, the two discover some shared emotions involving another student as they reach a level of rapprochement.

Director Jacquelyn Montellato skillfully guides the two actors through the rising tension and their emotional journeys. Hightower’s Dr. Danielson is pompous and condescending at first, but he reveals other sides of the character as the play continues. Likewise, Razawi’s Khadim initially comes across as a sullen teenager, but he, too, shows more depth.

The utilitarian office set is by Karl Haller with lighting by Leanna Keyes and sound by Andrew Mondello.

The play has strong local connections. It was part of TheatreWorks' New Works Festival in 2009 and had its world premiere with that company in 2011.

Running under 90 minutes with no intermission, "The North Pool" is both timely and absorbing — well worth seeing.

It will continue through July 16 at Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway St., Redwood City. For tickets and information, call (650) 493-2006 or visit www.dragonproductions.net.

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