

Cat's Paw



Cat's-Paw, a play about homegrown terrorism, unfolds slowly. As the play opens, we see kidnap victim David Darling (Keith Sullivan) politely arguing with his captor. Why these people are in a fortified watertanker bunker is unclear. The audience remains off balance and shares Darling's question as he pleads "May I ask what's happening?" Playwright William Mastrosimone takes his time answering this question, leaving the audience suspended on tenterhooks, with growing apprehension. There's nothing meek about the Dragon Theatre's production of this work.

Louis Shilling gave a disturbing performance as Victor, the ring-leader of the army of three. I suspect I was not the only person who drew connections to Cinque, leader of the miniscule Symbionese Liberation Army. The overwrought communiqués of both groups shared the same sense of being logically tortured and self-conscious. Perhaps leaders of small radical organizations have the same issues as men of short stature, masking insecurity with bluster. Had the character been just about the bluster, the performance would have gotten old quickly. However, the script laced together a network of intertwined connections and deceptions that became revealed slowly throughout the play. Shilling brought surprising subtlety to a character that relied primarily on false bravado.

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An unknown woman in the seats behind me spoke for the entire audience as she explosively released the breath she'd been holding.

Sarah Lee played the diminutive Cathy, the sole surviving member of Victor's "army." Cathy's environmentalist tirades are as predictable and tedious as a release from the late Osama bin Laden, wrapped as they are in the supremacy of ideology. However, Lee's exquisitely expressive face enables Cathy to speak more when silence, revealing a portrait of pain, loss, and confusion with the smallest of

gestures.

Keith Sullivan's portrayal of mild-mannered kidnap victim David Darling reveals his descent from a mild-mannered EPA accountant, asking polite questions, to little more than a quivering mass of nerves huddled on the floor. We like this character immediately, as he plays an effective foil for the bombastic Victor.

Jessica Lyons plays TV anchorwoman Gwen Templeton. Unlike Darling, she's not immediately likeable, as she carries the baggage for every other pretentious TV anchorperson. The motivation underlying Victor's fixation on her and how he can use her remains intentionally unclear until roughly three-quarters through. We see Victor most clearly through Templeton's eyes as she is the outsider. Because of this, she becomes the most reliable.

Set designer Ron Gasparinetti produced one of the most memorable sets to grace the Dragon in recent years. The play takes place in a rusted-out water tanker that's been converted into a bunker. The rounded edges of the tanker cut the usable stage space by at least a third and bring the actors even closer to the audience. This tiny space magnified Victor's bombast and intensified the experience.

As the play reached an unpredictable conclusion, an unknown woman in the seats behind me spoke for the entire audience as she explosively released the breath she'd been holding. This intense thriller will be at the Dragon through April 15.

Cy Ashley Webb

Cy spent the '80's as a bench scientist, the tech boom doing intellectual property law, and the first decade of the millennium, aspiring to be the world's oldest grad student at Stanford where she is interested in political martyrdom. Presently, she enjoys writing for Stark Insider and the SF Examiner, hanging out at Palo Alto Children's Theatre, and participating in various political activities. Democracy is not a spectator sport!

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