



Los Angeles

BWW Review: SUCKER PUNCH - A Bloody Good Knock-Out of A Show!!!

by Gil Kaan Jun. 5, 2019



William Christopher Stephens & Rick K. Jackson
Photo by John Klopping

SUCKER PUNCH / by Roy Williams/directed by Michael A. Shepperd/Tiger Boxing Gym/June 23, 2019

Coeurage Theatre Company's West Coast premiere of Roy Williams' **SUCKER PUNCH** consistently hits its target under the uber-tensioned, fast-paced direction of Michael A. Shepperd. Embodied by an all-around talented cast, all involved in channeling William's solid script to the

stage should raise their arms and pump their fists in triumph.

A site-specific production, **SUCKER PUNCH** takes place in an actual boxing gym - the Tiger Boxing Gym - with the audience seated on three sides of the boxing ring. A floor-to-ceiling mirror comprises the fourth side allowing viewable sightlines from all angles.

Set in a boxing gym in London, in a time when black and white racial relations still periodically erupt, Brit Charlie runs his pugilist training establishment, pinning all his hopes on his star fighter Tommy. Having caught two 'boys' Leon and Troy breaking into his gym one night, Charlie has the two work off their misdeeds by doing chores around the gym (like cleaning toilets). When circumstances provide an exit for Tommy, Charlie discovers that Leon just might have what it takes to win some bouts. Of course, Charlie's dead set against Leon having anything to do with his daughter Becky.



Brandon Ruffert, Rick K. Jackson & Anthony Cloyd
Photo by John Klopping

Any alliances between any two characters seem to be short-lived, for a variety of reasons, whether friendships, familial or mentoring.

Rob Nagle effortlessly inhabits his role of the seemingly in-command Charlie. Nagle's Charlie doesn't just bust his fighters' balls, Nagle wears Charlie's desperateness on his sleeve, not always successfully hiding it as he thinks. As stern as Charlie tries to be with

his daughter Becky, he loses a majority of their arguments to her. But Charlie's most adamant on Becky not having any relations with his black fighter Leon.



Mara Klein delightfully brings a defiant feistiness to her Becky. Much smarter in the financials department than her father, Becky also thinks little about dating outside her race, as she casually flirts and teases Leon.

Rick K. Jackson sturdily does the heavy lifting in his pivotal role of Leon, the black fighter who just might be better than Charlie's protégé Tommy (who's white). Is Leon an 'Uncle Tom' as some, including his bud Troy, have called him out?



Anthony Cloyd imbues his Troy with a fierce reflex of anger and fists. Cloyd's Troy just can't understand why Leon's not as angry at the prejudice directed at them as he is.

Brandon Rüter as Tommy has all the bravado and sharp moves of a prize fighter. Kudos to fight choreographer Jen Albert for all the realistic (from all angles) boxing between all the nimble actors Rüter, Jackson and Cloyd.

William Christopher Stephens provides a well-rounded performance of Leon's part loving, part leeching Dad, Squid.

Later into the play, Gregor Manns distinctly adds his bluster and showmanship as Ray, a competing fight manager.

Deserved shared applause to all tech contributors: Matt Richter and Adam Earle for lighting; Georgette Arison for costumes; Sammi Smith for props; John Nobori for sound; dialect coach **Abigail**



Marks; and boxing trainers Charles Nwokolo and Emeka Nwokolo.

For those squeamish, don't worry. No visuals of any bleeding. Just very effective punches thrown, dodged and felt. **SUCKER PUNCH** - a bull's eye!