

Bittersweet play nabs quick audience approval

By Bob Evans

Cory Weaver/KC Rep



Struggles of a Polish playwright to produce his masterpiece on Broadway leads to a troupe of actors being arrested and the play closed because of a shocking on stage kiss between two women—the first lesbian kiss on a Broadway stage.

“Indecent” by Paula Vogel opened Jan. 25 at Spencer Theatre on the UMKC campus to a near capacity crowd who witnessed a phenomenal performance of a tender play that engages the audience with its play within a play format about a Polish Jew whose ground-breaking play aims to take the lives and stories of real people to stages around the world.

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The play's tender message and hope reverberated with the audience. "Indecent" runs about 100 minutes with no intermission or break in the action. The result allows the audience to follow the focus and characters as the story progresses. Watching the audience reaction on opening night, some were leaning forward in their seats; some barely moved or squirmed; some just seemed fixated on the action on stage.

As the lights faded, loud applause followed and the audience quickly began showing their approval with a well deserved standing ovation. Sometimes the standing ovations seem in genuine, but not in this case. "Indecent" received an enthusiastic ovation and spurred lots of discussion and comments as theatregoers exited the auditorium. The show is beautifully conceived, directed, designed and lit. The spirit of the play shows the Ellis Island immigration lines that reflect the current immigration and amnesty lines now at America's southern border.

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An evening of enlightenment and tenderness met patrons as they witnessed "Indecent." The play enlightened the idea of LGBT relationships from a sensitive, delicate view. While showing this protected view of love and relationships, the harsh reality of immigrants to America, their struggles, and their acceptance here, the inhospitable attitudes created a sharp contrast.

Central to the plot, a young couple discusses their love for each other and the fidelity to remain between them but allows for same sex encounters should they occur. That being the case, they pen a play that features a love relationship between two women that dares to include an on stage kiss between two women. Shocking at first, the play speaks to the European viewers who hold a less Victorian view of sex.



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The playwright, a Polish Jew writes his play in Yiddish and presents his play, "The God of Vengeance" in Poland, Moscow, Berlin, and other locations with his stellar cast who believe in his project and wish to introduce audiences to art performed for the sake of art.

With the play being successful, the troupe decides to bring the play to American audiences by coming to America, learning English, and mounting a Broadway opening. This move presents the problem: America is not ready for this exposure to the LGBT world or of Polish Jews bringing this to general audiences.

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To change the artistic nature of the play for Broadway presents a conflict for the playwright, the producer, and the actors who want to present art in its original state. The conflict brings consequences not foreseen and mixed results as audiences discover the play's resolutions.

The strongest portrayal came from lead actor Ben Cherry as the Stage Manager and character of Lemmi. Cherry holds the play together as the scenes and characters shift and serves as the balance point. Locally known Emily Shackelford gives a stunning portrayal of both the young wife of the playwright and the actress in the play very much affected in the play's content. No stranger to the KC Metro stages, Victor Rader-Wexler gets the chance to unfurl several characters, each different, in this short piece. Also worthy of notice are

Susan Lynskey in a platinum wig styled to resemble a Marlene Deitrich type, and Max Wokkowitz as the playwright.



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With all the characters shifting and portraying different characters and different times, to focus on one causes less focus on another. Definitely, "Indecent" is an ensemble piece and the web woven by the entire cast makes the piece work. The play is well-written, strong, and delivers a message about art and artists on one level. On the other level it reveals the struggles of those seeking The American Dream who make great sacrifices to come seeking fulfillment.

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The cast is: Ben Cherry, Susan Lynskey, John Milosich, Victor Rader-Wexler, Susan Rome, Emily Shackelford, Maryn Shaw, Alexander Sovronsky, Ethan Watermeier, Max Wokkowitz. They mostly covered changing roles as dictated by the script and with few costume changes, yet the changes were easily followed.

The production team for Paula Vogel's "Indecent" is: Eric Rosen, director. Erika Chong Shuch, choreography; Alexander Sovronsky, music direction and original music; Jack Magaw, scenic design; Linda Roethke, costume design ; Josh Epstein, lighting design; Andre Pluess, sound design; Jeffrey Cady, projection design; Zach Champion, voice and dialect; Anne Nesmith, wig design; Victor Vasquez, casting director; Kurt Hall, production stage manager; Mary Honour, assistant stage manager.



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"Indecent runs on the UMKC campus in Spencer Theatre and continues through Feb. 10. The show runs about 100 minutes without intermission. Tickets can be purchased by phone or via the KC Rep website. www.kcrep.org

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