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"The Understudy" Takes Viewers Behind the Scenes

By Dana Casadei on May 30, 2012

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Walking into Williamston Theatre there's always a sense of familiarity, kind of like coming home. Whether it be having the lead of the last play giving you your tickets or having someone from the play in December showing you to your seat, it's obvious that everyone that's a part of this theatre loves it so much that they're constantly there, helping out in anyway needed.

"The Understudy" does much of the same; with some faces that have been seen before, and one new one, gracing the stage in the Rob Roznowski directed show.

The concept of "The Understudy," written by Theresa Rebeck, Pulitzer Prize nominee and creator of NBC's *Smash*, is much like the TV show Rebeck helped create, except without the singing and drama that at times can come off as obscene. In other words this is a much better, and more realistic version, of *Smash*, even with its flaws.



As the play begins it's shown quickly that Harry (Tony Caselli) is a little bit bitter about where he is in his life, no matter how many times he tells the audience he isn't, going on a rant of how awful movies have become lately.

Harry, played with the right blend of defeat and humor by Caselli, is the understudy of the understudy Jake (Drew Parker), a big Hollywood action star trying to be taken more seriously by doing Broadway.

Caselli, who's Williamston's Artistic Director and most recently directed "The Usual: A Musical Love Story," proves he belongs just as much on the stage as he does directing the actors on it.

Parker's Jake is drastically different than his last Williamston character, the rough and mysterious Injun Bill in "Dead Man's Shoes," and Parker pulls him off flawlessly, showcasing the major differences between these two men, even though they are both struggling with where they land on the totem pole of both Hollywood and Broadway.

Both have a lot to learn and that's where Stage Manager Roxanne comes in, Michelle Held in her Williamston debut. But it isn't all peaches and cream the moment she sees Harry, a ex who broke her heart, and the hot mess of the day begins, where just about anything that could go wrong does.

Held is extremely fun to watch as she struggles with the unseen pothead crewmember that keeps putting the wrong sets on the stage, clutching onto her script as if the stage will crumble around her the minute she lets go. Held also brings some emotional depth to the character, who has more layers to her than what's seen at first glance.

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News & Multimedia

The Lansing organizer for the "Move to Amend"

Even though at times the story wanders, and I wish that I could have gotten a more complete conclusion to the Roxanne and Harry subplot, the trio make up for the errors in Rebeck's script, taking the viewers behind the scenes in a story that will always be timely.

*Contains mature language

"The Understudy" is playing now until June 17 at [Williamston Theatre](#).

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Dana Casadei

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movement discusses a "Corporate Personhood" resolution proposal before the Lansing City Council on August 6, 2012.

Are corporations persons, too? The "Move to Amend Barnstorming Tour" featuring David Cobb visited Lansing on June 28, 2012. Cobb provided an accessible, fast-paced analysis of the history of "Corporate Personhood" in the U.S.

During his recent visit to Lansing, Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear talked about aging Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in Van Buren County, Michigan, on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Anika Fassia of Public Works: The Center for the Public Sector, talked to the recent Michigan

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Summit for progressives about a Michigan narrative that frames policy discussions in terms of community values.

George Goehl of National Peoples' Action says progressives need to re-envision the economy and suggests a strategy for activists attending the 2012 Michigan Summit in Lansing on May 12, 2012.

Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear talks to the Peace Education Center about Ontario, Canada's plans for a deep underground dump (DUD) for nuclear waste on the Great Lakes.

"I never thought I'd see the day I would be fighting my grandmother's fight..." said Melissa Osborn in addressing the United Against the

War on Women rally in Lansing.

Kathie Kuhn of the Peace Education gives a spoken word performance of "Hey, Now" at the United Against the War on Women rally in Lansing.

"Let Freedom Ring - P.A. 4 Emergency Manager Act Forum" was a public forum on Michigan's local government takeover law that directly assaults American democratic liberties. Rev. Edward Pinkney of Benton Harbor was the keynote speaker, followed by a panel discussion and audience Q&A. This is the recording Rev. Pinkney's keynote address.

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