

InterAct Theatre Company presents Kareem Fahmy's *American Fast*

by Josh Herren

Kareem Fahmy's new play, *American Fast*, currently onstage at InterAct in its rolling world premiere with the National New Play Network, raises intriguing questions. How do we navigate the delicate balance between cultural tradition and personal authenticity? What responsibilities do athletes in the public eye have regarding sharing their personal choices? And how crucial is teamwork when striving to establish an individual legacy?

Co-directed by InterAct founder and artistic director Seth Rozin with Zaina Yasmin Dana, the play delves into a championship season of NCAA women's basketball through the perspective of Khady Salama (Amel Khalil). Khady, a talented but self-centered basketball player, is thrust into the national spotlight when her mother (Hend Ayoub) and coach (Ontaria Kim Wilson) reveal during a press conference that she will be fasting during Ramadan. Salama, already ambivalent about fasting during the playoffs, now faces the pressure and scrutiny of social media and the press: she is expected to serve as a role model for Muslim girls everywhere.

The premise is captivating, brimming with compelling tension and intricate dynamics. However, the play struggles to fully realize its weighty concept and ends up taking on more than it can handle. It's understandable—the characters of Khady and her mother are captivating, and the temptation to explore every facet of Khady's life is apparent. As a result, scenes involving her coach and boyfriend Gave (Abdul Sesay) are given nearly equal stage time, diluting the focus. Additionally, the play requires Khalil to portray basketball games by herself onstage, which appears somewhat awkward, and might benefit from more interpretive movement.

Thankfully, the production shines due to the exceptional performances of its talented cast. Khalil, in particular, delivers a knockout portrayal of the often impenetrable and occasionally unlikeable lead character. She infuses Khady with a huge swagger that conceals deep-seated insecurities. Ayoub's performance goes beyond the confines of stereotypical images of overbearing motherhood, presenting a multi-dimensional portrait of a woman grappling with grief.

The physical production boasts an impressive appearance. With a deceptively minimal set by Melpomene Katakolos, Jorge Cousineau's beautiful projections are used dynamically. These projections, much like the acting, significantly enhance the material. While the script may have its inconsistencies, the production's visual cohesion is commendable.