

## 'The Mark of Zorro' Nails Swordsman, Markedly Complicates Cast, Botches Dialect

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Sometimes less, of course, is more. Live theater often knows that better than anyone. That's exactly the shrill reminder Chicago's Lifeline Theatre needed in Katie McLean's adaptation of the beloved Zorro book by Johnston McCulley.

With 13 actors on stage and 19 additional among management and tech, it's admirable to see so many components attempt to tick soundly together. Unfortunately, this decision didn't yield an idyllic symphony. Instead, the choice revealed patently weak links.



Zorro (James Elly, top) teaches Captain Ramon (Robert Kauzlaric) a bloody lesson in "The Mark of Zorro".

*Photo credit: Suzanne Plunkett*

"The Mark of Zorro" would have been exceedingly enhanced by replicating the talent of James Elly – who in his Clark Kent-like mode played Don Diego Vega and then played Zorro when it was time for Superman – as well as Rosa de Guindos as Lolita.

His no-romance attempts to woo her were surprisingly comical. Her disenchanted response to his worldly goods is what you'd expect from a highly desired maiden. The two – actually, the three of them – ultimately concocted chemistry as Don Diego Vega took a page from Zorro's quixotic ways.

As Don Diego Vega, James Elly's penchant for recurring "fatigue" was a pleasantly unexpected adaptation. Still, some could consider the script hokey and those turned off by the purposefully overdramatic and campy might find themselves repelled.

It's difficult to know whether dialect coach Elise Kauzlaric was lacking in her critical duty to transform the overall speech of this production or if

the predominantly non-Latino cast just couldn't authentically sell the Latino theme.

While the Persian James Elly nailed the accent, Larry Baldacci and Don Bender also adapted well. Baldacci and Bender deliver sound performances and stand out as supporting characters amid a large cast of many who merely blended in.

I instantly recognized Hanlon Smith-Dorsey from his 2007 production of "[Paradise Lost](#) [17]" at the TimeLine Theatre. This time around, he effectively disappears into the character of a friar and interchanges with the role of a governor.



Zorro (James Elly, right) wins the heart of the fiery Lolita (Rosa de Guindos) in Lifeline Theatre's adaptation of "The Mark of Zorro" by Johnston McCulley, which was adapted by Katie McLean and directed by Dorothy Milne.

*Photo credit: Suzanne Plunkett*

Manny Tamayo, though, sticks out as the plays unfortunate sore thumb. While no one could possibly come away thinking he lacks energy, there are much subtler ways to redirect it where he's truly feeling it rather than merely bellowing it. Tamayo is also a director at The Factory Theater in Chicago.

Though it's unclear why production photography made such a stark statement about Zorro's mark on James Elly's back but then never showed it in the actual play, the illustrious "Z" did light up momentarily on a wooden post.

Despite palpable pros and cons in a play that was absolutely too lengthy, the fundamental tenant of romance and the importance of courting is an exquisitely worthy message to bring center stage.

*"The Mark of Zorro" has been extended to run through July 20, 2008 (initially through June 22, 2008) at the Lifeline Theatre at 6912 N. Glenwood Ave. in Chicago. The play runs on Fridays at 7:30 p.m., Saturdays at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. [Tickets](#) [18] cost \$25.*

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