

Theater Review: Kicky ‘The Soccer Player in the Closet’ from Nothing Without a Company

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 25, 2019 - 6:46pm

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CHICAGO – Connecting to the theater collective Nothing Without a Company means a couple of things. One, you may visit parts of Chicago you’ve never seen before – in this case a plant store in an industrial area south of Humboldt Park – and two, you will see some daring and outside-the-box stagings. “The Soccer Player in the Closet” is their latest production – a World Premiere – and it provides what the title implies and beyond. The play runs through March 17th, 2019. [Click here](#) [19] for more details, including ticket information.



Play Rating: **4.0/5.0**

The loft above a plant shop is the setting, and the audience sits within what is the title character’s apartment. The vibe is odd as the play commences, with the occupation and motivations of the main character not entirely clear. Once those explanations come, the story works on a couple levels, and is delivered by a diverse and talented cast. Ryan Oliveira, the author of the play, has a notion of how life emits a difficult rhythm when a human being is off the rails, and that it is spread to all the fellow travelers surrounding them ... it’s a vivid 90 minute visit to his headspace. The director Christopher Sylvie uses the ensemble cast and their setting effectively and symbolically.



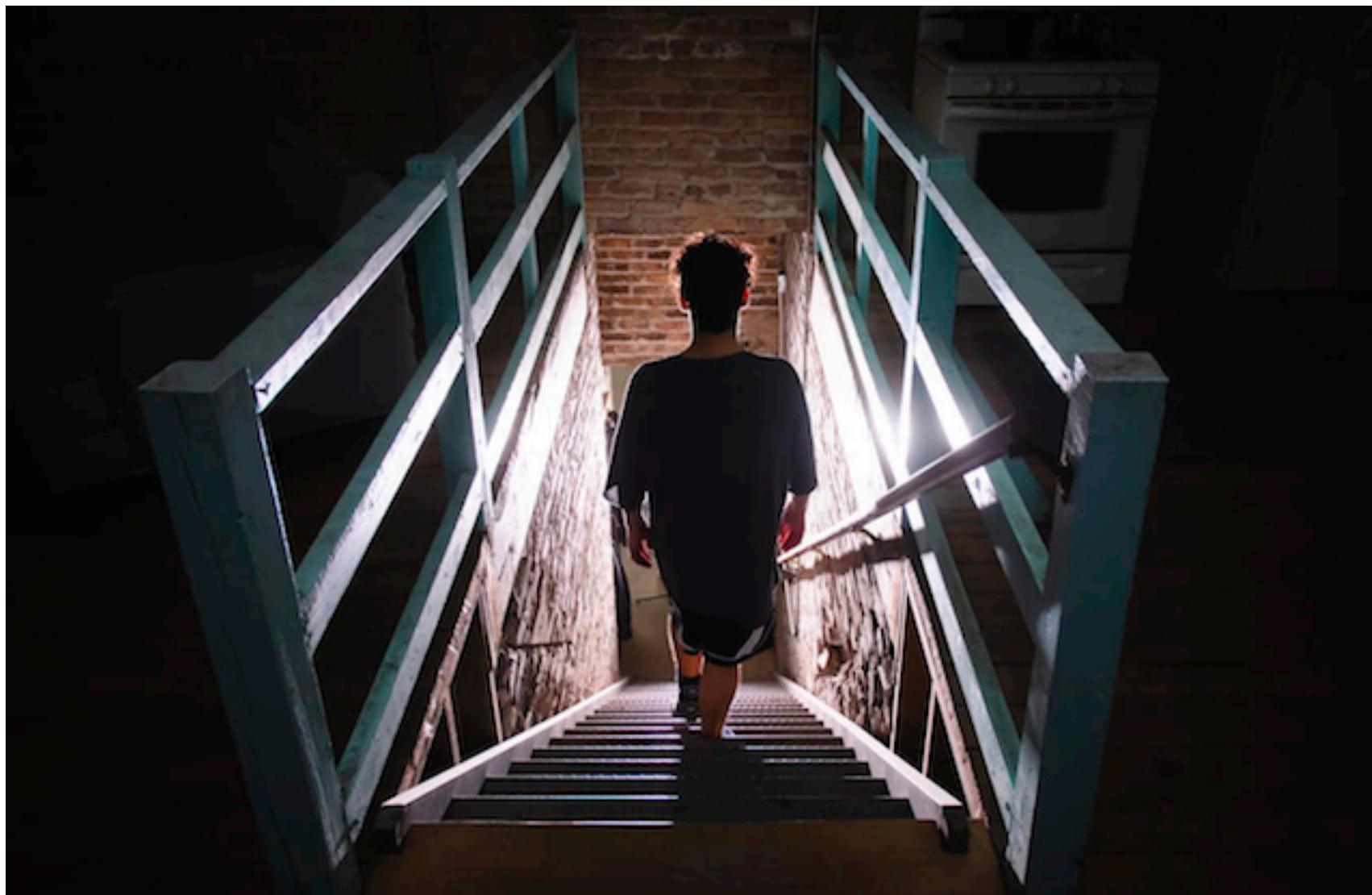
Nothing Without a Company’s ‘The Soccer Player in the Closet’

Photo credit: Matthew Gregory Hollis for Nothing Without a Company

Cristiano (Rolando Serrano) is a avid soccer player ... not physical soccer, but online "eSoccer" ... so much so that he is has cleaned up in prize money, before hitting a depression wall and refusing to leave his apartment. This perplexes his high school aged cousin Cobi (Julian Serna), who Cristiano is helping to get to college. Cobi's sister Milena (Viviana Uribe) is begging the recluse to get outside, even to date an online soccer opponent named Bastian (Alex Roggow). An external force intervenes as his landlord and sister Leona (Amelia Bethel) announces that she is selling her plant store and the apartment he occupies.

Cristiano's presence inside the apartment is all encompassing, and gives the premise two levels in which it inhabits... sometimes action takes place in flashback, and other times the present eats away at the characters. The mystery lies in the character of Cristiano, and Rolando Serrano delivers him with a passion and enigma that keeps the other characters on their toes. His life as a gamer and online critic is fascinating as well. It both motivates his actions and builds the barrier that prevents him from living with normalcy.

The whole cast is in the moment with the situation, and most of the laughs that come out it are their reaction to the absurdity of a "thing that won't leave" and the type of "job" he has. Bastian is the most cunning in this way, as he master manipulates both Cobi and Cristiano when he needs to. Alex Roggow has a good time with the character, both in physical seduction and the mental gymnastics with the crew. While not personified as a villain, his my-way-or-the-highway personality is an effective crowbar in opening up Oliviera's script.



The Stairway to Either Redemption or the Plant Store in 'The Soccer Player in the Closet'

Photo credit: Matthew Gregory Hollis for Nothing Without a Company

Amelia Bethel's Leona and Viviana Uribe's Milena are a mini comedy team in the story, constantly relying on arcade rituals to understand the situation ("I've got many more that I've found on the internet," says Leona). They are the ones most trying to get to the roots of Cristiano's refusal to leave, and their characterizations actually hit pay dirt by the time the conclusion takes place.

So it's a good outing to visit this fictional loft space above a plant store... which is an ACTUAL loft space above a plant store. Leave it to the adventurous Nothing Without a Company to find the "lit" in literal.

Nothing Without a Company presents "The Soccer Player in the Closet," Thursday-Sundays at 7pm through March 17th, 2019, at Christy Webber Farm and Garden (2nd Floor), 2833 West Chicago Avenue, Chicago. Featuring Rolando Serrano, Julian Serna, Viviana Uribe, Alex Roggow and Amelia Bethel. Written by Ryan Oliveira. Directed by Christopher Sylvie. For more information about Nothing Without a Company, [Click here](#) [20]



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