

## Theater Review: Nothing Without a Company's 'Pakalolo Sweet' Takes on Mental Health

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 28, 2019 - 9:06am

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CHICAGO – Playwright Hannah li-Epstein is a Hawaiian native who is bringing her unique point of view regarding that U.S.“State of Mind” to the Chicago stage. The theater group Nothing Without a Company presents her latest, “Pakalolo Sweet.” through October 5th, 2019, at the Berger Mansion in the Edgewater neighborhood. [Click here](#) [22] for more details, including ticket information.



Play Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The intimate stage play – in partnership with the Aloha Center Chicago – focuses on intergenerational marijuana cultivation (the title refers to a strain of weed), and the imminent backlash that such an operation would have on the human soul. The pressures are on everyone, and they express themselves in different ways through the characters, especially the hapless Junior Boy. li-Epstein explores his mental health imbalance especially, as he reacts to the simmering circumstances around him, including his pregnant girlfriend.



Nothing Without a Company



The setting is a modest house in Hawaii, as Junior Boy (Dean Santiago) and Nani (Sharon Pasia) blissfully do karaoke together, as they await the birth of their first child. Junior Boy is an operations man for a marijuana farm, one that is facilitated by the optimistic Pops (Jae Renfrow) and managed by Papa (Scott Hanada). Their good friend Kahe (Victoria Wang) is on hand, and their hanging out is interrupted by a problem in the fields, challenging Junior Boy's tentative grip on his own reality.

This is a prequel by Hannah li-Epstein, to 2018's "Not One Batu," part of an intended "drug" trilogy. Her Hawaii roots permeates the characters she creates, as they speak the island version of English, and live within the confinement of the ocean locked island. Known mostly as a tourist destination on the mainland, Hawaii is also home for the descendants of the native peoples, who in general live a hand-to-mouth existence. This also includes illicit drugs – both in trade and use – and this play's theme focuses on the intense and sometimes criminal pressures that the weed trade has on its practitioners.

The actors, recruited from Chicago, have a tentative grip on interpreting the pure island native, but still have the passion within the characters. Jae Renfrow as Pops reprises his character from "Not One Batu" and has the most fun with him. Dean Santiago, Sharon Pasia and Victoria S. Wang are less confident in their portrayals, at times ratcheting the pace of the dialogue so quickly that it was sometimes indecipherable. But once that top-of-the-play energy is burned off, the drama takes over, and the actors flow within it.



Nothing Without a Company

The storefront theater might of Nothing Without a Company is always about bold statements, inclusive casting and outside-the-black-box journeys. Their visits to Hawaii may not be the paradise that is constantly sold to tourists, but it points toward the humanity that is evident and empathetic to all of us.

*Nothing Without a Company, in partnership with Lanialoha Lee and Aloha Center Chicago, Presents "Pakalolo Sweet" through October 5th, 2019, at the Berger Park Coach House, 6205 North Sheridan Road, Chicago. Featuring Dean Santiago, Sharon Pasia, Victoria S. Wang, Jae K. Renfrow and Scott Handa. NOTE: the role of Junior Boy will be portrayed by Bobby Wilhelmson through the rest of the run. Written by Hannah li-Epstein. Directed by Rachel Slavick. For more information about Nothing Without a Company, [click here](#). [23]*



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