

**Theater Review: The Great Pretender**  
**Reviewer: Gordon Parks**  
**Organization: Gordy Awards**  
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Hiding behind a mask is a life draining experience as revealed by playwright Ivy Hawkins in the Heralds of Hope Theater's production of *The Great Pretender*. The play is a serious but light hearted presentation of lies, kept secrets, and infidelity. Alice Thomas producer and Percy Thomas work closely to bring this original play to the stage.

In *The Great Pretender*, five successful women, who are great friends, gather to celebrate the engagement of a younger member in the group. The intent is for Ida (Billie Taylor) to communicate to her younger sister Nadine (Alicia Hanf) that she was not ready for marriage. The party is masked in a ritual which obscures the intent of the party. During the course of the play each of the women reveals a secret that they have been hiding, which at a subconscious level impact their relationships with each other.

Ida is dealing with the infidelity of her husband while attempting to provide solace and comfort to her girlfriend Ruth (Eunice Seagraves) who was struggling to deal with her own marital discord. All of the women attempt to provide advice while keeping their own relationship issues with men a secret. Eva (Brianna West) started dating her best friend Monique's (Brenda Harper-Goffney) boyfriend without any consideration for her friend's feelings. Monique had stuffed her feelings until they were alone at Ida's home on the day of the party.

Casting for this show was excellent, all players performed their roles expertly, creating live and interesting characters. Monique provided impactful comedy relief with her timing a delivery of comedic lines. Several of her lines brought raucous laughter from the audience. Perry (Arnold Aubrey) was convincing as the unfaithful husband. He was so convincing in his role that the audience chanted "don't give him another chance" when it appeared that Ida was considering giving him a second chance. Cherrie (Dai Nguyen) and Doctor Able (Andrew Goffney) performed cameo roles to great audience applause.

Billed as a dramatic comedy, *The Great Pretender* delves in the complication of building meaningful marital relationships and the complexity of developing authentic friendships. It is a highlight of the production that all characters were relatable and used dialog associated with real people in society dealing with complex relationship. During the talk backs, the audiences, men and women, indicated that the play had a message that women of all ages, especially young women needed to hear.

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