

Witty and moving ‘Last Match’ is served beautifully at 1st Stage

A story told with lots of tennis about heartbreak that can forever change you.

By **Kendall Mostafavi** - June 14, 2023

1st Stage has opened a moving production of *The Last Match* by Anna Ziegler. The play takes place during a U.S. Open Semifinals’ heated pairing of American favorite Tim Porter and up-and-coming Russian player Sergei Sergeyev. The men engage in a brutal back-and-forth of volleys and banter while questioning their choices and battling their self-doubts.

Jessica Alexandra Cancino’s set is a tiered tennis court, with both players facing the audience (as if their opponent) and with stairs along either sideline allowing them to run up and down switching sides between games. The clever design gives Director Alex Levy the ability to match the verbal exchange with action that represents the actual physicality of the sport while boosting the energy and pace of the show.



Fabiolla Da Silva (Galina), Drew Kopas (Tim), Ethan Miller (Sergei), and Lynette Rathnam (Mallory) in 'The Last Match.' Photo by Teresa Castracane.

Drew Kopas plays Tim, the American megastar who’s dancing around the idea of retirement to spend more time with his two-month-old son and wife, Mallory, played by

Lynette Rathnam. His opponent, Sergei (Ethan Miller), is the younger, rising star itching to take his place on top, with Fabiola Da Silva as his vehemently supportive girlfriend, Galina. The four-person cast is outstanding in their roles, with great chemistry and genuine human interaction.

Ethan Miller (Sergei) and Drew Kopas (Tim) in 'The Last Match.' Photos by Teresa Castracane.

Each man walks the audience through their journey, highlighting moments of their past that had an impact. Ziegler's material is witty and potentially difficult, as the focus switches with the strokes, in a constant stream of memory mixed with the real-time of the match. But the cast takes on the challenge with ease, resulting in an exhausting yet inspiring 90 minutes straight of intense dialogue.

The play deals with hard topics like infertility, losing loved ones, and the struggle to find meaning and purpose in life.

Kopas and Rathnam as Tim and Mallory demonstrate the ups and downs of even the happiest of marriages. They struggle with Tim's career, the strain it causes their marriage, and the repeated agony of losing pregnancies. The toll this takes on Rathnam's Mallory is devastating to watch.

Miller and Da Silva's younger Sergei and Galina are still in the earlier, more fiery stage of their relationship but have dealt with their share of hardship. Miller emotionally recounts Sergei's separation from his family and the sacrifices made for him to be a

professional athlete. Da Silva's Galina pushes her partner and herself to look past what they have overcome and fight for their future.

The Last Match is a story about love, balance, and what defines an individual. Does your career define you? Does your family? Your pain? Your loss? Each competitor, from their own perspective and experience, deserves to win. And as the audience sees their lives unfold, it's clear that neither player is wrong.

The show does not give you the resolution you think you want. I will not give away the ending for those who have not experienced it yet. But it echoes reality in its uncertainty, seeming unfairness, and mix of disappointment with utter astonishment.

The Last Match is a wonderful piece, performed beautifully by Kopas, Rathnam, Miller, and Da Silva, who collectively convey the heartbreak of real-life experiences that can forever change you.

Also, a mention is necessary to dialect coach Adrienne Nelson for the fantastic work with the accents.

1st Stage's *The Last Match* is full of beauty and pain, confusion and conflict. And tennis. Lots of tennis. But you don't have to be familiar with the sport to identify with the pain of loss, the fear of failure, and the true longings of the heart.

Running Time: Approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

The Last Match plays through July 2, 2023, at 1st Stage, 1524 Spring Hill Road, Tysons, VA. **Getting there.** General admission tickets are \$50, with discounts **available** and Thursday evening tickets are \$35. Tickets can be purchased **online** or by calling the box office at 703-854-1856. The first 20 tickets for each performance are only \$20. Plus, a YES pass for high school students in Fairfax County offers free subscriptions. See details **here**.

The program for *The Last Match* is online **here**.

COVID Safety: 1st Stage is now a mask-optional space, with select mask-required performances offered for each show. Mask-required performances for *The Last Match* will be on June 16 at 8:00 pm and June 23 at 8:00 pm. See 1st Stage's complete COVID Safety Information **here**.

The Last Match

By Anna Ziegler

CAST

Tim: Drew Kopas; Mallory: Lynette Rathnam; Sergei: Ethan Miller; Galina: Fabiola Da Silva; Understudies: Patrick Joy and Chloe Lateulere

CREATIVE TEAM

Director: Alex Levy; Scenic Design: Jessica Alexandra Cancino; Lighting Design: Alberto Segarra; Props Design: Cindy Jacobs; Stage Manager: Sarah Usary; Sound Design: Kenny Neal; Dialect Coach: Adrienne Nelson; Costume Design: Danielle Preston; Intimacy Coordinator: Lorraine Ressegger; Stage Manager: Sarah Usary; Artistic Director: Alex Levy; Associate Artistic Director: Deidra Lawan Starnes; Assistant Costume Design: Courtney Johnson

Kendall Mostafavi

Kendall is a local writer and performer. As a longtime metro-area resident, Kendall has been a dedicated patron of the theater and arts scene and, especially as a mother to five beautiful humans, understands the importance of supporting live entertainment and keeping the arts thriving in the community. She eagerly awaits the opportunity to experience and share more of what the area has to offer through the beauty of imagination and interpretation of art in all of its forms.