

# Family conflict drives drama in 'Blood Boundary'

by JOHN BRANDENBURG For The Oklahoman • Published: April 13, 2017 5:00 AM CDT • Updated: April 13, 2017 5:00 AM CDT



From left, Zack Morris (Sac and Fox), Cynthia Cunningham (Cherokee), Summer Morgan (Kiowa) and Dillon Griffiths (Choctaw) rehearse Oklahoma playwright Vicki Lynn Mooney's "Blood Boundary," which will be the featured production of Oklahoma City Theatre Company's Eighth Annual Native American New Play Festival. [Photo provided]

Family drama and history came together — and never seemed forced — in Friday's staging of "Blood Boundary" by Vicki Lynn Mooney.

The Native American New Play Festival's winning entry was performed at Oklahoma Contemporary's Arts Center Theatre, 3000 Pershing Blvd. It continues with shows at 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday.

Period music and a simple family home set prepared us for the play,

set after World War I ended and just before the 1921 Tulsa race riots.

Dillon Griffiths, as James, was a catalyst to the action, renewing contact with his Oklahoma roots before before returning to study medicine in Europe.

Griffitts gave a finely nuanced, yet appealing performance, finding out he may have more Cherokee blood than he thought after he meets his uncle Billy.

Zack T. Morris was forceful, yet understated and folksy as Billy, a railroad porter who wants to turn the house into a "hospitality" center for all races.

Clad in black with natty orange braids, Morris soon won over spectators, as well as James, as events make him conclude that he must arm himself for the coming storm.

Cast as Tassie, Billy's daughter and an aspiring artist with some black and Cherokee blood, Cynthia Cunningham supplied "love interest" with great modesty and restraint.

Misty Red Elk was roguishly charming as Fain Cuddahy, who returns to meet her grandson, Virgil, and has to teach Tassie how to defend herself against men like him!

Juggling appealing and disturbing characteristics well, Dillon Pierce offered a well-balanced, almost Rabelaisian performance, as the racist Virgil.

In a white undershirt topped with a black bowler, Pierce came across as an overgrown child who loves drinking and driving a new car too fast.

Summer Rae Morgan filled another key role well, helping to balance the family equation as the more overtly Victorian, yet inwardly strong, great-aunt Jane.

Giving us a magical ending of sorts when Tassie and James escape to pursue their dreams in Paris only to hear news of the terrible events back home, the play is a must-see.

Directed by Randi LeClair, "Blood Boundary," which culminates Oklahoma City Theatre Company's Native American New Play Festival on a high note, is highly recommended.

— **John Brandenburg,**

**for The Oklahoman**