

STEVE WEHMEIER AND
DAWAUN LAWLER

DEEP-FRIED AND DELICIOUS

Superior Donuts shines a bright, comic light on generational differences

The Very Little Theatre's current main stage production *Superior Donuts*, directed by Stanley Coleman, is a work of both comedic and dramatic realism, like a buddy film with a twist of gut-wrenching social commentary.

The interwoven genres at work here are not too surprising, as it comes from playwright Tracy Letts, who's most famous work *August: Osage County* deals with the dark underbelly of Americana as a dramedy.

Superior Donuts sheds light on aspects of Americana through the lens of one place — a Chicago doughnut shop in the 2000s. As for VLT's set, it's the doughnut shop we've all been in, the one with an obsolete menu, cracked tile walls and few customers. And who owns it? A draft-dodging Deadhead named Arthur Przybyszewski, played by Steve Wehmeier. (I couldn't help but think this would morph into a Voodoo Doughnuts inception story — it didn't.)

Enter Franco Wicks, played by Dawaun Lawler, a 21-year-old man and Arthur's only employee, who wants to revamp both the shop and Arthur's wardrobe.

The two men share a chemistry onstage that equates them to other unlikely buddy duos like Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker or Shrek and Donkey. These characters act as foils to each other while providing a character for both generations to identify with. Arthur represents the futility of the past, while Franco stands for hope of the future. *Superior Donuts* illustrates how these roles can suddenly, and painfully, switch.

Scene breaks come in the form of Arthur's monologues about the Chicago of yore, and stories from his life, including fleeing the draft in Canada. Most of the play is spoken in quick dialogue ending in punch lines, providing a cathartic release from the intense themes.

Lawler was an audience favorite, getting the most laughs for his lines. "It's not like the Grateful Dead will have a reunion anytime soon," he says, while criticizing Arthur's ponytail and sloppy attire. *Superior Donuts* is ripe with these kinds of jokes, seemingly tailor-made for Eugene audiences, and its fast, witty writing both sheds light on and connects generational differences.

Superior Donuts not only entertains, but will also make you reconsider the emotional power of a pastry. ■

Very Little Theatre's Superior Donuts runs through June 13; \$12-\$17.

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