

PORNOGRAPHY, POT AND THE NEXT WAVE OF FEMINISM

Oregon Contemporary Theatre presents *Rapture, Blister, Burn*

What would you give up for a fabulous, famous life of brilliant academia? What would you sacrifice for the sacred, animal warmth of family? Pulitzer-nominated *Rapture, Blister, Burn* digs into these uncomfortable questions of feminism.

Playwright Gina Gionfriddo's setup for the exploration of this issue is unapologetically contrived: Women representing three generations of the feminist movement come together to discuss modern feminism in the face of slasher films, pornography and America's rapidly changing sexual morality. Under the surface of this discussion roils the old question — can a woman pursue a career, a marriage and raise a family?

The play is absolutely worth seeing. The writing is clever and searingly funny. While the play is about feminists, it shouldn't be considered a feminist play. You'll either enjoy a fresh perspective on Phyllis Schlafly, or write strongly worded letters to the playwright in your head all week long.

William "Bill" Hulings tackles direction on this production with good results. The mechanics of this particular play call for strong direction to uphold the suspension of disbelief. Hulings uses overt, almost stylized blocking to engage audience attention

through the academic discussions, and subtle glances, to humanize the play's more antiseptic edges.

Kari Boldon Welch is endearing as the chattering homemaker Gwen. Elise Barberis brings energy as Avery. The delightful Ellen Chance rolls out the deadpan one-liners as Alice. Ruth Adele Mandsager's rock-star-academic-in-crisis is solid.

It is unfair that the only male character in a play about feminism is such a worthless sack of biodegradable material, but Michael Walker does an excellent job of lowering himself into the pot-smoking, porn-addicted Don.

How fitting that this play was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, but did not win. It's really talky, and a little too long. With sentiments along the lines of "We're so poor we can barely pay Julian's private school tuition," you could have a heyday deconstructing it from a socioeconomic perspective.

But the unfettered discussion of the practical experience of feminism is fascinating. *Rapture, Blister, Burn* is an intense, uncomfortable and hilarious examination of the fate of feminism in our modern world. ■

Rapture, Blister, Burn runs at Oregon Contemporary Theatre through Nov. 14.

ELISE BARBERIS, KARI BOLDON WELCH, MICHAEL WALKER, RUTH ADELE MANDSAGER AND ELLEN CHANCE IN *RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN*

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