

ROE

Norma McCorvey wants an abortion. Sarah Weddington needs a plaintiff to challenge Texas abortion law. Weddington is idealistic and ambitious. As one of very few female students in her graduating class in law school, she recounts professors who refused to call on a woman. McCorvey, for her part, is poor — a hard-living, free-loving lesbian. If she needs to sleep in the park, steal her dinner or sell drugs, she'll do it.

The legacy of this unlikely pair is well known: 26-year-old Weddington argues for McCorvey in the landmark abortion case of *Roe vs. Wade*, all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The nine judges wrestle with the difficult issue and ultimately affirm that women should have the right to choose to terminate a pregnancy.

But the story is just getting started.

Weddington and McCorvey go on to lead dramatically different lives, and the outcome of *Roe vs. Wade* sparks a political storm that neither woman could have predicted. *Roe*, now playing at OSF, follows the aftermath of the Supreme Court battle in a plot so twisted an author couldn't make it up.

Roe was written by Lisa Loomer (*Distracted*, *The Waiting Room*) as part of the American Revolutions cycle, in which OSF is commissioning up to 37 plays that highlight pivotal moments in U.S. history. Loomer's style is irreverent and funny. With characters correcting each other's historic details, fussing about how a scene should run and sharing their future obituaries with the audience, the script plays like a sassy history book that talks back.

Sara Bruner brings passion to her role as McCorvey. And I never questioned Sarah Jane Agnew as Weddington. An ensemble rotates ably through the rest of the roles, with a particularly stirring performance by Catherine Castellanos as Connie.

This is the most interesting play of the OSF's season. Loomer presents a balanced portrayal of the pro-choice and pro-life movements. The script portrays McCorvey and Weddington both as highly fallible individuals, and Loomer is particularly adept at showing how a poor, uneducated woman was used to promote a cause, and how that woman then used the system right back.

VIETGONE

Quang rides an old motorcycle across the American Southwest with his best friend hanging on the back. He smokes pot with hippies, fights rednecks and tries not to think about Tong. Back in the refugee camp, Tong is learning English, finding a new life for herself and breaking hearts like the villain in a Taylor Swift video.

These two refugees fled South Vietnam as it fell to communist forces in 1975. They are grateful to the U.S. military that helped fight their war against an invading army, but now feel lost in the extreme cultural reaction to that conflict.

Vietgone tells the love story of playwright Qui Nguyen's parents. The journey is certainly play-worthy — funny, heartbreaking and fascinating in its historical context. But it is the fresh, experimental way Nguyen tells the story that makes *Vietgone* such a strong entry at this year's OSF.

So often plays attempting to be modern and different do so at the expense of entertainment value for the audience. Every step Nguyen takes outside of the box, however, is purposeful, illuminating character and plot.

Nguyen has his Vietnamese characters speaking modern street slang. Americans speak English that sounds stilted and nonsensical. Thus the immigrants are familiar, while the Americans come across as foreign, putting audiences squarely in the shoes of the lead characters.

Rap, a genre that can so effectively express power and hope in a tough situation, is a perfect outlet for characters who have lost so much in a war. A montage of famous pop culture love scenes shows how the giddy first flights of romance are universal.







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