

# WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH EVERYTHING ON EARTH?

OCT opens its season with playwright Will Eno's masterful *Middletown*

**W**ill Eno's *Middletown*, playing now at Oregon Contemporary Theatre, is a masterfully written, beautifully produced effort that seeks the extraordinary in the everyday.

Directed by Tara Wibrew, *Middletown* is like a metaphysical global positioning system that the playwright uses to orient us to a cosmological map of seemingly ordinary moments.

I don't give away plots. And to delve too deeply into the interconnections between and among characters — or what they might represent, or what it might all mean — would dampen the audience's discovery and delight.

So, instead, I'll highlight some exquisite work.

Robert Hirsh surprises as a "Cop" who is decidedly not Andy Griffith; his arc is nuanced and sharp as we develop a macro view of who he is.

Joel Ibáñez as "Mechanic" drives a powerful through-line with a performance that's raw and honest. Mechanic is the emotional marrow of the play, subtly but consistently directing us to form new ideas.

As "Librarian," Sharon Sless's bubbly, nurturing candor reminds us that the civilized world would unravel quickly without those unflappable souls who seem put on Earth to navigate the bumpy process of being a human being for the rest of us.



Erica Towe resonates as a fragile, questioning "Mrs. Swanson." Prim and put together, she's purposeful and determined, but will she survive her loneliness?

And Russell Dyball as "John Dodge" carries his character's comic pathos right down the field for one touchdown after another. Granted, he has a lot of great zingers to work with, but it's Dyball's impeccable comic timing that sets the gold standard.

The cast is rounded out by dual roles, performed ably by Matt Holland, Jerilyn Armstrong, Kelly Oristano, Kari Welch, Shawn Bookey, Storm Kennedy and Sabrina Gross. A tip of the hat, in particular, to Holland's opening monologue and to Oristano as "Male Doctor," who offers the perfect blend of clinician and sage.

Jerry Hooker's set gleams; with its comforting right angles and floor-to-ceiling map, we know where we are and what happens here. Transitions between locations flow seamlessly, and together with lighting by Kat Matthews, sound by Bradley Branam and costumes by Jeanette DeJong, we're offered just enough visual guidance to continually lead our imaginations to new locales.

Pleasurable and richly immersive, Eno's sharp wit and crackling lyrical rhythm confidently volley dialogue across time and space.

This is anywhere. This is us.

*Middletown continues through Oct. 14 at Oregon Contemporary Theatre; tickets at [octheatre.org](http://octheatre.org).*

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