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A Riveting Take on Abortion Divide

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and their medical judgments rather than the concerns and rights of women.

The play devotes equal time to McCorvey's interesting and circuitous story. A lesbian who sought an abortion when she was poor and lacking either a partner or family support, McCorvey was a survivor of trauma in her childhood and early adulthood. Though not well-educated, McCorvey displays a certain canny scrappiness that, at times, seems quite admirable; at other times, she seems a good example of the long-term effects of

trauma and marginalization. Both women are realized on stage with compassion and depth. Sara Bruner captures the ways in which McCorvey masks her suffering with bravado and can sometimes be blind toward her own and others' manipulations. The world has taught her one must grab for things, making her an easy target for people on all sides of the controversy surrounding abortion. Having met Weddington and heard her speak, I think Sarah Jane Agnew likewise has perfectly captured a mixture of strong will and reserve and a certain primness that characterizes Weddington and that makes sense given her social location. Where Weddington is poised and controlled, McCorvey is opportunistic and, though she can be rough around the edges, sometimes catches things that others miss. It is a mark of the skill of the writing and directing and acting on display that both women are portrayed with sympathy, even while we get a sense of their flaws and the limits of their perspectives.

The same is true for the rest of the cast, all of whom take on multiple roles. Particularly notable are Catherine Castellanos as McCorvey's steadfast longtime partner, a Latina who loves and adapts to McCorvey's many efforts to reinvent herself, and Jeffrey King,

who invests a pastor prominent in Operation Rescue with believable conviction and dignity. Unlike so many conversations about abortion, this play proceeds with good awareness of the experiences of women of color, investing their particular concerns with significance, mindful of how rarely those concerns are reflected in conversations on either side of the issues.

The result is a masterwork of theater which keeps you riveted as it skillfully shifts, shifts, and shifts perspectives again and again throughout its two-and-a-half hour running time. For those of us who lived through these events, the play puts the pieces of memory together with illuminating angles on these stories, deepening your understanding of things you thought you already understood. And for younger audience members, this play offers context for understanding the historical and present-day stakes, awakening appropriate urgency and compassion.

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. She also serves on the Oregon Shakespeare Festival board. Her movie review column Opinionated Judge appears regularly in The Portland Observer. You can find her movie blog at opinionatedjudge.blogspot.com.



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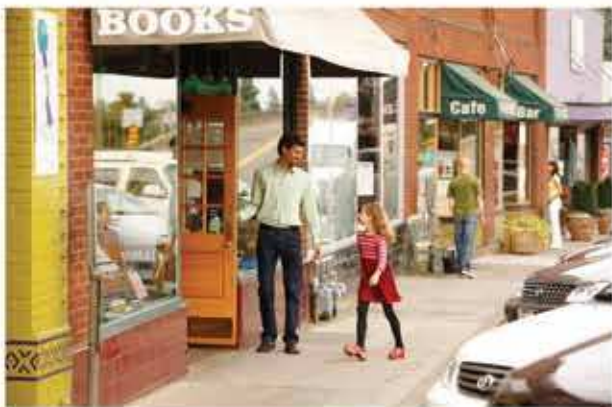
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