

Theater Review: Mary-Arrchie Theatre's 'Superior Donuts' is Authentic Chicago

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CHICAGO – The characters of “Superior Donuts” – as brilliantly interpreted by the cast in this production at the Mary-Arrchie Theatre – feel as though they’ve stepped from a Chicago neighborhood and began to perform their lives in the theater.



Play Rating: **4.0/5.0**

This is an authentic Chicago play about a fictional donut diner in the neighborhood of Uptown, in a play written by Tracy Letts (“August: Osage County”) and originally performed by local icon Steppenwolf Theatre in 2008. The Mary-Arrchie company, a couple of miles from where the play is set, brings the story home in an setting so intimate that there’s a tendency to want to sit at the counter and order a sinker. Each of the actors communicate their honesty by natural characterizations, to an extent where they create them right at the moment.

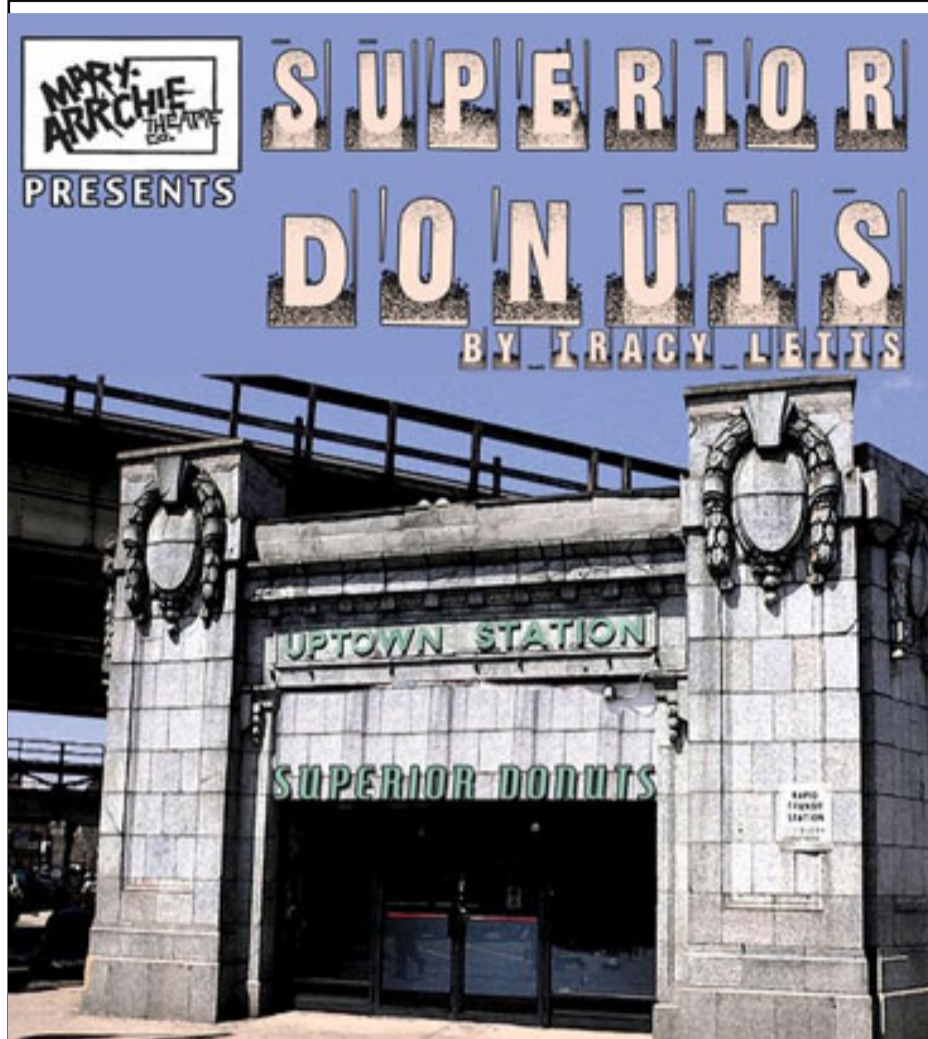


Richard Cotovsky (Arthur) and Preston Tate Jr. (Franco) in 'Superior Donuts'
Photo credit: MaryArrchie.com

Arthur Przybyszewski (Rich Cotovsky) is an old school donut shop owner in the slowly gentrifying Chicago neighborhood of Uptown. He is obviously burnt out, rarely opening his shop and even shrugging off some vandalism in the store, as the play opens. He is Chicago born and bred, raised in a traditional Polish household, and experienced the turmoil of the 1960s before eventually taking over his father's business. He is mourning the death of his ex-wife, and is separated from his teenage daughter. His life and purpose are slowly ebbing away.

He needs to hire some shop help, and turns to a local resident named Franco (Preston Tate Jr.), an excitable young African American college student. Franco brings a new energy to the atmosphere, encouraging Arthur to begin living again, which includes wooing a lady cop named Randy (Millie Hurley). But Franco has regrets as well, including massive gambling debts, and is pursued by a loan shark named Luther (Karl Potthoff). As the worlds of Arthur and Franco collide, all lives are in transition at the last independent donut shop in Uptown.

This is a play that features archetypes – 1960s Burnout, Loan Sharks, Immigrant Tough Guys, Bag Lady – and the book rarely rises above those types, but the performances are shaded in a way that everyone has their moment, and each character has such fine humanity that overall produces a warm empathy. This is an ensemble that connects the dots of the story and weaves them into a full picture of the changing Chicago, in one universe centered in a donut shop.



'Superior Donuts' runs through March 25th
Photo credit: MaryArrchie.com

Richard Cotovsky was born to play Arthur, and actually workshopped the part in the original Steppenwolf production, plus recently had a long run with the show in Washington, D.C. Every gesture and laconic turn of the character is felt through the actor, who inherently develops a moral compass that guides the narrative towards a redemptive conclusion. Every year Cotovsky sponsors the “Abbie Hoffman Festival” through the Mary-Arrchie theatre, and the spirit of Hoffman’s radicalism flows through the Arthur character, defining him without overstating how it also conflicted him. Cotovsky’s regal portrayal is the virtuous glue in the story.

Matt Miller directed the ensemble, and generates heat from the other characters as well. Preston Tate Jr. as Franco has fun tweaking the polar opposite Arthur, his genial enthusiasm lighting up the stage and prompting the hope that is necessary to motivate the shop owner. Millie Hurley instills a sense of pride into a lonely cop character whose patience is rewarded. The surprisingly delicate Bryan Kelly plays a hulking Russian muscleman, and proves that one gesture can speak a thousand languages.

Rarely are the street rhythms of Chicago captured in art, but “Superior Donuts” does it by depicting those rhythms, like a heartbeat that keeps responding to the inevitable in both time and evolution within the organism that is the city.

“Superior Donuts” is presented by Mary-Arrchie Theatre Company, 735 W. Sheridan Road, Chicago, Thursday-Saturday at 8pm, Sunday at 3pm, through March 25th, 2012. Featuring Richard Cotovsky, Preston Tate Jr., Millie Hurley, Dereck Garner, Susan Monts-Bologna, Karl Potthoff, Paige Smith, Bryan Kelly and Bradford Stevens. Written by Tracy Letts, directed by Matt Miller. [Click here](#) [15] for more information.



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