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Donuts, Catered Affairs and Experimental Cabaret: A Chicago Storefront Theatre Update

Robert Bullen | 6 hours ago

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With 200-plus theatre companies in Chicago, at any given day there is always something to see -- particularly if you've a daring theatrical appetite. So where to start? Here's a trio of shows that have made an impact over my past month of theatre going.

A Catered Affair*Porchlight Music Theatre | through April 1*

It doesn't surprise me that *A Catered Affair* didn't find success when the show opened on Broadway in 2008 -- a small and subtle musical is a hard sell when we're talking Broadway ticket prices. However, in Chicago's theatre scene, where tickets are usually a fraction of the cost, we embrace such things. And Porchlight Music Theatre's thoughtful production of this chamber musical by Harvey Fierstein (book) and John Bucchino (music and lyrics) makes a strong case for this show to get another look. Some very strong performances (particularly Rebecca Finnegan as the wounded family matriarch who believes a lavish wedding for her only daughter will solve the family's deeply rooted guilts) and first-rate music direction (by Doug Peck) make this production a must-see. Just wish they'd fix those pesky acoustic issues in Stage 773's black box space.

Fulton Street Sessions*TUTA Theatre Chicago | through March 25*

One hears the phrase "cabaret-style production" and immediately thinks of pantomime, piano, poetry readings and pretension. Thankfully TUTA Theatre Chicago's highly unique and often thrilling production is none of these things. The show works best when the inventive ensemble takes everyday events (such as sitting naked onstage in a large bucket) and builds on them (sitting naked onstage in a large bucket while people in snowsuits pour cold water over you). There's also a wonderful moment where the cast breaks into a karaoke-tastic rendition of "I Just Called To Say I Love You" that I think says something about the unifying force of Stevie Wonder, fleeting though it may be. In short: this ain't your mother's experimental cabaret.

Superior Donuts*Mary-Arrchie Theatre Company | through March 25*

As a follow-up to his groundbreaking and Pulitzer Prize-winning *August: Osage County*, Tracy Letts' *Donuts* is a shockingly simple play, relatively speaking. There are no histrionics, no

sudden third act revelations that turn the entire show on its head. No: it's a simple, straightforward and beautifully constructed play about people and relationships and the pain and necessity of change. And Mary-Arrchie's spot-on production, the first local production following Steppenwolf's 2008 premiere of the play, features a riveting lead performance by Richard Cotovsky, Mary-Arrchie founding artistic director. If you want a quintessential Chicago storefront experience, check out *Donuts*.

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