

# Dobama successfully serves up 'Superior Donuts'

April 28, 2015

6:33 AM MST

## Superior Donuts at Dobama Theatre

Rating: ★★★★★

Generations of dysfunction shape the characters in [Dobama Theatre](#)'s production of "Superior Donuts," playing now through May 24, 2015. The [Tracy Letts](#) play is clever, thoughtful, and will leave audience members jonesing for a pastry.



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Frying up friendship and fighting spirit, the comedic drama begins with the aftermath of a robbery in the [Superior Donuts](#) shop, located in uptown Chicago. Tables and chairs are overturned, garbage is strewn about, and the work “Pussy” is spray painted on the wall inside the donut shop owned by Arthur Przybyszewski (Joel Hammer). Trying to pronounce that? The “P” is silent! Officer Randy Osteen (Amy Fritsche) and Officer James Bailey (Lashawn Little) are surveying the scene and questioning Max Tarasov (Allan Byrne), who has found the mess.

When Arthur finally arrives, he seems unfazed and quietly distracted as he starts to clean up. Max has definite ideas about who did it, as he’s not ashamed to loudly blame the “little black hoodlums” in the neighborhood. In his don’t-screw-with-me Russian accent, he then casually throws a “no offense” over his shoulder at Officer Bailey, who is black. After failing to get Arthur to sell him the store, Max leaves to tend to his own business next door.

After Officer Osteen unsuccessfully tries to get Arthur to ask her out, she leaves him alone in his desolate shop to stew in his cruller-filled crabbiness. But Franco Wicks (Robert Hunter) needs a job, and he’s not paying attention to the “Closed” sign on the door.

Franco blows into Arthur’s life like a fresh jolt of caffeine flowing into the dark crater of a morning slumber. From the moment they meet, the men mix it up with each other. They challenge, they surprise, they test one another. As Franco learns to make donuts, he challenges Arthur’s calm, boring “normal” by pushing him to consider huge possibilities. As a young author, Franco is full of words and whimsy in a world of gray sadness.

The play explores stereotypes, generational misunderstandings, and cultural eccentricities. We see black and white, Russian and Polish, officer and citizen, old guy and young man, bookie and debtor.

With the regrets of his military-dodging past presented in solo-lit monologues, Hammer’s unassuming portrayal of Arthur is mellow and meaningful. Arthur holds in his emotions, shut tight like a sprung bear trap. In these in-between moments, however, his soul is open and searching.

With a head full of dreams and a belief in endless possibilities, Hunter’s optimistic presentation of Franco is spontaneous and motivating. Franco is full of promise and energy, even though he’s facing a huge gambling debt.

The relationship between Arthur and Franco is complicated, but complementary. They verbally spar with each other, learning a little more about humanity and each other with each personal bout.

The other characters are intriguing. Byrne’s Max is a Russian whirlwind of delight. Every time he sets foot on stage, the eccentricity comes out to play. He is a bull in the china shop that is made up of dough and coffee beans. Fritsche is adorable as Randy. She’s a woman who’s grown up in a family full of boys and cops. She just wants to be loved, and her passive-aggressive techniques at hitting on Arthur are endearing. Little is fun as the Star Trek-loving police partner, boldly going where everyone

has gone before in the tiny neighborhood. Mary Jane Nottage is a sad and humble Lady Boyle. Her meek nature makes her fragile, but her life experience makes her a heart-wrenching teacher.

The play is predictable and has moments of both enlightenment and of feeling philosophically preachy. The actors are engaging and likeable, but the pace could pick up a bit in a few spots.

However, director Nathan Motta has presented a well-sculpted piece. He has shaped the actors and elements into a sugar-glazed pastry that has substance.

The set (Aaron Benson), lighting (Marcus Dana), sound (Tom Linsenmeier), costumes (Tesia Dugan Benson), and props (Yesenia Real-Rivera) all come together to create a perfectly run-down but full-of-promise place for making both breakfast and life choices.

Overall, the production is a riveting evening that'll make you ponder your own relationships and prejudices. Now where's my chocolate-covered cream-filled cruller?

Tickets are \$28 regular, \$26 senior for Fridays and Saturdays, \$25 regular, \$23 senior for Thursdays and Sundays. Student tickets are \$10 (full-time with a valid ID). Tickets are available by calling the Dobama box office at 216.932.3396, or by visiting [www.dobama.org](http://www.dobama.org).



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