

EVERYBODY'S GOT ONE

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Roe



Photo by Jenny Graham

Fountain Theatre

The Fountain's "hyper-staged" reading of Lisa Loomer's Jane Chambers Playwriting and Pen Award-winning play *Roe* could not possibly be more timely—something that even the complex's artistic director Stephen Sachs could not have fully anticipated when it was chosen to grace the theatre's outdoor stage for a way-too brief run through July 10.

"We're acting quickly and urgently in answer to the upcoming Supreme Court ruling expected to overturn *Roe v Wade*," Sachs writes in the program. "We intend to use theater as a vehicle for social and political action. A call to action. Guerrilla-style theater. Actors holding scripts. Simple staging. Lisa has revised her script to bring it up-to-date and we're lucky to have Vanessa [Stallings], who directed the 2020 production at the Goodman Theatre."

Kate Middleton has journeyed to LA to reprise her role at the Goodman as Norma McCorvey, the intensely complicated woman who would come to be known to the world as "Jane Roe," once again playing opposite her Chicago costar Christina Hall as Sarah Weddington, the embattled Texas lawyer who argued the landmark case all the way to the Supreme Court.

Featuring some of LA's best theatrical stalwarts Rob Nagle, John Achorn, Ed F. Martin, Sufe Bradshaw, Aleisha Force, Xochitl Romero, and introducing local musical theatre child performer Liv Shechter, most of the other incredibly talented and committed castmembers have traveled here from all over the country to perform in this production, most having appeared in *Roe* elsewhere along its journey from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to Washington DC's Arena Stage to Berkeley Rep to Goodman.

The celebrated feminist playwright's latest triumph is a brilliantly conceived, often surprisingly hilarious, sometimes shocking, and more frequently heartbreaking chronicle of the history of the Supreme Court's controversial ruling which almost 50 years ago changed the course of America and sparked the challenging years following that decision.

As you'd have to be stranded on a tropical island not to know the nearly half-century standing but continually contested law of the land was overturned last week on the play's opening night by our crumbling country's severely Trump-compromised high court, believe me when I say experiencing *Roe* at this point in time could not be more urgent.

Smoothly directed by Stallings on a basically bare stage featuring nothing more than a bunch of folding chairs, two industrial-looking metal tables, and a row of standing microphones meant to overpower the urban open-air venue's nemesis police helicopter intrusions, the magic of this stunning production is palpable, especially as performed by a dynamic and incredibly versatile cast.

Middleton and Hall are nearly irreplaceable in their roles and there isn't a false moment from any of the other players. Nagle is especially slimy as the odious "Flip" Benham, the Evangelical Christian minister who to this day still leads the destructive national Operation Save America, the outspoken anti-abortion group that evolved from Operation Rescue, while Susan Lynsky as Weddington's quirky co-counsel Linda Coffee, Romero as Norma's badly-treated lover Connie, Pamela Dunlap as her vile and abusive mother, and Kenya Alexander in a moving eleventh-hour appearance as a traumatized audience member, are particular standouts.

Loomer's masterpiece is as fair-minded as possible as it breathes life into the complicated real-life human beings behind the case and delving beyond their mentions in their Wikipedia bios, while also exploring the polarizing years that followed SCOTUS' fateful 1973 decision. The irony that the current horrifyingly unbalanced high court only last Friday stripped away a woman's right to choose and at least one troglodyte justice has since quite vocally begun initiating the process of destroying other established laws guaranteeing equality for all, hangs over this fine production like an enveloping shroud of partisan ignorance.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy and historic aspects of the Fountain's mounting of *Roe* is the fact that the playwright instantly—and passionately—rewrote the play's final scene last Friday, updating it to reflect that horrific decision by the Supremes only hours before the Fountain's first performance.

To say her rewrite (which, according to Nagle was updated with new pages again before Saturday night's performance) is both tear-jerking and a spirited call to arms for any thinking person in this beleaguered country to fight their asses off and move quickly to again make us whole and equitable again, could not be expressed more adamantly.

It's time to get angry, Lisa Loomer tells us in metaphorical all caps, something I hope every truly patriotic free-thinking American is contemplating at this very moment when our coming together is desperately needed.

THROUGH JULY 10 ONLY: Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Av., LA. 323.663.1525 or fountaintheatre.com