**Win/Lose/Draw**

**Theater Review**

*by* [*Justin Sanders*](http://www.portlandmercury.com/portland/ArticleArchives?author=23870)

Win/Lose/Draw   
Magdelyn Theatre Company   
Through June 23

Like a heron in an oil slick, the middle-aged woman fights for survival in the world of theatrical priority. Occasionally, she makes her way to shore, where a conscientious playwright can clean off the black, sticky stereotypes that cling to her feathers, but more often than not she is outmuscled by hip young males and females, who make it to the shore first and leave her to flounder in the mire.

Sometimes, a middle-aged woman does make it to shore, and when she does, the cleaning process can reveal something as beautiful and compelling as anything in theater. Of course, this occurrence is rare. Indeed, finding even one example of it is cause for a celebration as raucous as the one that must have gone down when they took bison off the endangered species list.

Well, break out the champagne and buffalo napkins, because I am happy to report that the Magdelyn Theatre Company's current production of *Win/Lose/Draw* contains not only one such female character, but two. Even more remarkable, however, is that those two middle-aged women stand out in an evening where four other middle-aged women are brought into the spotlight. I don't think I've ever seen such an event on stage before: six middle-aged women with middle-aged problems, given the attention they deserve. It's about time.

The piece is divided into three one-acts. The first, entitled "Little Miss Fresno," portrays two mothers experiencing a beauty pageant vicariously through their daughters. The overbearing mom-at-her-child's-contest bit has been done before, but here the performances by Sharon Mann and Susan Boyd are humorous enough to keep things interesting. Director Michelle Seaton has added a touch of the morbid as well; these women are slightly lunatic with their maternal support, which makes things even more interesting.

The second play, "Final Placement," follows an argument between a social worker and a mentally unstable client who wants her son back. It's the weakest segment of the three, hindered mostly by Virginia Belt's performance as the social worker. Her cool professionalism is supposed to be violently disrupted by white-trash Luellen's (Julie Moorehouse) angry queries for a child she doesn't deserve, but Belt plays it with a reservation that never lifts, even when retaliative fury starts to pour out of her. Consequently, she comes across unnaturally detached from a scene that should brim over with intense emotion.

But the third and final segment, "Chocolate Cake," makes everything A-okay. It brings together a meek housewife from small-town Massachusetts and a crass, style-crazed glam goddess from Dallas in a hotel room at a conference for women who wish to find a new career. This is a can't-fail premise any way you slice it, but playwrights Ara Watson and Mary Gallagher raise the stakes by sketching their characters in surprisingly rich detail. I don't even have room to explain all the problems that are raised during the play's incredibly efficient 50 minutes, but I can begin by saying that I have never heard the life and times of a raging bulimic so articulately and poignantly stated.

Kim Bogus, as Southern Delia, has been given a dream part to play. She zings one-liners right and left, prancing across the stage in full leopard-skin glory, but always allowing her severe vulnerability to peek through the overconfident façade. Watching her and scene partner Kate Melby relate, I forgot that I was sitting in the dim basement of a church in the middle of North Portland, which for me is one of the finest and rarest experiences there is.