

# Steel Magnolias, Tron Theatre, Glasgow

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**3 stars\*\*\*** When Robert Harling's debut was made into a big-screen vehicle for Julia Roberts, Shirley Maclaine and other pan-generational Hollywood grand dames in 1989, its appearance chimed with a low-key wave of women's plays that trickled ideas of sisterhood and solidarity down the class scale.

By ladling it with an overdose of sentimentalism, the result was the cuddliest of blue-collar tragedies that has since become a staple of the commercial touring circuit. By squeezing Angela Darcy's production into the Tron's Changing House space, shoestring company Upstage attempt to get to the play's emotional heart via a suitably up close and personal fashion.

In the beauty salon run by Truvy, a bevy of southern belles bond over big hair and small-town Saturday morning gossip. Truvy's motto is "There is no such thing as natural beauty," as explained to shy new girl Annelle. Not even, it seems, for local beauty Shelby, whose wedding day it is when the play opens. Over four scenes, Shelby's mother M'Lynn, merry widow Clairee and sharp-tongued Ouiser share in an emotional makeover that goes beyond skin deep.

With only three men in a packed Saturday's matinee audience, it's clear where the market is for Harling's play. Darcy doesn't milk this in an uneven but refreshingly honest take on the original, led by Carmen Pieraccini's vivid portrayal of Shelby. One can't help but be touched by the warmth that emanates from the towers of strength these women become. As the title suggests, they aren't fragile flowers blown away at the first sign of trouble. They are survivors, who blossom through adversity.