

Cotuit delivers a striking *Glengarry Glen Ross*

Navigating the dark waters of desperation

By John Watters
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One of the strong attributes of the Cotuit Center for the Arts is its desire to tackle projects that other theater groups avoid. Its production of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* is a prime example.

Veteran director Daniel Fontneau tackles the project head on and pulls off a presentation of the hard-hitting play about the pathos of real estate sales with aplomb. His characters have great definition, all having sharp edges like etched glass. The Mamet dialog, which is the famed playwright's strong suit, is batted back and forth like a shuttlecock. The play cruises the dark waters of desperation like a shark.

There is a trap in producing a play that has been done indelibly before. *Glengarry* appeared on the silver screen in 1992, 10 years after it opened in London and eight years after it appeared on Broadway. Although the theatrical version boasted the likes of Joe Mantegna and Mike Nussbaum, it was ultimately forged in steel in the movie with iconic players Alec Baldwin, Al Pacino, Jack Lemmon, and Alan Alda. When you think of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, it is those actors that readily come to mind.

In this Cotuit production a



LIVES OF UNQUIET DESPERATION – Delivering the words of David Mamet like body blows in *Glengarry Glen Ross* are, left to right: Peter Cook, Rick Martin, David Allen, Scott Estrella, Nicholas Dorr, Christopher Cooley, Larry Zalis

ALAN TRUGMAN PHOTO

couple of the players deliver performances with nuances of vocal inflection and body language that comes a little too close to those on the movie screen. At times I was confused as to whether I was watching Mamet's characters or the famous actors who have played them in the past. That being said, I sensed as I watched the play that many in the audience had never seen the movie and were enjoying the performances on its own merits. In the end, all was fine because the total sum of the show far outnumbers its individual parts. The ensemble cast is dynamic, and Cotuit's production of the play is damn good!

David Allen portrays Shelly "The Machine" Levene, a

former star salesman who has fallen upon hard times. He sees his current failure to close sales as a result of the poor leads he has been dealt. The crux of Mamet's piece is the desperation of Levene and the other salesmen, and Allen colors that in nicely.

Rick Martin plays office manager John Williamson, the straight man and protagonist. Martin does a fine job with the difficult task even though his character isn't given the flair, energy and pathos of the others.

Scott Estrella lives and breathes Richard Roma, the star salesman who always stays atop the Sales Board and can close anyone. Estrella oozes just the right amount of smarminess and cockiness that brings Roma

to life.

Dave Moss is played by Chris Cooley and George Aaronow by Nicholas Dorr. Their characters are lower in the pecking order of the office. They feel they aren't getting their fair share of the leads and scheme to change that. Both of them perform their supporting roles readily.

In smaller roles are Peter Cook as James Lingk and Larry Zalis as Bayen. Lingk is a client of Roma's who has returned to back out of the deal at his wife's insistence. Bayen is a police detective investigating a break-in at the real estate office. Like the rest of the ensemble, Cook and Zalis pull off their roles believably.

The play, like much of Mamet's work, is filled with

hard words that are definitely not appropriate for younger audiences or those who are easily offended. Mamet uses language like fists and can and will deliver lines like pummeling blows to your solar plexus. That said, this is part of what puts him among the great playwrights of our time; his plays are always a must see if you can stomach them.

Please take the opportunity to see Cotuit's production. You won't be disappointed because, as I said, it's damn good!

***Glengarry Glen Ross* is at Cotuit Center for the Arts on Route 28 through April 27, with performances Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m. For tickets (\$20; \$18 seniors; \$10 students), call 508-428-0669.**