

Scam Artists: "Glengarry Glen Ross," at the Village Theatre through September 27

Theatre - Reviews

ShareThis

Written by Mike Schulz

Monday, 14 September 2009 06:00



Daniel DP Sheridan, Pat Flaherty, Eddie Staver III, Tristan Tapscott, David Furness, Louis Hare, and Aaron Randolph III in *Glengarry Glen Ross*

David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* is arguably, though not *that* arguably, the author's best-known, best-loved, and all-around best play. (Thanks to 1992's celebrated film version, I have friends - including friends who don't really *like* plays - who can quote entire scenes verbatim.) And it's no overstatement to say that the cast recruited for the Curtainbox Theatre Company's presentation of this exhilaratingly profane comedy is ridiculously gifted. At one point here, you'll find Michael Kennedy, Pat Flaherty, Eddie Staver III, Louis Hare, and Daniel D.P. Sheridan all sharing the Village Theatre stage, and that's *before* David Furness and Tristan Tapscott show up.

So with all these talents spitting out some of American theatre's most corrosively entertaining dialogue, it says worlds about just how extraordinary the Curtainbox's *Glengarry Glen Ross* is that its two most memorable, most thrilling sequences are actually nowhere to be found in Mamet's original script.

The first (or rather, the second) of these is the wordless opener to Act II. Gathering on designer Joe Goodall's magnificently detailed office set, the actors assume positions facing the audience and, for a few seconds, just *stand* there, unmoving and expressionless. And then - *bang!* - they collectively trash the joint, toppling chairs and garbage cans, scattering paper and removing phones, and causing general mayhem against the cool jazz of the accompanying score.

It's a surprising, utterly riotous sequence that not only sets the scene for *Glengarry's* second half - in which Mamet's ethically challenged real-estate swindlers find their workplace broken into - but exemplifies the blessed playfulness of director David Bonde's outing. While his performers are deeply in character throughout, this wondrous bit of stagecraft underlines the pulse-quickening *fun* behind the salesman's vicious banter; Bonde's cast members tackle their roles with utmost seriousness, and still never let you forget about the rich theatricality, the dazzling *joy*, inherent in Mamet's achievement. (This prelude climaxes with a beauty of a punchline, with Flaherty exiting on one final, inspired bit of vandalism.)

Yet as grandly inventive as this segment was on Thursday, it was still only the evening's *second*-best act-opener. In what will perhaps forever be referred to as "the Alec Baldwin scene," the Curtainbox's production opens with Kennedy's morale-crushing Blake castigating Mamet's hucksters for their woeful sales, and the sequence delivers so much subtle exposition, and is so damned *funny*, that it's a shock to remember it was originally written for the film, and doesn't (yet) exist in the published text. Its inclusion here, though, suggests that the scene should be mandatory in all future *Glengarrys*. With the salesman writhing in discomfort (and Sheridan's team leader blithely kissing ass), Kennedy commands the stage with a master's confidence, tearing into Blake's captive audience with spectacularly unforced skill, and dropping threats and insults with casual disdain. ("You see this watch? *This watch costs more than your car.*")

Kennedy is, in truth, so smashing fine in what basically amounts to a cameo that my friends and I agreed we could've left the scene when *he* did and still considered it a night well spent. (There's definite, if unintentional, comic subtext in Act I's prelude, as it could easily be viewed as Kennedy - a local Brando among actors - walking amongst his co-stars and demonstrating how, exactly, it's *supposed* to be done.) But given how blisteringly well-paced *Glengarry's* 90 minutes are, and how transcendently its actors assume their scurrilous and pathetic characters, who would want to miss even a *moment*?

Collectively, Flaherty, Tapscott, and Staver deliver so many outstanding performances, and appear with such happy frequency, that it's tempting to simply describe each as "excellent until further notice." Yet just because they're prolific doesn't make their *Glengarry* portrayals any less stunning: Flaherty's Levene, with his artfully manic, soulful desperation; Tapscott's Lingk, with his aching timidity and self-loathing; Staver's Moss, with his sly cajoling and fearsome anger. (On Thursday, the actor's Act II exit elicited applause, and not, I'm guessing, for the last time during the show's run.)

Sheridan - last seen on an area stage, and glorious, in St. Ambrose University's 2004 *Our Town* - imbues his hateful office manager, Williamson, with such sublime, wicked intelligence that you can get dizzy watching the wheels spin behind his deceptively nonchalant façade. Furness hits every conceivable note written for his divinely amoral Ricky Roma; sporting a natty goatee that rightly suggests Lucifer with a business card, this graceful, cucumber-cool actor is seductive, frightening, and brutally comedic.

And in the many years I've watched him on-stage, I've never seen Hare as phenomenal as he is playing the sad sack Aaronow. Technically polished, effortlessly touching, and explosively hilarious, the actor, here, is like the best of *Glengarry* in one convenient package, and Act I's verbal wrestling match between Hare and Staver is Mamet-speak at its purest and most invigorating. With Aaron



Pat Flaherty and Daniel DP Sheridan in *Glengarry Glen Ross*

Randolph III rounding out the cast (and, in his role as Detective Baylen, not asked by the author to do more than bark), this *Glengarry Glen Ross* is an almost criminally good time, a comedy about lowlifes that leaves you with an exultant theatre high.

For tickets and information, call (563)650-8121 or visit TheCurtainbox.com.



Tags

[See All Tags](#)

[Add New Tag...](#)

[< Prev](#)

[Next >](#)