

Theater: David Mamet's Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Week on Broadway

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THE ANARCHIST * out of ****
GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS ** out of ****

David Mamet is a major playwright so distinctive that his name became an adjective. He's also a very good filmmaker. (I especially enjoy his atypical charmer *Things Change*, the under-appreciated *Homicide* and that marvelous remake of *The Winslow Boy*.) So he will survive this unpleasant week in which his new play *The Anarchist* opened to indifference and immediately posted a closing notice for December 16 while two doors down a revival of his major work *Glengarry Glen Ross* finally opened with a starry cast and less starry reviews. It can't be much fun right now to be Mamet but presumably he'll curse in a rat-a-tat style and get on with his other projects, like a TV movie about Phil Spector he's written and directed with none other than Al Pacino. If they get nominated for Emmy Awards a year from now, they will surely laugh about this downer of a week.

THE ANARCHIST * out of ****
GOLDEN THEATRE

First let's deal with *The Anarchist*, a one-act play that runs a long 65 minutes. A prisoner (Patti Lupone) was apparently some sort of Weather Underground anarchist who cold-bloodedly shot a cop some time in the heady 1970s when robbing banks or other crimes seemed like a clever way to create social change. Now she's up for parole -- again -- and apparently the judge and jury boils down to Debra Winger, who has Lupone's fate in her hands. Lupone insists she has found Jesus and is rehabilitated. Winger is unconvinced and wants some remorse or even better the whereabouts of one of Lupone's accomplices. (Though why Winger would think Lupone would know this 30 years after the fact is beyond me, although Lupone was writing a letter to said fugitive.)

It's a battle of wills, or should be, in this two-hander. The set is starkly simple, with a table, two chairs and what looks like a space heater on the far end of one table. Some filing cabinets are in the back and a weird combination of filing cabinets are toward the front, with one drawer stacked next to two drawers, providing a convenient perch for sitting or rabble rousing on the otherwise fine set by Patrizia Von Brandenstein (who also did the costumes).

I'm all for a battle of two fiery personalities. Is Lupone repentant? Can Winger (and presumably the audience) forgive her hateful actions after 30 years? When this doesn't prove terribly involving, I was perfectly happy to have Mamet use these two women as an excuse to debate questions of faith and redemption, morality, the passage of time and something, anything that might hold my attention.

No luck. At 65 minutes my guest slumbered briefly (I understood) and then woke up just in time for the minor twist that hardly puts what we've witnessed in a new light or even deserves the dreaded spoiler alert. Don't anticipate a revelation and you won't be disappointed. Mind you, don't anticipate much of anything and you won't be disappointed either.

Lupone is a Mamet veteran but unlike Ricky Jay she's no master of sleight of hand and can't conjure up drama where none occurs. Winger of course has far less theatrical experience but I won't judge Winger's stagecraft on her work here. She's a sturdy presence and if she doesn't really register or convince, neither does the show.

GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS ** out of ****
GERALD SCHOENFELD THEATRE

With *The Anarchist* sadly behind me, the very next day I headed to *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The shows stand on either side of *Once*, the musical that was a favorite of mine from last season. One can imagine its essentially hopeful outlook for the future fighting off the grim shadows of the plays around it. I'd never seen *Glengarry* on stage so this was a chance to see Mamet's tale of sleazy salesmen fighting and clawing their way over the bodies of the salesmen they'd left behind while hoping for the American dream, or at least a Cadillac for the salesman of the month.

It's a dream cast, with Al Pacino as Shelly, the loser who once was king of the hill but now has to beg the office manager (David Harbour) for some decent leads. Bobby Cannavale is Richard Roma, the new cock of the walk with a name so flashy you just know he could sell used cars without tires and then get you to buy the tires as well. John C. McGinley of *Scrubs* is the loud-mouthed braggart who is browbeating sad sack Richard Schiff of *The West Wing* so Schiff will break into the office overnight and steal some leads. Jeremy Shamos (so good in *Clybourne Park*) is a mark whose wife insists he back out of a deal made with Roma. But nobody backs out of a deal with Roma; a sale is a sale even if the law says schmucks like Shamos can change their mind within three days.

It's a pleasure to list all the actors, talented performers one and all. What could go wrong with that cast and this play? A lot apparently.

Act One is simplicity itself. We're in a dingy Chinese restaurant with two booths side by side perched on the edge of the stage, almost in the audience's lap. (The scenic design by Eugene Lee is at its best here.) That intimacy is a good thing since Pacino is not in carnival barker mode. He's a desperate, beaten down, pleading man here in the first scene, quietly cajoling and whining and needling the office manager for what he needs. No fireworks here, but Pacino does score some nice moments with gentle hand gestures and quiet demurrals that show a man down to his last chance and trying to tamp down the animosity and anxiousness he feels.

Quiet is not usually the word that springs to mind when thinking of the garrulous, nonstop talking of *Glengarry* and the problems this approach engenders begin to pile up. In the second scene, McGinley is bullying Schiff but the idiotic logic he uses (Schiff must rob the office because if he doesn't McGinley will do it and say Schiff helped him) falls apart when we get a chance to catch our breath. Even less effective is the third scene, where Cannavale is in one booth and Shamos is in another. Cannavale is more outgoing and voluble than the others (he's on top, after all) but still his spiel towards an unsuspecting diner feels more creepy than hypnotic. You expect Shamos to tell Cannavale to shut up ("I'm eating here!") not get drawn in.

The second act takes place the next day in the aftermath of the burglary, with a cop (Murphy Guyer) grilling each employee one by one. The tension -- Who actually robbed the place and will they get caught? Can Roma put off the mark until the deadline passes? Who gets the Cadillac? - is almost nonexistent. Director Daniel Sullivan has done much better work before and will do so again but here the drama is drained away quietly and perceptibly. Everyone has a moment or two. The play is too inherently good and the actors too talented to avoid a complete miss. Pacino is nicely deflated at the end, like a balloon whose helium has been slowly leaking out until it droops toward the ground. But we should be on the edge of our seats from the first moment, not sitting back and wondering who would be so foolish as to buy anything from any one of them.

THE THEATER SEASON 2012-2013 (on a four star scale)

As You Like it (Shakespeare in the Park with Lily Rabe) ****

Chimichangas And Zoloff *

Closer Than Ever ***

Cock ** 1/2

Harvey with Jim Parsons *

My Children! My Africa! ***

Once On This Island ***

Potted Potter *

Storefront Church ** 1/2

Title And Deed ***

Picture Incomplete (NYMF) **

Flambe Dreams (NYMF) **

Rio (NYMF) **

The Two Month Rule (NYMF) *

Trouble (NYMF) ** 1/2

Stealing Time (NYMF) **

Requiem For A Lost Girl (NYMF) ** 1/2

Re-Animator The Musical (NYMF) ***

Baby Case (NYMF) ** 1/2

How Deep Is The Ocean (NYMF) ** 1/2

Central Avenue Breakdown (NYMF) ***

Foreverman (NYMF) * 1/2

Swing State (NYMF) * 1/2

Stand Tall: A Rock Musical (NYMF) * 1/2

Living With Henry (NYMF) *

A Letter To Harvey Milk (NYMF) ** 1/2

The Last Smoker In America **

Gore Vidal's The Best Man (w new cast) ***

Into The Woods at Delacorte ** 1/2

Bring It On: The Musical **

Bullet For Adolf *

Summer Shorts Series B: Paul Rudnick, Neil LaBute, etc. **

Harrison, TX ***

Dark Hollow: An Appalachian "Woyzeck" (FringeNYC) * 1/2

Pink Milk (FringeNYC) * 1/2

Who Murdered Love (FringeNYC) no stars

Storytime With Mr. Buttermen (FringeNYC) **

#MormonInChief (FringeNYC) **

An Interrogation Primer (FringeNYC) ***

An Evening With Kirk Douglas (FringeNYC) *

Sheherizade (FringeNYC) **

The Great Pie Robbery (FringeNYC) ** 1/2

Independents (FringeNYC) *** 1/2

The Dick and The Rose (FringeNYC) **

Magdalen (FringeNYC) ***

Bombsheltered (FringeNYC) ** 1/2

*Paper Plane (FringeNYC) ** 1/2*
*Rated M For Murder (FringeNYC) ** 1/2*
*Mallory/Valerie (FringeNYC) **
*Non-Equity: The Musical! (FringeNYC) **
*Blanche: The Bittersweet Life Of A Prairie Dame (FringeNYC) *** 1/2*
*City Of Shadows (FringeNYC) ****
*Forbidden Broadway: Alive & Kicking ****
*Salamander Starts Over (FringeNYC) ****
*Pieces (FringeNYC) **
*The Train Driver ****
*Chaplin The Musical * 1/2*
*Detroit ** 1/2*
*Heartless at Signature ***
*Einstein On The Beach at BAM *****
*Red-Handed Otter ** 1/2*
*Marry Me A Little ***
*An Enemy Of The People ** 1/2*
*The Old Man And The Old Moon *** 1/2*
*A Chorus Line at Papermill ****
*Helen & Edgar ****
*Grace * 1/2*
*Cyrano de Bergerac ***
*Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf? ****
*Disgraced ***
*Annie ** 1/2*
*The Heiress ***
*Checkers ** 1/2*
*Ivanov ****
*Golden Child at Signature ** 1/2*
*Giant at the Public *** 1/2*
*Scandalous * 1/2*
*Forever Dusty ***
*The Performers ***
*The Piano Lesson at Signature *** 1/2*
*Un Ballo In Maschera at the Met *** 1/2 (singing) * (production) so call it ** 1/2*
*A Christmas Story: The Musical ***
*The Sound Of Music at Papermill ****
*My Name Is Asher Lev *** 1/2*
*Golden Boy ***
*A Civil War Christmas ** 1/2*
*Dead Accounts ***
*The Anarchist **
*Glengarry Glen Ross ***
*Bare ***
*The Mystery Of Edwin Drood ** 1/2*
*The Great God Pan ** 1/2*

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Note: *Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review.*

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