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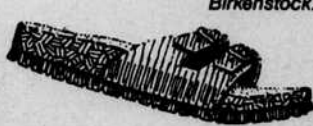
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THEATRE

Glengarry, Glen Ross

Review by Deborah McGee

Reviewing *Glengarry Glen Ross* reminded me of teaching school. Sometimes honors students did "C" work, and my job was to let them know. It didn't exactly boost my chances for teacher of the year award.

Saturday night the team behind this production of David Mamet's play was batting average. After last year's dynamic productions of one-act plays by Dorothy Velasco and Katherine Long, Terra Nova Theatre fizzles out on this one. Hopefully it's just like the occasional dud in any fireworks display, and TNT will be back in form for *Open House*, forthcoming production of a new full-length comedy by Velasco.

Director Phil Dietz picked some of the finest local male actors for this play. One of them, Bill Douglas, was astonishing as Pozzo in Zircon Theater's *Waiting for Godot*. Another, Chris Pinto, was absolutely brilliant as a redneck murderer in the University of Oregon's *Short Eyes*. The names of the others—Jonathan Siegle, Cliff Coles, James Aday and Danny Bruno—are synonymous with good acting in this town. However, in this production, only the seventh cast member, Ken Hof, was impressive.

Most of the men portray businessmen involved in a real estate office scandal, but Hof alone seemed believable. From the very first attention-getting laughter which introduced his character, he poured tremendous raw energy into the role of Richard Roma, a totally unscrupulous wheeler-dealer. Sweat trickled down his face at one point, and it wasn't just because of the lights. Of course, one expects a lot of him.

He gave us Chief Bromden in Oregon Repertory Theatre's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and he was Jacob Marley in ORT's *Appalachian Ebenezer* last Christmas. Saturday night, Hof delivered again. The rest of the cast descended into dither mode.

With so much resident talent, perhaps *Glengarry Glen Ross* will improve before its last performance on Mar. 21. It also would benefit from a change in its staging. Act I takes place at a group of delicatessen tables, set upon short risers. After intermission, Act II is on another stage, elsewhere in the large room that functions as home to TNT. I think if both acts somehow could go on in a single stage location, perhaps using moveable screens, it would keep things better focused. Program notes encourage audience members to move around. Humans are a sedentary lot—such suggestions don't really work. The abrupt mid-play change in audience-to-actor distance may be one reason why the acting wasn't up to par.

Another deterrent to the play's success was the lack of realism in Act II. Before it began, the stage was a mess of strewn papers. During intermission, even more papers were slopped around. It was distracting. To make a place look burglarized, more than papers needed to be disturbed—drawers dumped out, papers torn up, furniture upended. It just looked like someone threw papers around, which is exactly what we saw happen. Yet another problem was far too much slamming of doors, even for such a yang play. While the sturdiness of the set is much to be admired, the slamming seemed to substitute an adrenalin rush for au-



Photograph by Cliff Coles

L. to R.: Bill Douglas, Cliff Coles, Danny Bruno, Ken Hof, Jonathan Siegle, James Aday, Chris Pinto, members of the cast of *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

dience members whose minds might wander.

The script of 1984 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Glengarry Glen Ross* is full of expletives TV never would allow, so TNT advises leaving the little ones at home. The actors actually seemed uncomfortable with so many F-words. Program notes apologized for the language: "Profanity is used by the characters essentially to fill in their communication gaps." It never seemed offensive to me—just stilted. The notes also indicated the actors studied salesmen to learn how to be more realistic. I think they needed cussing lessons,

too.

Still, seeing Hof at work and savoring the tasty deli fare, with unexpectedly good coffee, before the play, made the evening worthwhile. If Mainstage can have so much success with a similar set-up at Seymour's, why not TNT at Napoleon's Deli? As Velasco said in her introduction to the audience, "You don't need a passport" to come to Springfield. Perhaps I am too spoiled with how much fine theater does go on hereabouts. And I do believe these guys just might pull it off in subsequent performances.

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