

MEDIA RELEASE

Soulpepper's "Electric" production of *Glengarry Glen Ross* is back!

Toronto, ON – March 22, 2010 – **Albert Schultz**, Founding Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre Company, today announced the remount of last season's critically acclaimed and sold-out production of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, David Mamet's Pulitzer Prize-winning play.

The full original cast returns in this ferocious and unforgettable production. **Eric Peterson** reprises his role as the desperate, at-the-end-of-his-rope Shelley Levene and **Albert Schultz** returns as the reptilian Ricky Roma along with **Kevin Bundy** as James Lingk, **Peter Donaldson** as Dave Moss, **Stephen Guy-McGrath** as Baylen, **Jordan Pettie** as John Williamson, Soulpepper Founding Member **William Webster** as George Aaranow. *Glengarry Glen Ross* is directed by **David Storch**.

In Mamet's snapshot of the cut-throat world of real estate, a group of salesmen scramble to lie, cheat and steal their way to the top. In this desperate game of survival, insults and accusations fly in the rhythmic, colloquial style that is Mamet's signature.

Here is what the critics had to say about Soulpepper's smash hit *Glengarry Glen Ross*:

"This *Glengarry Glen Ross* is electric" *The Globe and Mail*

"So funny, so scary, so convincing" *National Post*

"Packs the original punch with a brand new meaning" *Toronto Sun*

Glengarry Glen Ross opens April 22 and runs until June 5th at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, located at 55 Mill Street, Building 49, in the Distillery Historic District. Tickets range from \$29 - \$70 and are available by calling the Young Centre box office at 416.866.8666 or by visiting www.soulpepper.ca. \$20 tickets are available for 21-30 year-olds at www.stageplay.ca. StagePlay is sponsored by TD Bank Financial Group.

Glengarry Glen Ross was made possible in part with the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund. 2010 Soulpepper Lead Sponsors are: Sun Life Financial, Scotiabank Group and TELUS. Soulpepper gratefully acknowledges annual operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council.

Soulpepper Theatre Company is an artist-founded, classical repertory theatre company with a three-tiered mandate: to present the world's greatest stories in vital Canadian interpretations; to train a new generation of theatre artists; and to inspire and enrich youth through mentorship and access programs.

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BACKGROUND NOTES

David Mamet believes the way men speak, how they speak, each word they say, each word they repeat, reveals everything about their character. People don't always say what they mean, according to Mamet, but they mean what they mean. He's a verbal pointillist and through his use of repetition and rhythm *Glengarry Glen Ross* builds a remarkable portrait of a group of men fighting quite literally for their lives. For this writer, the word is paramount. He's even said that the test of a good play is to read it on the radio. If it can be understood without any of the appointments of staging, then, he says it's good. If it can't, then the words are not strong enough, the writer has not done his job.

Glengarry Glen Ross could pass the radio test. It has almost no stage directions. Mamet is not perfectly clear about who is on stage when. But each word, each half syllable, each repetition, each dot, dash, comma and exclamation point, have been chosen with infinite skill and care and every actor on stage has to play each one differently. Mamet demands a lot of his actors, but as Albert Schultz said in his interview earlier this year, they relish the challenge. They love mastering the complex rhythms and verbal challenges of this text.

Observations about men drive the action. The feverish propulsive conversations reveal these men's unceasing competition with each other, their longing for each other's respect as well as their need for each other. Half the men in this office are in their forties and half in their fifties. The top dog in the former group is Richard Roma, a man at the peak of his persuasive powers, a man who gets what he wants and doesn't care how he gets it or who is crushed in the process. The characters in their fifties are clinging, barely, to their jobs, some, like Shelly Levene, fueled by the memory of their glory days, when they could “close”, when they could sell any piece of real estate to anyone – if you believe their version of events. (They are salesmen, after all.) In this cutthroat world yesterday is long gone and there is no mercy for yesterday's man.

An early sequence between (fifty-year-old) Levene and (forty-year-old) Williamson, who runs the office, brilliantly expresses the two points of view as well as revealing the depth and precision of Mamet's writing. In this scene Shelly begs Williamson for a break, a leg up. He wants the coveted “good leads” – the names and numbers of real possible, potential clients (as opposed to names and phone numbers taken out of the phone book, which rarely yield results). Over the course of the scene we watch Shelly try absolutely every gambit he knows to get what he wants but Williamson is adamant:

W: I can't do it, Shel. (pause)

L: I'll give you ten percent. (pause)

W: Of what?

L: Of my end what I close.

W: And what if you don't close.

L: I will close.

W: What if you don't close ... ?

L: I will close.

W: What if you don't? ... Then it's my job. That's what I'm telling you.

BACKGROUND NOTES CONTINUED...

Both of the pauses in the first two lines mean something. The first one gives Levene a moment to consider his next move: will he give up his argument or will he sink to the point of buying a lead. He sinks. The second pause gives Williamson a moment to consider taking the money. It's that pause that gives Levene a glimmer of hope, a lifeline. Finally he has Williamson's interest, he teeters on the brink of success. But Williamson doesn't quite sink. He says: "And what if you don't close." Though it is phrased like a question Mamet makes it clear that this line is not a question. It is punctuated by a period. It's a statement. Williamson doesn't think Shelly can close.

The word "close" is repeated five times and every repetition builds tension and cements the power dynamic between the two men. Levene seems more desperate at first but in the last line we see that Williamson is desperate too. Nobody in this world can afford to give anybody else a break, even if they might benefit financially from it. As this segment reaches its climax, every time Levene says the line he emphasizes the word will and every time Williamson replies he emphasizes the word don't. The words are simple, the situation is anything but, the stakes are as high as they can possibly be. In stage time this part of the scene takes less than half a minute to play. It is Mamet's skill as a writer, his remarkable grasp of rhythm and repetition, character and desire that make every moment in *Glengarry Glen Ross* as rich with information and as loaded with urgency as this nine-line excerpt. The result is an exhilarating, energized theatrical experience that, as Roger Ebert put it, "allows people to arrive in triumph at the ends of sentences we could not possibly have imagined."

Tidbits: *Glengarry Glen Ross*

- ▶ David Mamet's adaptation of *Glengarry Glen Ross* went before the cameras in 1992. No major studio would finance it so it was independently produced.
- ▶ Major A-list actors vied hard to be involved. The cast included Al Pacino, Kevin Spacey, Ed Harris, Jack Lemmon, Alan Arkin and Alec Baldwin in a role created especially for him. They all took major pay cuts, apparently happily.
- ▶ Pacino was nominated for both a Golden Globe and an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for this film and Lemmon won a Volpi Cup for Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival.
- ▶ An obscenity count on the internet claims that the Moss character has the most expletives in the film, topping out at a healthy sixty-nine instances.
- ▶ In 2008 David Mamet wrote a play about the political process called *November*. That year he wrote an essay for *The Village Voice* about how it had affected him. It was titled: "Why I am No Longer a Brain-Dead Liberal."

Notes by Soulpepper Associate Artist Paula Wing

BIOGRAPHY: DAVID MAMET

1947 – On November 30th David Alan Mamet is born, the only son of Bernard, a labour lawyer, and Leonore Mamet. He will later have a younger sister, Lynn.

1962 – He begins working at the Hull House Theatre and discovers his life's direction.

1964 – He studies literature and theatre at Vermont's Goddard College.

1969 – Young David earns his Bachelor's Degree and goes on to study acting in New York at the Neighbourhood Playhouse School of Theatre.

1971 – Mamet begins teaching drama at Goddard and writes several plays.

1972 – *The Duck Variations*, an early one-act, displays features that will crop up again and again in his plays: a fixed setting, few characters, a simple plot, and dialogue that captures, in a poetic way, the sound of everyday speech.

1974 – *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, his next play, gains him great notices and he himself later adapts it for the screen as *About Last Night*.

1975 – *American Buffalo* receives the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and goes on to be produced all over the country.

1981 – He writes his first screenplay for *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. It stars Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange but it is considered his least successful effort in this arena.

1982 – His second screenplay, an adaptation of the a novel, *The Verdict*, starring Paul Newman and Charlotte Rampling, is nominated for an Academy Award.

1983 – *Glengarry Glen Ross*, perhaps Mamet's most praised work, premieres at The Cottesloe Theatre in London England. It draws on Mamet's own real-life experiences working in this kind of office in the early 60's.

1984 – *Glengarry* opens first in Chicago at the Goodman Theatre and then transfers to Broadway where wins the Drama Critics Circle Award. It captures the Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well.

1985 – With his close friend, the actor William H. Macy, Mamet founds the Atlantic Theatre Company, which continues to operate two small theatres in the Chelsea neighbourhood of New York City.

1987 – He directs his first film, *House of Games*, set in the world of con artists, a world he will continue to explore in his next two films, *The Spanish Prisoner* and *Heist*.

1988 – His *Speed-the-Plow* goes to Broadway, where rock singer Madonna makes her stage debut as a woman whose presence threatens a close and longstanding male friendship.

1992 – *Oleanna*, Mamet's consideration of political correctness becomes a huge, multiply produced hit. Meanwhile his adaptation of *Glengarry Glen Ross* goes before the cameras.

1994 – His first novel, *The Village*, is published. In the coming years Mamet will write two more novels, as well as several warmly regarded books of essays.

1999 – His film *The Winslow Boy*, starring Ms. Pidgeon, is well received. He writes a book on acting called *True or False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*.

2005 – He becomes a regular blogger on the *Huffington Post*. Many of his posts contain his own cartoons, all political satires laced with humour.

2006 – Soulpepper stages *American Buffalo*, starring Ted Dykstra, Michael Hanrahan and Jeff Lillico.

2008 – Mamet's latest film, *Redbelt*, comes out, a story about mixed martial arts.

Notes by Soulpepper Associate Artist Paula Wing

ARTIST PROFILE: PETER DONALDSON

Glengarry Glen Ross actor Peter Donaldson sat down with Michael Murphy to discuss the approach to Mamet's text.

MM: At its core, Glengarry Glen Ross is about the disintegration of the American Dream. How do you think this might be received by Canadian audiences?

PD: I don't think that's an issue really. I mean it probably is an issue, but I think it's an issue that we as Canadians deal with on a regular basis. We're always viewing our particular circumstances through an American lens an awful lot of the time. I also think that a writer like David Mamet is more global than he is American in some sense – that his plays and the way he writes is universal. I think that given the circumstances that we're living in at the moment, this play speaks to a much broader audience than it probably did when it was first written.

MM: Both Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, arguably each playwright's best known work, are about salesmen. Any thoughts on how they connect or overlap thematically?

PD: I suppose they do in a way. I think they both reflect their particular times. *Death of a Salesman* even though it is a crushing emotional experience watching or reading that play, there is a kind of melancholic feel to some of that play that *Glengarry Glen Ross* doesn't have. This play is much harder nosed and harder edged than *Death of a Salesman* – I'm not trying to put down *Death of a Salesman* in the least because I think it's a spectacular play – but *Glengarry Glen Ross* really reflects the hard times in which it was written. Economically it was a very tough period.

MM: Which has come full circle.

PD: Exactly. I think *Death of a Salesman* was written under different circumstances that weren't quite as nasty.

ARTIST PROFILE CONTINUED...

MM: The play's title refers to two land developments: the Glengarry Highlands (which is the hot property at the time of the play's action) and Glen Ross Farms (which was popular fifteen years before that). Do you think it's meant to represent a passing of the torch from the old guard like your character Dave Moss to the young hotshot up and comers?

PD: My character actually has that discussion, "Remember when we were at Platt? Glen Ross Farms. Didn't we sell a bunch of that?" All of us have talked in rehearsals about how those were the good times, those were the heydays when you actually could sell land to people over the phone. That was Glen Ross farms, so in a way we're actually looking at the progression for all of these guys to the Glengarry Highlands point in their lives when they're obviously much more desperate than they were back then. And things have not worked out well for them over the years.

MM: I've heard some of the actors saying they've found the rhythms of Mamet's writing creeping into their own speech patterns. Have you had that happen as well?

PD: Not so much the rhythms, but I have to be careful what I say around home because I don't think my foul mouth would go over very well around the children. But it's another one of the reasons I wanted to leave Stratford for a while, because there I never get to say stuff like this. I'm always saying brilliant wonderful text, but not brilliant wonderful modern text like this.

MM: It's a long way off from Atticus Finch [which Peter played in To Kill a Mockingbird in 2007 at Stratford].

PD: That's right. It's a real joy to get your mouth around this kind of play and be foul mouthed for a change.