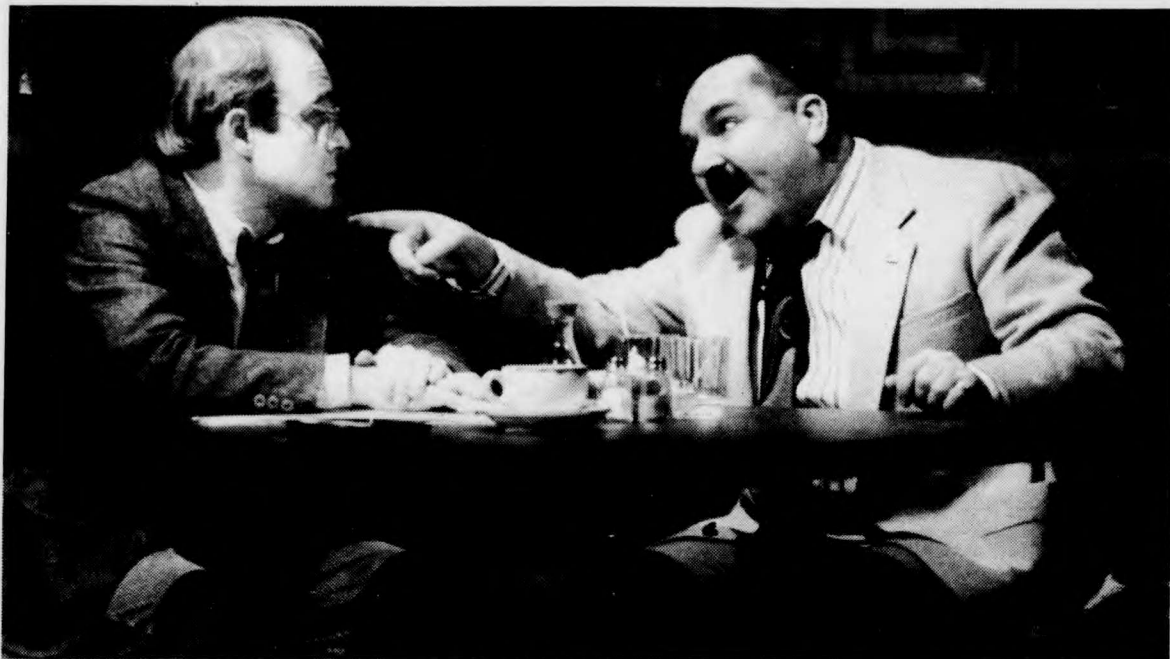


# A sleazy look at sales



I WOULD GUESS THAT THIS IS YOUR SHOULDER: Peter Blais (with shoulder) and Heath Lamberts (with finger) in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

By LOREN ARDUINI

Within America's jungle of money-hungry businessmen are four men who strive for a little personal dignity and pleasure in life. Shelley Levine, Richard Roma, Dave Moss, and George Aaronow are real estate salesmen in David Mamet's play *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

The 1984 Pulitzer prize winning play is taken from Mamet's own experience working as a real estate salesman. After watching the play, one soon realizes that the author's experience must not have been one of his best.

The Toronto version of the play is unique as it is the first stage production co-produced by the Toronto Free Theatre and CentreStage Company. Directed by Bill Glasco, the play takes on a more sensitive tone than in past Mamet productions. However, the production still maintains the intense and ruthless portrayal of North American capitalist practices that Mamet had originally intended.

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Heath Lamberts, one of Canada's most popular actors, stars as Shelley Levine, a proud character who struggles to try to keep his head above water within a corrupt Chicago real estate firm. He has been forced by a merciless manager to compete with three other real estate agents in a "contest of the month."

At the end of the month, the prize for the top salesman is a Cadillac. However, the losers not only lose the contest, but the bottom two salesmen will also be fired.

Given this ruthless and amoral situation, the audience witnesses the destruction of four struggling ambitious men and their scheme for revenge. Typical of Mamet's earlier plays, *Glengarry Glen Ross* has a fast-paced and intense plot. Unfortunately, the audience is led to a somewhat anticlimactic ending.

Even though the set design is supposed to emphasize the brutal nature of the play, it is rather basic and sparse. The entire second act takes place within one room of a dingy basement office. The walls are bare and gray and the furniture looks like it was picked up at a garage sale. The effect achieved is dismal and unappealing. Yet this scenario could be found in any capitalist society and the plight of the characters therefore seems linked to a greater, more universal, problem of social injustice.

Two features help to make the production a success. One is the skillful use of dialogue, and the other is the impressive performance of the actors.

Mamet's writing is realistic and down-to-earth. Through the casual use of coarse language the dialogue is forceful and vibrant. Most importantly, the dialogue is honest and brings forth the subtleties of the

characters. Mamet's use of pauses, silences, short sentences and philosophical rhetoric allows the audience to use its imagination to pick up on the play's connotations and implications.

Often this manipulation of the dialogue is used for humorous results. This tactic is epitomized in the second scene of the play which sets the audience roaring with laughter. Here a conversation between Dave (a smooth-talking, manipulative man) and George (slow and unconfident) results in Dave twisting words around to get George to agree to commit a crime.

Splashes of humour throughout the play keep it light and entertaining, reminding the audience that there is a brighter side of life outside the darkness of the business world. In *Glengarry Glen Ross* the characters are well-developed and all of them display both fierce and fragility toward their jobs and lives. Outstanding performances are made by Heath Lamberts and Tom McBeath, who plays Richard Roma. Although the roles are demanding, they are executed skillfully by the two actors.

The rest of the cast includes Peter Blais, Ken James, Howard Jerome, Thomas Hauff, and Dean Hawes. The play can be seen at the Bathurst Street Theatre until December 7 and it should prove to be a most successful run.

# York brings Black back

By KEN KEOBKE

When he left York University as Chairman of the Theatre Department eight years ago, it's rumoured that Malcolm Black swore that he "... would never cross the 401 again." Yet he crossed it last week to meet with 150 theatre students who attended last Friday's Prime Time.

Prime Time, a weekly event sponsored by the York Theatre Department, tries to bring theatre students in touch with distinguished professionals in the Toronto theatre community and visiting thespians such as internationally known author/critic Eric Bentley.

Black, the Artistic Director of Theatre Plus, began his wide-ranging discussion by outlining the three aims of good theatre: the working out of every action and word in minute detail, clarity of thought, and emotional truth. As an example of an actress who reaches all three, he mentioned Martha Henry whose recent performance in *Happy Days* moved him to tears in each of the nine performances he saw. He went on to say that world class actress Henry, who is perhaps better known for her part in the movie *Dancing in the Dark*, should be required watch-

ing for all theatre students. Black was very disappointed to find that only three students had been to see *Happy Days*, especially as he had worked particularly hard to insure pay-as-you-can Sunday afternoon performances for poverty stricken students.

Speakers at Prime Time are almost always asked how a struggling student actor can break into the big time. Black was not very encouraging. He said, "I meet more York theatre students working in bars and restaurants than I do in theatres." He went on to say that in Canada, the theatre is supported by the people who work in it; actors, directors and technicians who could be making more money in other fields.

He contrasted this with the American system where those who sit on a theatre's Board of Directors work hard to raise money. Tax write-offs for contributions in the US are 100 percent, compared with only 25 to 30 percent for donations to Canadian theatres. Theatres in the US which qualify as non-profit organizations enjoy lower postal rates with help them with promoting their shows and appealing for donations.

Black says he is a prime example as one who works in live theatre for

the love of it. "I have been working in the professional Canadian Theatre for 38 years and I still have to go to the States to support my habit," he said.

Part of "supporting his habit" has included working on films for Twentieth Century Fox where Black said that the high quality of the technicians means "you have to be a booby not to come up with something." He also directed all of the *Room 222* television series. However, he doesn't have a high regard for television. "My biggest shock was when I found everyone took themselves seriously and would stand around talking about their roles and scripts as if it were fucking Chekhov," Black noted.

His advice to directing students looking for jobs was to begin in production, as he has done. His first directing break came after a successful season as stage manager when he threatened to quit if he wasn't given a show to direct the next season. His advice to all actors was to *not* use Xeroxed form letters when writing him. He explained that in his office he keeps two Australian Finches. The bottom of their cage, Black noted, is exactly the same size as a r sum .

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