

## Stereotypes contribute to play's lack of substance

**Speed the Plow**  
David Mamet  
Citadel Theatre  
through December 24

review by Kevin Law

David Mamet has become something of an avatar of contemporary American playwrights. This is chiefly due to a distinctive style that has emerged from his original utilization of an urban idiom — an idiom marked by dialogue that is disjointed, elliptical, and ripe with obscenities.

Although most of the visual and dramatic elements of Mamet's latest play are nicely presented by director Jim Guedo and cast in this combined Citadel/Phoenix production, an honest look beneath the surface reveals something else. But first, a synopsis:

Two performances in this three character play are uniformly good, indeed, nearly excellent. Ron White especially is foremost in his characterization of newly appointed Hollywood studio production head, Bobby Gould. Gould and his partner Charlie Fox (played by Philip Hoffman), have hustled their way to the sleazy top of the vacuous Hollywood money machine, and they celebrate their first shallow film deal through typical Mamet dialogue that is wildly profigate and crass. All throughout the first act they pitch frenzied and fractured congratulatory phrases about an integrity that simply doesn't exist in their approach to filmmaking. Their entire selfish philosophy can be summarized in Gould's assertion that "Film is a commodity. I'm not an artist, never said I was." Such debased values are jeopardized by Karen, a temporary secretary who is both lusty and ideological in her questioning attitude. Her attitude eventually changes Gould's view of himself.

White's timing in delivering Mamet's fast-paced dialogue is precise, and his expressive mannerisms and gestures are well attributed. White projects the carefree and careless personality of Bobby Gould with flair.

Jane Spidell too, as Karen, achieves a warm subjective performance. Her character is enigmatic, oozing a mixture of sexual influence over her boss with a romantic feeling for her ideological concerns regarding an "artsy" book that would make a meaningful

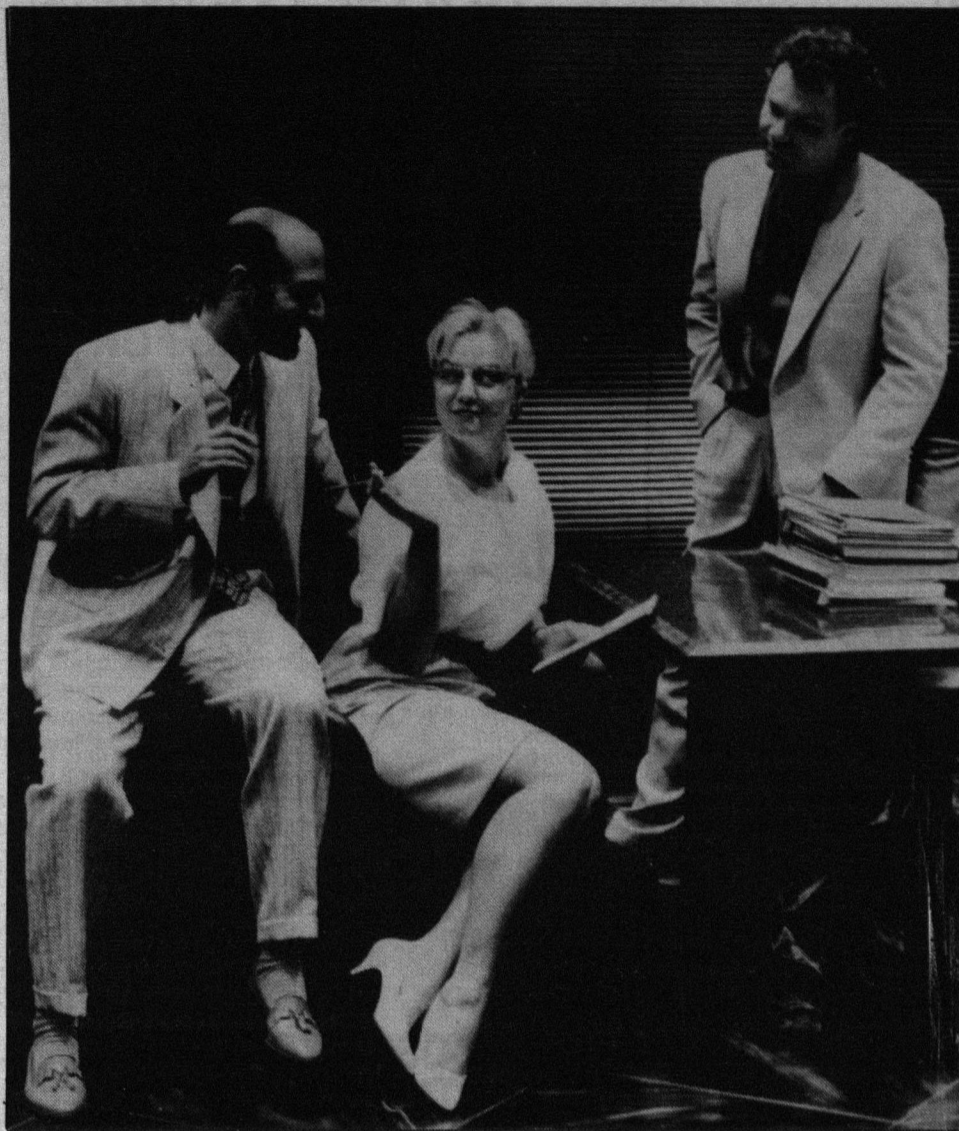
movie.

The seduction scene in the second act is far cozier than the first. Spidell and White not only emit a sense of being well rehearsed together, they positively connect as they play sexual and philosophical politics with each other. When Karen successfully challenges Gould's vacant values, the expression of confusion that crosses White's face is a droll sight to behold.

Unfortunately, Hoffman, as Charlie Fox, does not match his fellow cast members. His interpretation of the hyperactive, weasel-like assistant to Gould is overwrought in the histrionics of melodramatic mannerisms. Particularly in the first act, Hoffman appears too self-reflexive as he constantly spins around on his toes and flails his hands about. Even an anxiety-ridden character such as this need not resort to a kinetic free-for-all. Hoffman, and director Guedo, could give Fox's actions more meaning through a more refined exploration of gestures. Only in the third act does Hoffman come close to reality of emotion when he explodes in anger at Gould for succumbing to Karen's influence regarding principles. Fox is fully charged as he expounds the virtues of corruption necessary for a corrupt occupation.

While many of the production aspects of the play are fine, including Stencil Campbell's dark, ominous set of black marble and black mirrors, the actual underlying content of the play is less tangible. Unfortunately, the problem lies deep within the play itself. The deification of David Mamet as a playwright cannot obscure the intrinsic lack of substance and meaning beneath the superficial skin of the play. Even with its potentially scintillating theme of inane Hollywood production principles, this play never really soars. The few thrills provided are cheap thrills that arise out of Mamet's masterful skill in colloquial cadences. His ability to capture the seedy tone, debased values, and vulgar lives of his characters is certainly first rate, but in *Speed-the-Plow*, he presents these characters, particularly Gould and Fox, in such a stereotypical and stylized manner that he fails to analyze them with any real perception.

Mamet's experiences as a screenwriter initiated his self-possessed anger and cynicism



Two sleazy movie execs and an idealist secretary, played by (from L-R) Philip Hoffman, Jane Spidell and Ron White, appear in Rice Theatre's production of *Speed the Plow*

against Hollywood, and it is this cynical anger that seems to make up the play's entire surface. Mamet never delves beneath the surface of vulgarity and superfluous Hollywood entrepreneurship; the things talked about don't expose any larger truths about human nature, or the Hollywood trash machine. We get essentially caricatures of a type that defy any attempt at understanding

motivation or identity.

For all its barbed wit and intense dramatics, this play strangely lacks impact; it is ultimately as bloodless and vacant as the characters it depicts. A child who throws a tantrum is interesting to watch, but he never really tears down the walls of his room. David Mamet's *Speed-The-Plow* is also interesting to watch, but his walls remain unscathed.

## Bone Club breaks a leg

interview by Ron Kuipers

Originally, I intended for a typical "this was a good show, too bad you weren't there" concert review to run in this space. But developments occur, things happen, opportunities arise, and I changed my mind.

I went to see The Doughboys this past Sunday at the Bronx. In typical fashion, The Doughboys made their third trip to Edmonton as kick-ass as the last two. If you experienced it, cool. If you didn't, too bad you weren't there.

Too bad you weren't there because chances are you would have been pleasantly surprised by the band that opened for The

Soundgardens of Seattle's music scene.

"We get compared to the Seattle sound a lot," affirms singer Andrew Arashiba. "But we also get the Beach Boys and the Monkees," he adds wryly, not wanting to be pigeon-holed. "A lot of people think that we're a good cross between the Minneapolis sound and the Seattle sound," he explains. And while understandably no band wants to be compared, he admits that "everybody's going to be compared to something."

Having roots in the rich Minneapolis musical heritage has led to discussions about the difference between the established scene in Minneapolis and the newer, up-and-coming scene in Seattle. "Minneapolis has a lot of depth to it," says Arashiba, "Seattle is brand new and Seattle kicks ass, but it's not a competition and it shouldn't be."

Arashiba says that Bone Club's sound is the result of a collective creative process. "We work a lot with dynamics," he explains, adding that "there's always space to be filled, and we try to fill it as much as possible without being tasteless."

The fact that they fill up as much space as possible comes across in the hardness and solidity of their sound. Their songs are big chunks of wah-wah-ridden crunch and grunt, complete with discordant melody, changing time signatures, screams, moans, good singing, and driving tempo. It's pretty evident that these boys listened to more than a little Black Sabbath when they were younger.

And no, this is not just a "too bad you weren't there" interview either. "Cause you can catch these guys Wednesday night at Cracker Jacks when they open for Nomeansno, and Thursday night at the Ambassador. Wednesday's show will be absolutely killer. I can't go because I'll be laying out Thursday's Gateway. See the show, and for once you can come up to me and say, "Too bad you weren't there."

"...we try to fill [space] as much as possible without being tasteless..."

Doughboys, The Bone Club. When they played, things happened. After they played, an opportunity to interview them arose. As a result, I changed my mind and you will be reading the highlights of that interview instead of a concert review.

Bone Club are a thunderous group of musicians hailing from that mecca of original underground music, Minneapolis. They are part of the frothing crest on the tidal wave of sound that started with giants like Husker Du and The Replacements. It's odd, then, that the band's music reminds one more of what's going on in Seattle than it does of Minneapolis. They fit right in with the Mudhoney and

