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Curtainbox Theatre challenges actors, audiences

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By Jonathan Turner, jturner@qconline.com

Audiences aching for powerful, profanity-laced theater are in for a treat this weekend.

Curtainbox Theatre Company -- which launched in Los Angeles in 2001 -- presents its third production in the Quad-Cities, "Glengarry Glen Ross," by Pulitzer Prize, Academy Award and Tony Award-winning playwright and screenwriter David Mamet. The show is directed by David Bonde and features the talents of Michael Kennedy, Daniel DP Sheridan, Louis Hare, Aaron Randolph, Eddie Staver III, Pat Flaherty, David Furness and Tristan Tapscott.



Photo: Submitted

The Curtainbox Theatre cast of 'Glengarry Glen Ross' includes, from left, Daniel DP Sheridan, Pat Flaherty, Eddie Staver III, Tristan Tapscott, David Furness, Louis Hare II and Aaron Randolph III.

The 1982 Pulitzer winner is a scalding comedy about small-time, cutthroat real-estate salesmen trying to grind out a living by pushing plots of land on reluctant buyers in a never-ending scramble for their share of the American Dream.

It depicts two days in the lives of four agents and how they become desperate when the corporate office sends a representative to "motivate" them by announcing that, in one week, two underperforming salesmen will be fired.

"It's a fantastic show," said Mr. Bonde, of Davenport, who directed a Curtainbox show in L.A. in 2002 and performed in its "Three Viewings" at St. Ambrose University last year.

"It just seems to strike a chord in anybody who ever worked for a living," he said of the Mamet play, named for two of the real-estate developments being peddled by the salesmen. "It really captures what it feels like to have to be beholden to somebody else for your living."

It seems especially relevant in the current recession, Mr. Bonde said. "People fear in the workplace, people could lose their job, depending how the economy goes," he said. "It captures a lot of the fear and loathing you have in the work environment."

"Glengarry" -- which Mr. Mamet adapted as a 1992 movie starring Al Pacino, Jack Lemmon, Alan Arkin, Alec Baldwin, Kevin Spacey and Ed Harris -- is making its debut in the Quad-Cities. It fits the Curtainbox mission perfectly, Mr. Bonde said.

"This is our community. What we want to do is bring theater to the Quad-Cities that they might not otherwise have a chance to see, that's challenging for performers and challenging for audiences as well," he said. "This is a great choice toward that aim."

Mr. Mamet -- well-known throughout his work for his liberal use of curse words -- felt that "people who speak with profanity speak the truth," the director said. "These are people who aren't restricted by social graces. They're able to be themselves. They hold nothing back. It's just humanity in its most raw form."

The vicious tirades reflect the nature of the business they work in, Mr. Bonde said. "It's also very much written for and from the perspective of men, about how men deal with each other.

"Anybody backed into a corner is going to take desperate steps," he said of the characters' unethical behavior. "These men are backed into a corner from the get-go. In sales, your job is to manipulate, do whatever it takes to make the sale."

The Q-C cast features many theater veterans. "I feel unbelievably lucky," Mr. Bonde said. "When you have a cast as good as this, you really get a chance to direct, with your energy not focused on coaching performances. You're finding new things in the script. It's an absolute pleasure, working with this high-caliber cast."

Partly because of the nature of the play, the cast has had scripts for six months. "It's incredibly difficult to memorize," Mr. Bonde said. "Mamet in general, the greatest challenge is in his cacophony of words, to leave room for small, significant moments in telling the story."

"I think they're just a really inventive group of performers," he said. "They really care about what they're doing on stage."

This is also the first time Curtainbox is running the play for three weeks, instead of two, beginning tonight. "The belief is there is enough name recognition, with this piece, that we're able to have good audiences," Mr. Bonde said.

-- If you go

-- **What:** "Glengarry Glen Ross."

-- **When:** Opening tonight; 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and Tuesday, 3 p.m. Sunday, through Sept. 27.

-- **Where:** Village Theatre, 2113 E. 11th St., Village of East Davenport

-- **Tickets:** \$15 (\$12 on Tuesdays); \$10 for seniors and students. Purchase at the door, e-mail reservations@thecurtainbox.com, or call (563) 650-8121.