

Blackstone Valley

Entertainment

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Pitch-perfect performances

■ A knock-out cast appears in The Gamm's 'Glengarry Glen Ross.'

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PAWTUCKET — The Sandra Feinstein Gamm Theatre couldn't have picked a better time to produce "Glengarry Glen Ross," David Mamet's 1984 Pulitzer Prize-winning play about four unethical Chicago real estate agents whose business is predatory selling.

THEATER REVIEW

Sound familiar? The mortgage debacle and collapse of the housing market is in the headlines every day, and Mamet's play takes us to one source: the everyday guys who lose their morals to the pressure of trying to make a living. It's an uncomfortable scenario, but The Gamm's pro-

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Richard Roma (Tony Estrella) exchanges heated comments with Dave Moss (Tom Gleadow) while Shelly Levene observes the conflict in a scene from 'Glengarry Glen Ross' at the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre. Gamm Photo/Peter Goldberg

The Gamm

It's an uncomfortable scenario, but The Gamm's production is pitch-perfect. At a shade over 90 minutes long, it moves quickly but hones in with precision on the desperation that drives the characters' actions. The result is a most compelling look at the dark side of human nature.

It's amazing that we can be so fascinated by five main characters for whom we have so little sympathy — but so much interest.

Salesman Shelly Levene had a good run years ago, but now he's reduced to groveling for the A-list sales prospects for properties in Glengarry Highlands and Glen Ross Farms. Of course, he has his sick daughter to worry about, but he can be unbearably self-important.

Then there's Richard Roma, the current hot shot: smooth and cocky. The "everymen" are Dave Moss and George Aaronow who, overwhelmed by the pressure to sell, are angry and nastily resentful of their employers — so much so that Moss proposes robbing the office and selling the sales leads to a competitor.

Aaronow finds the idea appalling and appealing at the same time.

Riding herd on this overheated crew is office manager John Williamson, young, unequipped to be a leader and unpleasantly passive-aggressive. He is charged with handing out the leads, and although he protests that he does it by the rules, it's his only source of power and he takes advantage of it.

These are not nice guys, and when the real estate office actually is robbed and trashed, their concern is only for how the loss affects them individually.

Figuring out who is behind the larceny is the work of a cop named Baylen, and the question for the audience is both whodunit and will the cop be smart enough to figure it out.

Director Fred Sullivan Jr. did a stellar job casting the play from Gamm regulars. Sam Babbitt wears the role of has-been Shelly Levene as perfectly as his tailored suit. From the little gestures, like nervous-

ly tugging at his jacket, to the big ones, like gloating over a sale, are right on the mark. It's a pin-point accurate portrayal.

The entire cast is just as watchable. Tom Gleadow can barely contain Dave Moss' frustration and anger, but it feels real.

Chuck Reifler is excruciatingly pathetic as George Aaronow, and Tony Estrella is a convincing Richard Roma, so solicitous on the surface and so malicious underneath.

Marc Dante Mancini as John Williamson, the unlikable office manager, manages to convey that personality just from his demeanor, even before he has spoken a word.

Actor Kelby T. Akin is tall but comes off believably small and timid as James Lingk, a hapless client of the high-pressure Roma, while Richard Forbes, with his Mr. Clean shaved head, looks the part of the brusque cop.

Patrick Lynch's set design is workable in the first act, which takes place in a Chinese restaurant, but is inspired in the second act, which moves to the real estate office. Cardboard filing boxes piled floor to ceiling create a look as claustrophobic and overpowering as the situation the salesmen find themselves in.

Two more things should be addressed. Despite the nastiness of the business, there are humorous moments in the play. Sullivan, wisely, never plays them for the joke; the characters are their funniest when they are completely serious.

Secondly, this show is full of profanities, and not just the everyday variety. Be prepared for a fusillade.

But also be prepared for some of the most authentic performances on stage — anywhere. This is an award winner.

Performances of "Glengarry Glen Ross" continue through Oct. 3 at The Gamm, 172 Exchange St. Tickets are \$25, \$30 and \$40 depending on day and time of performance. Discounts are available for subscribers, groups of 10 or more, seniors and students.

For tickets, call (401) 723-4266 or visit www.gamtheatre.org.