

Glengarry Glen Ross (Flying Penguin Productions in association with Brink Productions)

Big suits, big stakes and big lies collide in this exceptional revival of David Mamet's ageless classic.

The Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide
Reviewed on 11 September, 2021

by Gordon Forester on 12 September, 2021

The Chinese restaurant's flimsy table lurches under the desperate pleas of a man nursing a scotch, begging for another chance. The sauce is soy, the Susan is lazy and the noodles are bound to leave us hungry in about an hour. Negotiations are attempted, ideas are hatched and banter is clipped, quick and witty. Lighting designer Tom Kitney impeccably paints this scene vermillion, but the interactions portend no good fortune or joy. Were a fortune cookie to be cracked to peer into the future, the message would not be heralding the impending arrival of the bluebird of happiness. The setup is perfect; trouble is coming.



Nicholas Garsden and Christopher Pitman in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Flying Penguin Productions. Photo © Shane Reid

This intimate luncheon table in America's Midwest is the alternate conference room of the 1980s, where deals are struck and futures are made and lost. Playwright David Mamet's award-winning classic puts the con into conman, but it's the desperation of the competing scammers with their underlying layers of greed and fear, that propels this gem.

Director David Meador drives the magnificent cast of this production (staged by Flying Penguin Productions in association with Brink Productions), creating countless moments of light and shade, which are masterfully exploited by the tight ensemble. Various extremes of American accents are consistent and convincing; particularly impressive through the frequently explosive rhetoric. Timing, tension, delivery and drama are universally outstanding across the whole ensemble.

Rory Walker as Shelley 'The Machine' Levene and Bill Allert as real estate office manager John Williamson shine. They are the first to face off, and the tussle of the fraught, unevenly matched characters skilfully highlights the power imbalance at the heart of their working arrangement.

Christopher Pitman brings an unparalleled energy to bullish, corrupt real estate agent Dave Moss. Nicholas Garsden is his wobbly, sorrowful foil George Aaronow. The 'Mamet speak' of the second scene is as deliciously good as it gets. Later, Moss's tirade and exit to Wisconsin is pure brilliance and Aaronow's juxtaposed pitiful resignation to his fate at the close, are highlights of this precisely executed production.

Mark Saturno as Richard Roma is frighteningly convincing. The slick-haired, sharp suited salesman is a man of words whose world revolves around himself and his ability to bully his way into deals. James Wardlaw plays James Lingk, whose palpable timidity develops from

endearing to pitiful. The Gimlet scene is noteworthy for bringing humour to the deception.



Nicholas Garsden, Mark Saturno and William Allert in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Flying Penguin Productions. Photo @ Shane Reid

Chris Asimos as Baylen, the police detective, rounds out the cast with his threatening on-stage presence, cementing the

bastardry of his behind-closed-doors interrogation techniques.

We are booted out of the Chinese restaurant into Act Two. Actors representing former presidents of the United States efficiently transform the outstanding staging by set and costume designer Kathryn Sproul into a spacious real estate office, their bulbous masks creating an ideal and intriguing diversion. This nod to the Point Break robbery scene is another powerful augury that someone is about to be fleeced. The attention to detail with costuming is striking, with diamond cygnet rings, askew ties and cashmere coats all lending credible nods to the era.

Composer and sound designer Quentin Grant's hi-hat, sizzle-heavy refrains add filmic intrigue and ably aid the building storyline. The 'ta-da' moment is perfectly timed, peaking at the height of the dramatic tension.

The jarring racist and misogynistic language delivered with the hate-fuelled invective from what we wished was a bygone era, is met with uncomfortable voids that cannot be sufficiently filled by debates about historical context or character flaws. Removed from some revivals by Mamet himself, the choice to adhere to the original script is bold. At the close, our hopes that this tale is anachronistic are all but dead. The genius of the script and this incarnation is its expose of the human cost of the failures of capitalism; an all too modern reality.

This tight, tense, roller coaster treat of a production of *Glengarry Glen Ross* is small theatre at its very best.

***Glengarry Glen Ross* plays at The Bakehouse Theatre until 25 September**