

Talkin' Broadway Regional News & Reviews: San Francisco - "November" - 11/27/13



***November* by David Mamet**

A Very Adult Holiday Comedy for Our Time

Dragon Productions

Review by Jeanie K. Smith

Also see Jeanie's reviews of [*Coney Island Christmas*](#) & [*The Sunshine Boys*](#)
and Richard's reviews of [*Ideation*](#) and [*Amaluna*](#)

David Mamet, best known for his edgy, gritty dramas such as *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *American Buffalo*, also wrote a clever, sharp-witted satire in 2008, sending up American politics and the scheming therein. It's just the kind of play Dragon Productions loves to produce, and they give it a great outing, a timely antidote to typical seasonal sentimental tripe.

It's early November, a mere week from election day, and American President Charles "Chuck"

Smith (Peter K. Owen) desperately wants to salvage his failed campaign for re-election, running last-ditch ideas past his sanguine assistant, Archer Brown (Fred Pitts). Nothing is clicking, and his speechwriter, Clarice Bernstein (Stephanie Crowley), a lesbian who just adopted a Chinese baby with her partner, has already written his concession speech. But when a Turkey Association PR rep (Bill Davidovich) shows up, with turkeys ready



Fred Pitts and Peter K. Owen

for the usual promotional "pardoning," schemes begin to blossom. Throw in an Indian Chief (James Devreaux Lewis) who wants to build a hotel and casino on Nantucket, and you have even more opportunity for wheeling and dealing.

Mamet skewers obvious targets in politics: a president who isn't very bright or presidential; elections won by money, not merit; the ubiquitous presidential library; and so forth—familiar territory with a Mamet spin. But where the play really starts to cook is when Smith's scheme takes shape, involving the overthrow of the Thanksgiving holiday altogether, in order to extract money from the turkey people and enable him to retire in peace. Bernstein's brilliant speeches pave the way for a complete reversal of thinking about the beloved holiday, and all she wants is one simple thing in return—but it's illegal.

From there the play ramps up in political incorrectness and wackiness, ultimately bringing home some all-too true points about a corrupt political landscape that depends heavily on Quid Pro Quo deals. It's not necessarily new, but the zany context heightens the contradictions and makes the system's corroded underpinnings visible. Plus it's just downright funny, in high satire style.

Owen as President Smith gets off to a slow start; or it might be that the play has a kind of delay in its inception; but by the end of act one he rises to the character, and the show takes off. We can see the phony handshakes, the practiced demeanor, the jaded attitude of the career politician. Act two is much stronger, with the action fast and furious, and Owen/Smith commanding the stage, calling the shots.

Pitts is downright flawless as Archer, blasé, pragmatic, and uninterested in Smith's Hail Mary pitches until the scheme unfolds and he wakes up to the possibility of another four years in power. Crowley, saddled with a character who's sick the whole play, at first seems unlikely to inhabit the oval office, but she, too, develops as the play proceeds, and her visionary speech writing is wittily done.

Davidovich and Lewis play their characters totally over the top, which is perhaps a

stylistic choice befitting the play, but is sometimes distracting in contrast with the more believable conduct of the others. Jason Arias' attractive set and Jeff Swan's distinctive lighting take us inside the oval office, and Linda Olbourne's costumes are suitably political arena.

Forget treachery holiday plays with feel-good phoniness; head over to the Dragon for some good ol' political shenanigans and spirited satire.

November by David Mamet, presented by Dragon Productions, 2120 Broadway Street, Redwood City; through December 15. Tickets \$15 - \$35; available at www.dragonproductions.net. or call 650-493-2006.

Photo: Dragon Productions

Cheers - and be sure to Check the [lineup of great shows this season in the San Francisco area](#)

- Jeanie K. Smith