

November in July at Hangar

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Fraught with signature adult expletives, ensconced in his terse, clipped dialogue, David Mamet takes us on a riotous, sometimes not-so-surrealistic, one-day visit to the Oval Office in "November", the current production at Ithaca's Hangar Theatre.

Widely-known for his explosive, powerhouse, "Glengarry Glen Ross", a tale

of moral decay among anxious real estate salesmen, Mamet more readily comes to mind when considering characters on the precipice of emotional disaster than as a deliverer of outrageous, twisted comedy until one also considers his screenplay for "Wag the Dog", a 1997 film starring Robert DeNiro as a harried, dysfunctional spin doctor.

But, deliver he does in this finely-directed (by Hangar's Peter Flynn), five-character circus (the set is bordered by a ring with red stars) outlining a day in the life of President Charles Smith (Wally Dunn), who is on the brink of landslide defeat in a bid for re-election because, as his chief aide, Archer Brown (Jesse Bush), tells him, "Your numbers are lower than Gandhi's cholesterol!"

Smith, more worried about raising funds for "his legacy" than in losing the election, spends a preponderance of his time scheming, in manic, "f-bomb" bloated half-sentences, while Brown and **Smith's speechwriter, Clarice Bernstein (Sharon Eisman) attempt to quell the political fires of Smith's self-immolation.**

Dunn is very effective as he balances Smith's mercurial nature somewhere between a Nixon-like paranoid schemer and a loon on a weekend pass, as he does righteous justice to a body of dialogue that is more akin to improvisational jazz riffs than to any words a President would be proud to make public.

Bush, as the steady, unflappable aide does excellent comedic turns as Dunn's "straight man", while **Eisman creates a fully-believable speechwriter, armed with a righteous lesbian agenda and a flu-infested demeanor worthy of an immediate temperature reading.**

Despite Mamet's intentional swinging of the dramatic pendulum toward the outrageously comic, his timing is never off the target of underscoring moral decline in American society.