



## *Poking Holes in the Political Machine*

**November, by David Mamet**  
**The Hangar Theatre July 8–18**  
**By Ross Haarstad**



A deliriously out-of-control snippet of a Sousa march launches the Hangar's production of "November." With the stage looking like a hollowed out snare drum — a circle of red and white bulbs over a round Oval Office — fireworks should logically follow. As the evening's playwright is David Mamet, they do, in bursts and fountains of verbal pyrotechnics. A prankster gone amok, he sets off cherry bombs of ethnic and cultural stereotypes while taking shots at the great American political machine. And this master of cursing also throws off a few colorful pinwheels of the f-word (more PG-13 than R, however.)

His subject is one Charles Smith, possibly history's worst president, who is facing the last week of a dismal re-election campaign. While hungry for a second term, he'd settle for a nice presidential library; it would get his wife off his back. The annual turkey pardon presents the perfect opportunity to raise a little cash (off the books), so he and his handler and partner-in-crime Archie Brown decide to put the squeeze on the National Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Product Manufacturers. Meanwhile, his erstwhile lesbian speechwriter, Clarice Bernstein, just back from adopting a baby in China, is battling the flu as she works on his concession speech.

You guessed right, it's a comedy. Not always up to Mamet's best — it offers up both a manic riot of a closing act and a great comic creation in President Smith that ranks with such oversize schemers as Max Bialystock and Pseudolous the slave, not coincidentally, roles which Zero Mostel created and our current great stage-clown, Nathan Lane, re-fashioned for our times. Mamet fashioned the character to fit Lane, who played it in its Broadway premiere. Happily, it suits Wally Dunn to a T. Dunn dazzles whether fast-talking, bumbling, conniving, or backtracking as Smith plots his way to glory. Dunn is devastating comedian with his quick takes, his ever-bending body, his flourishes of bravado and shifts of inflection.

Straight man, setting up the jokes with off-hand aplomb. Bush's sly, underplayed and slightly sinister performance fits into the play so snugly that only afterwards do you realize the skill behind it.

*As the daffy, earnest and hopelessly liberal Bernstein, Sharon Eisman alternately stumbles and wheels about the stage as she tries to pull Smith to her side and declare same-sex marriages legal. Eisman smartly plays Bernstein as an innocent who is enchanted by her own rhetoric, yet able to mount a ferocious attack when her back's against the wall. Her back and forth with Dunn and Bush while dressed in pouffy wedding dress is priceless.*

The finale owes a lot to the Marx Brothers and a little to the Loony Tunes and is definitely the reason to see the show. Peter Flynn has staged it dexterously, with constant motion that matches the verbal rollercoaster of the text.