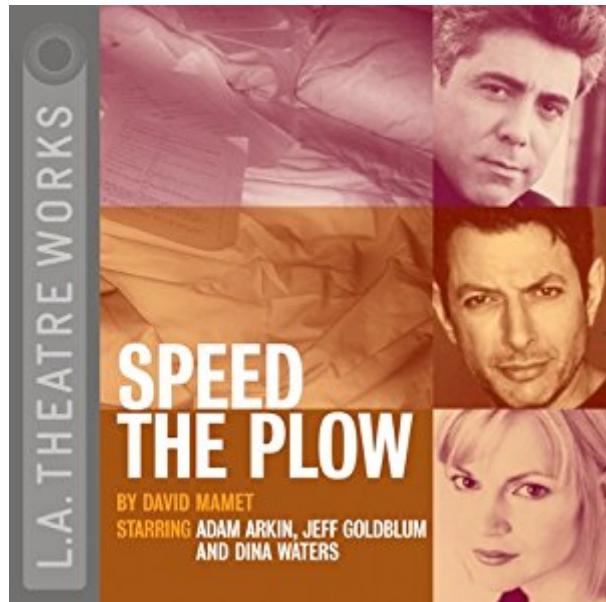


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Speed The Plow



Synopsis

Full Length, Dramatic Comedy / 2m, 1f / 2 ints. Revived on Broadway in 2008, the original production starred Joe Mantegna, Ron Silver and Madonna in this hilarious satire of Hollywood, a culture as corrupt as the society it claims to reflect. Charlie Fox has a terrific vehicle for a currently hot client. Bringing the script to his friend Bobby Gould, the newly appointed Head of Production at a major studio, both see the work as their ticket to the Big Time. The star wants to do it; as they prepare their pitch to the studio boss, Bobby wagers Charlie that he can seduce the temp/secretary, Karen. As a ruse, he gives her a novel by "some Eastern sissy" writer that needs a courtesy read before being dismissed out of hand. Karen slyly determines the novel, not the movie-star script, should be the company's next film. She sleeps with Bobby who is so smitten with Karen and her ideals that he pleads with Charlie to drop the star project and pitch the "Eastern sissy" writer's book. "Hilarious and chilling ."- The New York Times "Mamet's clearest, wittiest play." - The New York Daily News
--This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

David Mamet finished this play in 1987 and it debuted in NYC in 1988. It is the story of two movie producers (played by Joe Mantegna and Ron Silver in the original cast) and a young secretary (Madonna). The producers decide to pitch a prison movie. A schlock movie that is formulaic but has a big star attached to it and will make everyone lots of money. One of the producers gives a dystopian book to his temporary secretary to read. She loves it and urges him to produce it, thus submerging the other producer. This gets us to the volatile third act. Like some of Mamet's other

plays, the language is vulgar (doesn't bother me at all) without being direct (this is bothersome). There is too much subtext, which is overused in literature and used much less frequently in real life. As in many of Mamet's other plays, everyone is not only flawed, but a bit bad. For me, it can be hard to read or watch a play without anyone to really root for. It's ok. If you are a Mamet completist, then you should read it. Otherwise, you can pass without worrying about missing anything.

This play debuted just after David Mamet directed his first movie, *A House of Games*; it's easy to think the experience left him embittered. The barrages of testosterone-soaked male posturing that dominate plays like *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *American Buffalo* are translated to the big-studio film industry. And here we see a device that would become a Mamet standard in the 1990's: a woman enters the men's space and calls them on their baloney sauce. This play is nuanced and subtexty. What the characters say is less important than what they imply. In this way it's a little like Harold Pinter, and it's especially difficult to get the import just by reading the script. That difficulty is multiplied by the distinctive jagged Mamet-speak of characters who seldom finish a sentence in their rapid, electric dialogue. If you want to study this play as literature, get friends together to read lines. This play absolutely demands actors. Yet it's intensely rewarding and yields potential for endless discussions. Which character is most venal? Is it better to be honest about venality than to mask it in artistry? What kind of industry reduces humans to interchangeable commodities? All of these conundrums and more are made visible in this play, but it doesn't offer up pat answers. It leaves you hungry to think. The one fault I find is that it wraps the characters up a little too neatly at the end. We know who we're supposed to like, who we're supposed to loathe, and which characters bet on bad ponies in their choice of loyalties. Considering the thematic ambiguity with which we're left, putting a bow on the package right at the end is just a little too neat for my money. "Speed-the-Plow" is both damning and hugely funny. It was this blend of condemnation and comedy that build Mamet's reputation, and he uses it here to full effect on movies and the men who make them. Powerful and punchy without being merely slick, this is a play for people who love theatre for its power to recognize bull and call it by name.

This play on Broadway originally starred Madonna, Joe Mantegna, and Ron Silver. To me David Mamet is an overrated playwright and an underrated screenwriter. The play is going to be revived in the 2008-2009 season along with Mamet's "American Buffalo." They are both slight efforts which pale in comparison to Pinter, Stoppard, Albee etcetera. He puts three characters on the stage and lets them blabber on, but he adds some comedy. Supposedly there's a deep and portentous subtext

related to the American psyche. In this play two movie makers have to decide upon presenting socially significant films or the usual commercial drivel. Karen (Madonna) tries to convince Gould to choose art over commerce by bedding him. Fox tries to persuade Gould that the only reason she acquiesced was to get the art film greenlighted. Mamet in a New York Times 2008 article says this play belongs to "that particularly American subgenre, the Workplace Drama." In the occupational drama he sets up circumstances in which characters have to choose between two evils. Of Americans he says, "We live to work." This play he says deals with "the difference between Work and Art, and how is one to draw the line." Of his play Mamet says, it's "a ripping yarn, with a bunch of sex, some nifty plot twists, and a lot of snappy dialogue." For this play I think he's wrong on all four counts. True, in the play business drives out idealism; it's the ruthless versus the toothless, but it's not ripping, nifty, snapping, or sexy. The title phrase is like a good luck wish for swift and profitable plowing. It's a behest that you speedily plow under and start over. There's dirty work to be done, and somebody has to do it, and if you don't do it, you'll be plowed under and someone else will do it. Why is the movie business garbage? "Why? Why should nickels be bigger than dimes? That's the way it is." The play does not read well, and it cries out for the voices and gestures of flesh and blood actors.

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