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STAGE

Opinion | Get ready to be challenged by a chilling, tough-minded play

Theatre through the eyes of a practical dreamer.

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Patrick Stewart, left, Adam Iachelli and Seif Sorensen star in The Kitchen Sink Collective's upcoming production of "American Buffalo" by David Mamet at The Staircase Theatre.

Jennifer Iachelli photo

By Gary Smith Special to the Spectator

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Can't do or see the kind of theatre you love in your hometown?

What's to be done?

Start your own theatre company of course.

"We're called Kitchen Sink Collective," 18-year-old founder Adam Iachelli says.

"And we're about to produce David Mamet's classic 1972 play, 'American Buffalo.' "

If you know Mamet, he's the kind of playwright whose works have a rat-a-tat rhythm, tough talk and dark, corrosive ideas.

Wearing three hats, Iachelli is producer, director and star of this dramatic thunderbolt of a play. He's also a dreamer who isn't afraid to take risks.

A McMaster student, working part time at Fortino's, Iachelli says the production at Hamilton's underused Staircase Theatre will cost him about \$3,500. Count royalties, rent and a few free dinners for the actors in that mix.

"The money will come from my bank account," Iachelli shrugs. "I hope to recoup it through ticket sales."

Risky? Yes. But perhaps doable.

The other two actors in Mamet's firebrand of a play are Iachelli's pals Seif Simon and Patrick Stewart. All three are Westdale Secondary School grads.

Right now, this trio is rehearsing Mamet's play in Iachelli's parent's basement in Ancaster. It's about three low-lives, trying to steal a valuable Buffalo Head coin.

You could say it's a labour of love.

Young, clean-cut and articulate Adam Iachelli talks theatre like a young, virgin professional. His ideas reverberate with intellectual savvy and the enthusiasm of someone unafraid to dream big dreams.

Studying humanities at McMaster University, Iachelli's placating his parents, who feel he should have some academic credentials behind him before trying to make a living acting.

"The acting game can be a tough go, even if you have talent. I know it's not an easy life," Iachelli says.

"I caught the acting bug watching my dad, Carm Iachelli, teaching and directing his drama classes at Westdale Secondary School. Later, I got involved in his plays. Last year, I won a Mira Award for directing Westdale's high school production at the National Theatre Festival."

Acting in and directing "American Buffalo" doesn't faze Iachelli. "Every so often, my dad comes down and pokes his head into rehearsals. He's there to provide help and advice."

"In Mamet's play, I'm Teach, a foul-mouthed bully. There's a human side to him though and he also has a comedic element. I think I understand the vulnerable side of him too. That side goes beyond the bold, rough talk. It might sound a bit vain, but I believe I understand this guy. And Mamet doesn't glorify or excuse the behaviours of the characters in this play. He just showcases them for what they are."

Iachelli says he doesn't believe the play is political, but feels it's relevant today, even though it's 50 years old.

"Of course it's about ruthlessness. These men are disenfranchised casualties of ruthless capitalism. In the end, the play is very much about greed."

For all that, Iachelli believes the characters have a certain charm.

Of course, they're exposed to us with their rough edges showing."

So, is there an audience for such plays here in the city? Iachelli admires Harold Pinter, John Osborne, and of course David Mamet. Certainly, most community theatres avoid them.

Still, Iachelli says he believes there are people craving plays like "American Buffalo." Surprisingly, he believes this audience is made up of older people who like their plays to have context, content and a beginning, middle and end.

He hopes to do more plays of this ilk, but for that his fledgling company will have to survive producing what he calls, "classic, contemporary work, passed over for new, not nearly as valuable works."

Recently, Mamet has been criticized for what some critics have termed hostile macho posturing. His characters feel life has done them wrong. They feel the American dream, (if indeed there still is one) is something they are due.

Certainly "American Buffalo" places male relationships under a bold lens. Iachelli and his cast understand this. But just how much venom and caustic grit they can coax from Mamet's dramatic thunderbolt of a play remains to be seen.

Certainly, The Staircase is a perfect venue for "America Buffalo." With just over 60 seats, it's intimate.

So, why not take a chance and celebrate this new, young company that hopes plays with guts and brawn can find an audience.

Flimsy comedy and sentimental imagery doesn't have to be a major theatrical diet. Plays like "American Buffalo," the recent Theatre Burlington production of "Timepiece" and Theatre Aquarius's "Casey and Diana" offer substantial stories that might just be mind-stretching.

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