



ANARCHY IN THE USA: (left to right) Patti LuPone & Debra Winger in 'The Anarchist.' Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review

The Anarchist

Mamet's latest is *not* a play & no vehicle for its stars

THE ANARCHIST

Written & directed by David Mamet

Through December 16, 2012

John Golden Theatre

252 West 45th Street, (212-239-6200)

www.TheAnarchistBroadway.com

By Scott Harrah

It is tough deciphering what exactly *The Anarchist*, David Mamet's latest Broadway offering, is purportedly about, but one thing is certain: It is *not* a play. The story is merely a rough draft and a sometimes thought-provoking, political character study of two women, but the narrative is too confusing and unfocused to qualify as a solid drama.

There was much anticipation for this show, particularly since it stars actress Debra Winger, long absent from the spotlight, making her Broadway debut; and musical theater legend Patti LuPone in a non-singing dramatic role. Unfortunately, both women's gifts are wasted on appallingly flimsy material

Summarizing the plot is almost pointless, for there really is only a proverbial germ of an idea here, and it is an effort to even follow what is happening. Ms. LuPone plays Cathy, a woman convicted of murder and bank robbery, who has served 35 years in prison and spends all of the story's 70 minutes trying to convince parole officer Ann (Ms. Winger) why she must be released.

Mr. Mamet throws numerous convoluted pieces of plot around through the dialogue, which contains none of the rapid-fire, staccato sting that is normally his trademark. We learn that Cathy speaks French, once lived in Algeria, committed heinous crimes and had a lesbian relationship with her accomplice, and has spent more than three decades in prison as a result. There is no locale mentioned in the script (the Playbill states the setting is "an office.") Is the action taking place in America or elsewhere?

Cathy's reasoning for being released is that she has done enough time and is also now a born-again Christian. She has a Bible that she has studied extensively, and blathers a lot about how Christ has forgiven her sins. Anyone raised in the faith may, while watching *The Anarchist*, feel like a kid again, sitting in a musty church classroom and studying the catechism, with Mr. Mamet in charge instead of a pastor or Sunday School teacher because many of Cathy's faith-based arguments are indeed fundamental summaries of Christian dogma.

While all the theological chatter about the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost might be inspiring to some in a revival meeting, it hardly makes compelling theater, and certainly is not what we expect from a playwright with the status of Mr. Mamet.

The Anarchist might be more palatable had it been produced off-Broadway in a more intimate setting, but it is no vehicle at all for the two multitalented ladies here, both trying desperately to breathe life and meaning into their undeveloped characters in this shoddy, empty tale.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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