



NEW RACE CAST MEMBER EDDIE IZZARD: Mamet's acclaimed drama runs through August 21, 2010 at the Barrymore. Photo: Robert J. Saferstein

Theater Review

With new cast, Mamet's *Race* remains a must-see drama

Race

Written and directed by David Mamet

Barrymore Theatre

138 West 48th Street

(212-239-6200), www.RaceonBroadway.com

Closes August 21, 2010

By Scott Harrah

It's hard to imagine that a small four-letter word could have so many meanings. In David Mamet's play *Race*, that one word by my count has at least eight different meanings. It is phenomenal that David Mamet can choose such a thought-provoking simple word and have it mean so much. This brings us to Mamet's brilliance and his use of the English language.

Most playwrights write a play elaborating on a thought or idea. Mamet, on the other hand, elaborates on the choice of words and their connection to each other. There is a flow to Mamet that has to be learned and cultivated. No word is left to chance. Everything you hear has a meaning and a purpose. The premise may seem simple and direct. A wealthy prospective white client, Charles Strickland (Richard Thomas) comes to the bi-racial law firm headed by Jack Lawson (Eddie Izzard) and Henry Brown (Dennis Haysbert) on a case involving a white man accused of raping an African-American woman. The dilemma centers on whether the firm wants to handle this dicey case or not. Complications arise when the young African-American intern at the firm Susan (Afton C. Williamson) is asked to assist.

As the participants in the law firm, Eddie Izzard, Dennis Haysbert and Afton C. Williamson have replaced the three original cast members James Spader, David Alan Grier, and Kerry Washington, respectively. Spader and Grier were perfection in their roles. Izzard, a British comedian, is a strange choice to portray an American lawyer with accent and presence. They both haven't reached their stride at the Mamet tempo, and as of yet Ms Williamson, has yet to feel comfortable in her part as the young intern, but she more than makes up for it with her rapid-fire delivery in the play's climax. Only Mr. Thomas continues his role as the client.

Race plays out as a wonderful whodunit. There are myriads of twists and turns, making a wonderful evening of theater. However, the enjoyment is further enhanced by the use of the language. As a critic to give a list of definitions for the word "race" would be a disservice to the reader. The viewer has to go to this show without any preconceptions, sit, and listen. Audiences should glean all the different meanings of this one small word and marvel at the context of such a powerful word and the work of a brilliant mind such as Mamet's.

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Broadway Listings



POWERFUL *RACE* : Dennis Haysbert in the new cast of Mamet's superb *Race*
Photo: Robert J. Saferstein

RACE

The latest installment from American theater icon David Mamet is controversial indeed. *Race* plays out as a wonderful whodunit. There are myriads of twists and turns, all of which create a wonderful evening of theater. However, the enjoyment is further enhanced by the use of language. It's all about words and how a single word or phrase can ignite a situation to create a racial issue in the workforce. Mamet touched on a similar issue in 1990 in *Oleanna*, presented earlier this season. The new cast, starring Eddie Izzard and Dennis Haysbert, is powerful and riveting. Richard Thomas is the only remaining cast member. It remains a potent, thought-provoking drama as only David Mamet can deliver. **Through August 21, 2010.**

ETHEL BARRYMORE THEATRE, 243 West 47th Street. (212-239-6200.)

www.raceonbroadway.com

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