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## Male Call

### Famed playwright adds testosterone to Nashville's theater season

by Martin Brady

***Speed-the-Plow*, Presented by Tennessee Repertory Theatre  
Through Feb. 17 at TPAC's Johnson Theater**

Over the years, the playwright David Mamet has cultivated something of a macho image. He's a man's man, a whiskey-drinking, poker-playing, gun-toting writer who's not the kind of touchy-feely guy you'll find sitting on Oprah Winfrey's sofa. But he's exactly the kind of guy you'll find inhabiting *Speed-the-Plow*, the Mamet play that Tennessee Repertory Theatre is currently staging at TPAC's Johnson Theatre.

The setting is manly enough: the inner sanctum of film executive Bobby Gould (David Alford), a glib and confident Hollywood player who revels in his power to "green-light" big commercial projects, in particular a typical Tinseltown piece of crap brought to him by junior exec Charlie Fox (Jessejames Locorriere). Enter a lone, interloping and possibly angelic female, Karen (Marin Miller), who sidetracks Gould with coy sexual overtures while attempting to interest him in another, more artfully serious film venture. For Gould, thinking with his genitals proves to be a misstep his ego can't afford, and in the play's climactic moment, Karen, pushed to honesty by the jaded, slimy Fox, admits that she only engages in sex if she's gets something out of the deal. For her, intimacy is a career tool.

*Speed-the-Plow* is vintage Mamet as provocateur, and the Tennessee Rep, under the thoughtful direction of Rene Copland, does justice to the play. The dialogue always crackles, and the interplay between Alford and Locorriere—a kind of movie song-and-dance on its own terms—is consistently vibrant, especially in a tense Act 3 scene where they come to blows. Meanwhile, Miller provides the alluring fulcrum that allows us to watch these masculine impulses at work.

What *Speed-the-Plow* tells us about powerful men isn't reassuring, but it rings with truth and is consistent with Mamet's ideas about the male-centered community. Despite the play's inherent seriousness, Mamet still finds a welcome amount of time for irony and humor. The Rep, for its part, delivers it all with style and dramatic flair.