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[Sing-Along "Sound of Music": Friday-Sunday at Cinema 21](#)

["Everlasting Moments": Starts Friday at Hollywood Theatre Coffins: 8 p.m.](#)

[Saturday, Satyricon King Louie & Baby](#)

[James: 3 p.m. Sunday, Music Millennium](#)

[The Shins: 9 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, Crystal Ballroom](#)

["The Importance of Being Earnest": Thursday-May 24, Venetian Theatre](#)

[Jenny Owens Young: 9 p.m. Wednesday, Doug Fir Lounge](#)

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Theater review: 'Romance' worth seeing -- unless you offend easily

by Michael McGregor, Special to The Oregonian

Sunday January 25, 2009, 8:09 PM



Bruce Lawson

"Romance" at Theatre Vertigo

A particular kind of masculine conflict has long been central to David Mamet's plays -- brutal rather than subtle exchanges fired by a will to power, and stuttering inarticulateness yielding to explosive outbursts of often-offensive language.

As he has become one of America's most influential playwrights, his signature style has been both praised and satirized. He hasn't been shy about praising it himself. Now, it appears, he's willing to satirize it too.

How else to view his 2005 farce, "Romance," which [Theatre Vertigo](#) is giving an energetic and at times inventively humorous Portland debut?

Clocking in at just an hour and fifteen minutes, the play is a trifle really -- what Graham Greene used to call an "entertainment," a less-serious work between weightier projects. But it is chock-full of the crude and idiosyncratic speech patterns, power plays and identity politics Mamet loves, all pushed to ridiculous extremes.

Set mostly in a courtroom against the backdrop of a Middle East peace conference in an unnamed city, the play centers on five male figures: a Jewish defendant (Tom Moorman) and his Christian lawyer (Nathan Gale), a gay prosecutor (Gary Norman) and his younger lover (Ben Buckley), a pill-popping judge (Garland Lyons) and his pliant bailiff (Bruce Lawson).

The crime is never quite clear but as usual in a Mamet play -- and in a farce -- the identities are: The Jew, The Christian, The Homosexual. Mamet seeks humor in setting these identities against each other, but a light touch was never his strength. While he succeeds through exaggeration in places, in others he pushes too far, striving not only for laughs but shock and maybe a fuzzy message. Slurs, invectives and insults abound. The result is a sometimes humorous, sometimes tiresome mess.

Even so, this show is worth seeing (except by anyone easily offended). The Vertigo cast knows where the humor lies and exploits it with their usual gusto. Buckley, in particular, brings a heightened, endearing energy to a smaller role, and Lyons is worth the price of admission alone for his surprisingly complex, manically quixotic performance as a loopy, expansive, shameless judge.

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