

Oleanna, by David Mamet

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Readers' Theatre In New Space For Mamet's Pulitzer Prize Drama

In February, The Readers' Theatre of Ithaca will present the chillingly provocative and incisive Pulitzer Prize winning drama that dissects the controversial issue of sexual harassment from every emotionally wrenching side of the equation: **OLEANNA** by David Mamet. The modern production will premiere at The Readers' Theatre's new home, **the Black Box Theatre at Lehman Alternative Community School, 111 Chestnut Street**. Performances will be one weekend only from Friday, February 22nd to Sunday, February 24th with a total of four performances in Ithaca (see detailed dates and times below).

Anne Marie Cummings, Founder and Artistic Director of The Readers' Theatre of Ithaca, is directing OLEANNA. Starring in the two-person, 90-minute drama is **Tim Perry**, Associate Artistic Director with The Readers' Theatre of Ithaca and an actor with the ensemble, and newcomer to The Readers' Theatre, **Darcy Jo Martin**. Martin graduated from UCLA's department of theatre, film, and television. Before moving to Ithaca, the area where she grew up, Martin could be seen in television shows such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *Without a Trace*.

OLEANNA provoked fierce debates about sexual harassment and gender politics. Written during the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas sexual harassment scandal, this play, about a female student accusing her male professor of sexual impropriety, divided audiences between those who were angered by what they perceived as fabricated sexual harassment charges used as a tool to gain power, and those who viewed the image of a scheming woman as an attack on the right of women to defend themselves from improper sexual advances.

Cummings' inspiration to direct OLEANNA came from a 2004 production at the Garrick Theatre in London featuring Aaron Eckhart and Julia Stiles. "I was very impressed with Lindsay Posner's direction and the performances," said Cummings. "It was clear how Posner wanted the audience to think of these two flawed characters in this situation. The beauty of directing a play like this is that a director can make restrained choices that dramatically sways the audience's thinking."

Martin stated that she's interested in tackling the challenging dialogue and staccato rhythm in OLEANNA. "As an actor I know that the role I'm playing can be viewed as the obvious 'bad guy.' While I may not agree with my characters' actions, she has very important things to say about abuse of power and the definition of sexual harassment," says Martin.

Perry explained that what interests him is the subtle dynamics of manipulation between the two characters. "The process of each character exploiting the other to gain even a slight advantage is engaging," he said. "It draws me into the scenes because it's a look at how humans desperately struggle to find meaning in their lives by selfishly striking down those around them, a theme that stands by itself, apart from the context of collegiate harassment accusations."

There will be free talk-backs following **all four performances** of OLEANNA. Guest speakers include **Dr. Greg Eells**, Director of Counseling and Psychological Services at Cornell University, **Richard Polenberg**, former history professor at Cornell University (last season Polenberg gave a fascinating talk-back after A STEADY RAIN), and **John Suter and Vivian Relta**, president of the Board of Directors for the Center for Transformative Action and consultant and facilitator for Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble.

Eells' talk, "*The Complexity of Relationships at Colleges and Universities*" will be given on Saturday, February 23rd at 8pm, and Polenberg's talk, "*The Anita Hill/David Mamet Connection*" will be given twice: Friday, February 22nd at 8pm and Sunday, February 24th at 6:30pm. Suter and Relta's talk, "*Be Right Or Be Heard: Listening for Understanding*," will be given on Sunday, February 24th at 3pm. Cummings will give a pre-show talk at Kendal, for Kendal residents only, on Sunday, February 10 at 3pm entitled, "*The Director's Process*."

Alternatives Federal Credit Union is a financial sponsor for OLEANNA. **The Center for Transformative Action** is a supporting sponsor. **Performance readings of OLEANNA take place at THE BLACK BOX THEATRE, 111 Chestnut Street, located at Lehman Alternative Community School. OLEANNA begins on Friday, February 22nd at (8pm), and will be performed on Saturday, February 23rd (8pm), and Sunday, February 24th (3 & 6:30pm). Tickets for students are \$10 with a reservation (student ID at the door). Tickets for adults and seniors are \$12 with a reservation and \$15 at the door. Reservations are recommended, and can be made by calling 607.217.6272. www.thereaderstheatre.com.**

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