

THE ARTS

American Buffalo needs to smooth rough edges

AMERICAN BUFFALO

Written by David Mamet.
Directed by the cast,
Jennifer Duncan '92, and Paulo Pereira '93.
Starring Archie Roberts '92, Ryan Yu '93,
and Franz M. Elizondo Schmelkes '94.
Reviewed at rehearsal.
Kresge Little Theatre,
Feb. 20 and 21, 8 pm.

By Deborah A. Levinson
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

American Buffalo is not a play for the faint of heart. Its characters are brutish and profane; its action is harsh and startling. The student production of David Mamet's play brings out these elements, but takes a little too long to get there.

To the actors' credit, I reviewed a rehearsal, and both the actors and the assistant directors admitted they had problems to work out before the two public performances. If they can just iron out the first act, *American Buffalo* will be worth seeing.

American Buffalo deals with the lives of three men: Don, a junk-store owner; Bob, a dimwitted ex-junkie; and Teach, a violent Cro-Magnon case whose idea of a platitude is "The only way to teach these people is to kill them." Don has just sold a rare buffalo-head nickel to a collector and, having discovered the profitability of coin collecting, plots with Bob to steal the buyer's coins. Enter Teach, who takes charge of the situation and browbeats Don into cutting off Bob. As plot goes, it isn't much, but then again, Mamet's strength has always been his dialogue.

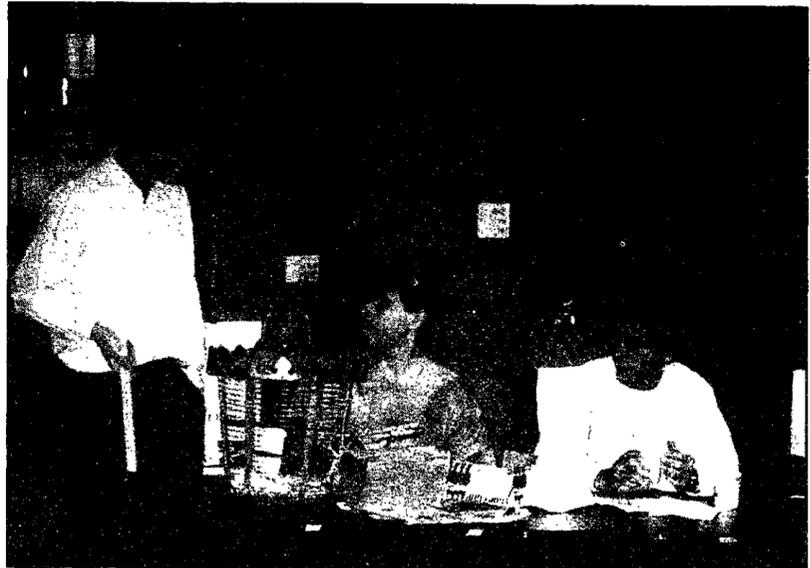
Teach's dialogue is the most colorful — essentially, it is a series of profanities strung together with an occasional adjective or verb.

The kindest thing he ever calls a woman is "broad" or "vicious dyke." As Teach, Ryan Yu '93 is superb, ferocious one minute and gracious the next. He enters the play screaming and yelling, maintaining that pace throughout the play, notably in the gripping final scene where he destroys the junk-shop and nearly beats Bob to death. Having seen Yu in other plays where he gave merely good performances, it was gratifying to see him turn in a great one.

Archie Roberts '92 also delivers a fine performance as the amiably stupid Bob. Decked out in faded jeans and denim jacket and wearing an old baseball cap backwards, Roberts looks the part of the poor ex-junkie trying to stay straight. He reveres Don as a son does his father, and the final scene and fadeout, where he lies bleeding in Don's arms, is genuinely touching.

I found it harder to warm up to Franz M. Elizondo Schmelkes '94 as Don. His voice remained flat and even for the entire first act when it should have carried more emotion. Not until the second act did he begin to bring some life to Don, finally offering more than a simple reading to the quiet moments of the play.

The calm moments, however, show the critical problem with this production of *American Buffalo*: In a play where dialogue is everything, the pacing is lugubrious, especially in the first act. Since the bulk of the action takes place in the second act, the actors must hook the audience right away. Unless the directors' and actors' promised changes occur, that isn't going to happen. Still, for a play as fascinating as *American Buffalo*, I'd be willing to take a chance on this company of actors again.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOANNA E. STONE
Ryan Yu '93 (Teach), Archie Roberts '92 (Bob), and Franz M. Elizondo Schmelkes '94 (Don) in David Mamet's *American Buffalo*.

Ozawa's New World demands your attention

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Conducted by Seiji Ozawa.
Dvorak's New World Symphony.
Haydn's Symphony No. 86.
Symphony Hall, Feb. 20 at 8 p.m.,
Feb. 21 at 2 p.m., and Feb. 22 at 8 p.m.

By Jonathan Richmond
ADVISORY BOARD

Despite all the calls for adventurous programming, there's always a place for a concert without X-rated items, and this weekend's offering from the BSO offers pure pleasure and relaxation. The main item is Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, and Ozawa does it very well indeed.

Of course, there's nothing quite like listening to the *New World* sprawled across the grass at Tanglewood under a starlit sky. But Ozawa's Symphony Hall rendition also brought out the melodies, the romance, and the earthiness of a piece audiences will never stop

loving.

Ozawa developed great drama in the opening movement of the *New World*: the BSO's alert and lively playing gripped one's attention. Strings attacked with majestic, flowing sweeps, while winds plied their art of seduction on the ears with gentle subtlety, and brass produced waves of excitement.

The second movement — suggested by the arboreal funeral of Minnehaha from *The Song of Hiawatha* — was done with a wistful beauty. The orchestra's dreamy, quiet playing also suggested wonder upon arrival in a new-found land. The work was concluded with high spirits, making it definitely worth a spot on your weekend agenda.

The concert also included Haydn's *Symphony No. 86*. Several passages were played felicitously, and the work's wit shone through, at least partially. The BSO was a bit plodding at times, however: Ozawa needs to inject a more lightly-sprung touch into his Haydn.



Seiji Ozawa

THE TECH PERFORMING ARTS SERIES

BRANDENBURG ENSEMBLE

Alexander Schneider, conductor
Richard Stoltzman, clarinet soloist
Rieko Aizawa, piano soloist

The Brandenburg Ensemble performs an all-Mozart program featuring *Two Marches in D Major*, K. 335; *Piano Concerto in B-flat Major*, K. 595; and *Clarinet Concerto in A Major*, K. 622. A Bank of Boston Celebrity Series event.

Friday, March 6, 8:00 p.m., Symphony Hall
MIT price: \$7

Tickets are on sale at the Technology Community Association, W20-450 in the Student Center. Office hours posted on the door. Call x3-4885 for further information.

The Tech Performing Arts Series, a service for the entire MIT community, from *The Tech*, MIT's student newspaper, in conjunction with the Technology Community Association, MIT's student community service organization.

Radio Flyer's childhood theme doesn't quite fly

RADIO FLYER

Directed by Richard Donner.
Written by David Mickey Evans.
Starring Elijah Wood and Joseph Mazzello.
At Loews Copley Place.

By Chris Roberge
ARTS EDITOR

Childhood themes haven't been faring too well at the movies these days. The latest offering from Steven Spielberg, widely praised as the guru of youth cinema, was the fairly disappointing *Hook*. *Beauty and the Beast*, which has earned \$110 million and the first best picture Oscar nomination awarded to an animated film, would be slighted by the term "a kid's movie." Now Richard Donner, most famous for directing both *Lethal Weapon* movies, has created *Radio Flyer*, a story of two brothers who transform their little red wagon into an imaginative means of flight from their abusive stepfather. But despite a very good premise and some strong performances, *Radio Flyer* never really gets off the ground.

Elijah Wood and Joseph Mazzello play Mike and Bobby Wright (a not-too-funny pun, given the film's fascination with flight), two young brothers who travel from New Jersey to California with their single mother (Lorraine Brocco) after their father deserts them. Soon after the splintered family arrives at their new home, Ms. Wright meets "The King," a totally unredeeming character who has a tendency to get upset at Bobby for no reason at all. This is



Elijah Wood and Joseph Mazzello star as brothers who must contend with a volatile stepfather in *Radio Flyer*.

a man who will become not just an evil stepfather, but an evil stepfather who daily drinks enough cheap beer to raise his blood alcohol level well beyond lethal levels, listens to cheesy country music well into the night, names himself after Elvis, drives an ugly pickup truck with tools constantly falling out of the back, and enjoys wielding electrical wire. Despite all of these warning signs, Ms. Wright

marries "The King," and Bobby and Mike discover that a monster much more frightening than anything they see on television or in their comic books has settled in their own home.

The two brothers are able to find a few defenses against their stepfather, including their pet dog, who tries to protect the boys at all costs. Mike and Bobby also begin to spend their days exploring the woods around their

home and making money through such ventures as finding and selling lost golf balls and depositing glass bottles. "The King" soon becomes too dangerous, though, and the boys decide to use their secret money to create "The Big Idea" — the only real way to get away from "The King's" anger.

The world of *Radio Flyer* is a world of crying buffalo, frightening werewolves, secret potions, and boys who can fly, all seen through the eyes of children. Wood, who was very impressive in 1990's *Avalon*, and Mazzello both do an excellent job in realistically portraying both the joys and pains associated with the stage of life when such visions are strongest. But the boys' acting is far superior to Evans' script, which frames the story as an anecdotal flashback of an older Mike (Tom Hanks) talking to his own children years later. There are far too many scenes of Wood looking up into the sky as Hanks' voice says something like "That was the first time that I..." or "From that moment on, I realized that..." It doesn't take long for the voiceover narration to grow tired, driving every significant point into the ground. And Donner, who is much better at intense action sequences than at touching family scenes, fumbles too often with his material. A few scenes possess an ingenious charm, but more often the story creates unintentional laughter when it tries for heartfelt emotion. Add to these shortcomings one of the weaker endings that I've seen lately, and *Radio Flyer* doesn't add up to much.