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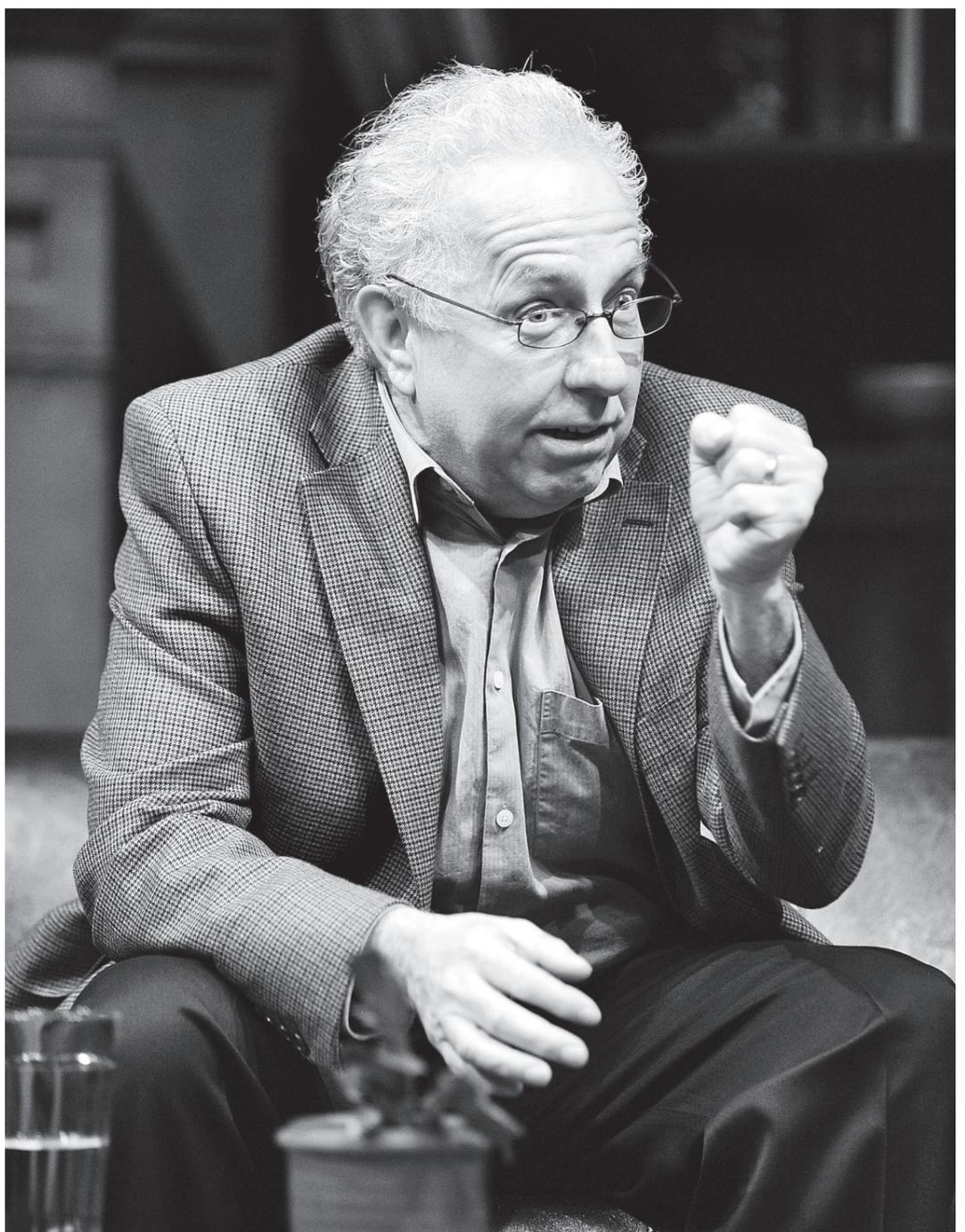
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A shining reflection in the dark

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theatrepreview

Shining City

Runs until 24 February
Written by Conor McPherson
Directed by James MacDonald
Starring Tom Wood, Caroline Cave,
Jaon Carnew, and Shaun Smyth
Citadel Theatre

BRYAN SAUNDERS
Arts & Entertainment Staff

In his presidential farewell address, Ronald Reagan spoke of a "shining city." In his mind, it was "a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace."

With his latest work, Irish playwright Conor McPherson challenges this idea of a perfect metropolis. The Tony Award-nominated script in question, *Shining City*, is now making its Canadian premiere at Edmonton's Citadel Theatre, and director James MacDonald is hoping citizens of this shining city will make time to see it.

That said, drawing in audiences shouldn't be an issue; the premise would intrigue even the most uninterested theatre-goer, as the play, which MacDonald often describes as "extremely natural," quickly becomes supernatural.

"[*Shining City*] is a play about an ex-priest who is setting up a [therapy] practice in Dublin, [whose] first and pretty much only client is a

middle-aged man who's recently lost his wife," he explains. "In the first scene, we find out that the reason the man is so tormented is that he's actually seeing the ghost of his dead wife."

Furthermore, the man's therapist has some issues of his own.

And while the entirety of the play's twisted plot unfolds inside the gritty, low-rent office belonging to this disturbed therapist, MacDonald explains how, even from indoors, the action challenges the idea of a shining city existing outdoors.

"I think that we all lie to ourselves to a certain extent, [but] some people lie to themselves in a very small way, and some people are completely dishonest and are living a lie."

JAMES MACDONALD
SHINING CITY DIRECTOR

"It's quite an urban play, but there's a feeling of isolation that you will find. Here we are, in a boomtown of a million people, but there's a lot of isolated people living in this so-called Shining City," he points out. "We tend to think of isolation as people who have no friends or no loved ones, but a lot of people can be very isolated within their relationships."

Unfortunately, MacDonald explains, people often refuse to acknowledge when a relationship isn't working out. Instead, they stay in that relationship when they shouldn't, essentially lying to themselves. This idea is central to the play; self-delusion, denial, and deceit are all issues that *Shining City's* characters struggle with.

"[The] major theme [in this play is] being honest with yourself. I think that we all lie to ourselves to a certain extent, [but] some people lie to themselves in a very small way, and some people are completely dishonest and are living a lie."

Ironically, this theme of dishonesty will ring true for many people, MacDonald thinks.

"This kind of day-to-day baggage that McPherson portrays is heavy, but it's also something that everybody shares. We accumulate a lot of experiences in our life, a lot of relationships, a lot of friendships, a lot of family things, a lot of things that we deal with. Really, what the play is about is how well we deal with [these things] and, really, about how honest we are with ourselves.

"I mean, you can achieve huge success in your career or with your family or your relationship," he continues. "But I don't think you ever quite get rid of the feeling that there might be something better. And how you deal with it is eventually going to be the answer to how you deal with your life. You have to come to grips; you have to be able to say, 'I don't think that's true. I don't think this is second-best. I am really in a fantastic place.' But if you don't do that, you're going to torment yourself your whole life."