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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS’
THE GLASS MENAGERIE
the ur international theatre program

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A NOTE ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Program content is compiled by the production’s Assistant Director, Meridel Phillips, and edited by Nigel Maister. For a complete list of sources and works cited, please contact the Theatre Program.

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The UR International Theatre Program wishes the following students who have contributed to the Theatre Program over the course of their undergraduate careers and who are now graduating: good luck, godspeed, and many broken metaphorical legs in the years ahead. Stay in touch!

Annalise Baird - Kelsey Burritt - Eric Cohen - Cassandra Donatelli - Jasmine Furnace
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THE GLASS MENAGERIE
by tennessee williams

directed by laura savia
set design by daniel zimmerman
costume design by jessica pabst
lighting design by jeanneert oi-suk yew
sound design by veronika vorel
voice & acting coaching by ruth childs

production staff

production stage manager ........................................... liza penney
assistant production stage manager .................................. sara frederick
assistant stage managers .............................................. deema ali/costumes
juan de la guardia/sound
richard lau/run crew
enobong okung/lights
michael tamburrino/props
christopher futia
assistant master electricians ............................ cassandra donatelli & garrick centola
theo lincoln
ryan kelly
macie mcgowan & apollo mark weaver
marika azoff, lydia jimenez & travis kohler
grace elizabeth interlichia
melanie weekes
missy pfohl smith
meridel phillips

production staff continue...
Born as Thomas Lanier Williams III on March 26, 1911, the young Tennessee Williams was the middle child (and oldest son) in a family of three, raised by a traveling shoe salesman and an overbearing mother from a traditional, genteel Southern family. He spent much of his early childhood in his grandfather’s parish in Clarksdale, Mississippi, during which time he suffered from a case of diptheria, a severe respiratory tract illness that nearly killed him. Forced to spend nearly a year recuperating, he was doted upon by his mother, resulting in an inextricable bond between the two. Several other factors from his life in Mississippi would become extremely influential in his later work. His grandfather, Walter Dakin, would read to him from his extensive library, including works by Shakespeare, Milton, and Poe, instilling an admiration for writing in the young Williams. The First World War, and the stories of warfare and trauma from those who came back from it, would also deeply affect him.

The parallels between Tennessee’s early life and that of Tomi’s in The Glass Menagerie have been extensively documented. His father, Cornelius, was not only away much of the time, but also a heavy drinker and an abusive husband. His mother, Edwina, was a charming and talkative social climber, obsessed with her own past as a popular debutante. His older sister, Rose, was his closest companion as a child, such that the connection between them sometimes led others to believe they were twins. Later in life, after increasingly erratic behavior, Rose was doted upon by his mother, resulting in an inextricable bond between the two. Several other factors from his life in Mississippi would become extremely influential in his later work. His grandfather, Walter Dakin, would read to him from his extensive library, including works by Shakespeare, Milton, and Poe, instilling an admiration for writing in the young Williams. The First World War, and the stories of warfare and trauma from those who came back from it, would also deeply affect him.

At seven years old, his parents moved the family to St. Louis, Missouri, where his father had secured a job at the International Shoe Company. Williams grew to despise the city, where his family was very much part of the poorer economic bracket, something he was made repeatedly aware of at school. During his years as a high school student and an undergraduate at the University of Missouri, tortured by his parents’ antagonistic relationship and his sister’s emotional and physical distance from him (Rose had been sent to finishing school), Williams began writing and submitting his stories for publication. The work won several local awards and honorable mentions. At twenty-one, his
ARTIST BIOS

LAURA SAVIA’S (DIRECTOR) directing credits include The Munimust of Duchess County (upcoming, The Attic), House Strictly Private (1st Irish Festival), The Color of Justice (TheaterworksUSA), The Urban Dictionary, The Plays, The Wii Plays, and Laim Frightened of My Body (Ars Nova), Pinter’s The Lover (Drama League), The Last Days of Judas Iscariot (NYU/Strasberg), Sri Dukai (At Play), and the 24 Hour Plays, as well as readings and workshops for The Public Theater, Roundabout Theatre Company, Atlantic Theater Company, Second Stage, Naked Angels, and MA-Yi Theater Company, among others. As a developing producer, she has served as Production Manager under Michael Mayer, Diane Paulus, and Neil Pepe. Her directing includes productions with Michael Mayer, Diane Paulus, Pepe, and Daniel Sullivan, most recently the Broadway production of The Merchant of Venice starring Al Pacino. Laura is the Director of the Workshop at Williamstown Theatre Festival. She spent five seasons on Atlantic Theatre Company’s staff, including two as Literary Associate. Co-conceiver and director of The Living Newspaper, which has performed at Joe’s Pub, Le Poisson Rouge, and the A.R.T.’s Club Oberon. 2009 Drama League Directing Fellow. Alumna of Northwestern University.

DANIEL ZIMMERMAN (SET DESIGN) is a scenic designer. Selected NY credits: Andrew Hinderaker’s God of Carnage (The Flea Theatre); Never the Sinner (Woodshed Collective, Regional), 3 Pianos (A.R.T.), A Permanent Image (Boise Contemporary Theatre), Thai (Center Theatre Group). Zimmerman’s design credits include Andrew Hinderaker’s God of Carnage (The Flea Theatre); Never the Sinner (Woodshed Collective, Regional), 3 Pianos (A.R.T), A Permanent Image (Boise Contemporary Theatre), Thai (Center Theatre Group). Her work has also appeared at St. Ann’s Warehouse, NYU School of Opera, HERE, Dixon Place, Tribeca Performing Arts, Red Bull Theatre, The Hangar Theatre, Dance Theatre Workshop, SF, NYMF, and NY Fringe Festival. Graduate of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts.

JEANETTE OI-SUK YEW (LIGHTING DESIGN) is a NY-based lighting & video designer and puppetry artist. Her designs have been seen in New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, Minneapolis, and Miami and internationally in Havana (Cuba), Prague (Czech Republic), Lima (Peru) and Edinburgh (Scotland) in venues including the Rose Theatre at Lincoln Center, HERE Arts Center, St. Ann’s Warehouse, ArtsEmerson, the Ontological-Hysteric, Manhattan School of Music, Teatro Milla, The Zoo Roxy, The Flea Theatre, Joyce SOHO, The Chocolate Factory, REDCAT, and Highways Performance Space. Recent: Matthew Paul Olmos’s So Go The Ghosts of Mexico Part 1, The Civilians’ Paris Commune, Elizabeth Swados and Cecilia Rubinoff’s From the Fire (winner of the 2011 MTM: UK Musical Theatre Awards for Best Musical, Best New Production, and Best Music), Conni’s Avant Gard Restaurante Returns in: The Motherland Ship (2012 New York Innovative Theatre Awards Nominee for Lighting Design), The Foundry’s How Much is Enough, The Civilians’ In the Footprint, Mozart’s Don Giovanni with Isabel Milenksi, Handel’s Alcina

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

father pulled him from college to work in the warehouse, where he spent several years. During that time, the dreadful treadmill of the job made him miserable, and although writing became his outlet, his depression led to an eventual nervous breakdown that drove him to quit the factory. After beginning his degree in English at Washington University and eventually transferring it at the University of Iowa, Williams drifted around the country, taking odd jobs and working with various writing and theatre groups. In 1939, around the time he began to be known as “Tennessee,” Williams received a Rockefeller Grant and settled in New Orleans where he wrote for the Works Progress Administration and secured a six-month contract with Max Gordon’s Mabou Mines. The Glass Menagerie, written in New Orleans in 1944-45, became his first major success, moving from its opening in Chicago to Broadway within the year and earning the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for the best play of the season. In 1947, A Streetcar Named Desire was similarly successful, bringing him the 1948 Pulitzer Prize. Over the next decade, he went on to write several more Broadway plays, gaining international attention and earning a second Pulitzer (for Cat on a Hot Tin Roof in 1955).

In 1947, after several brief affairs, Williams met the part-time actor Frank Merlo, who became his partner for the next fourteen years. The two traveled widely together, and eventually moved from their apartment in Manhattan to Key West, Florida. Merlo provided Williams with a source of stability against his worsening depression, serving as his personal secretary and helping him battle his alcohol abuse. In his forties and fifties, the playwright began to decline emotionally, a downward spiral that was only amplified by Merlo’s death from lung cancer in 1963. Although he continued to write extensively, much of his work was poorly received and his public image suffered from both his reputation as an addict and his homosexuality. He subsequently became addicted to prescription drugs which became a contributing factor in his death in 1983, when he was found in his New York hotel having choked on a bottle cap. Williams was buried in St. Louis at his family’s request, despite his desire to be cremated and buried at sea.
The Glass Menagerie...
by degrees something was happening much uglier and more terrible than death.” Tennessee’s diary was witness to the irrevocable: “R. makes the house tragic, haunted. Must be put away, I suppose. An incredible horror to face.”

In the State Hospital in Farmington, ‘Dementia Percox. (Schizophrenic) Mixed Type, Paranoid Predominate’ was diagnosed and insulin shock and Metrazol therapy prescribed. After six years of hopeless treatment, in 1943, Rose was given a bilateral prefrontal lobotomy, sanctioned by Edwina Williams, her husband having given up on Rose. Tennessee’s only comment was a journal entry in blank verse:

Grand, God be with you.
A chord breaking.
1000 miles away.
Rose. Her head cut open.
A knife thrust in her brain.
Me. Here. Smoking.
My father, mean as a devil, snoring - 1000 miles away.

Tennessee had last seen his sister in 1939, “her talk was so obscene—she laughed and talked continual obscenities.” His own obsession with mental illness remained with him, as Leverich writes, “He knew that Rose’s reality was never far removed from his own.”

Tennessee’s success with A Streetcar Named Desire allowed him to finance his sister’s private care, and up until his death he continued to pay for her upkeep, whilst intermittently blaming his mother (who died aged 94 in 1979) for having allowed the operation. Williams’ estate was left to the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, with the bulk remaining in trust for his sister during her lifetime. With her death, the university received $7m.

ST LOUIS

St. Louis, Missouri was originally transferred to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and was incorporated as a city in 1822, a year after Missouri became an official state. The city’s stance during the Civil War was divided, but despite the economic setbacks of war and the blockade on river trade, St. Louis flourished under trade with Western states after the war concluded. In 1904, St. Louis hosted the World’s Fair and the Summer Olympics, which provided the city with the money to build Forest Park, the St. Louis Art Museum, and the St. Louis Zoo. Religiously, St. Louis is home to many Roman Catholics having been a destination for many Catholic immigrants during the 19th and 20th centuries. Despite its notorious crime rates, the city is home to popular blues, jazz, and ragtime traditions, and its economy thrives on service, manufacturing, transportation, and tourism.

CAST

in order of appearance

Tom Wingfield ........ Danny Mensel
Amanda Wingfield....... Melissa Martin
Laura Wingfield....... Grace Elizabeth Interlichia
Jim O’Connor ......... Angel Morales

Being a “memory play,” The Glass Menagerie can be presented with unusual freedom of convention. Because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part. Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are ... These remarks are not meant as a preface only to this particular play. They have to do with a conception of a new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions if the theatre is to resume vitality as a part of our culture.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, PRODUCTION NOTES TO THE GLASS MENAGERIE

ELEGY FOR ROSE

She is a metal forged by love too volatile, too fiery thin so that her substance will be lost as sudden lightning or as wind. And yet the ghost of her remains reflected with the metal gone, a shadow as of shifting leaves at moonrise or at early dawn. A kind of rapture never quite possessed again, however long the heart lays siege upon a ghost recaptured in a web of song.
1937 was a year that marked the beginning of the "depression within the Depression." After a period of growth generated by President Roosevelt’s New Deal, the economy once again declined, triggered by the backlash of reflationary policies such as the Banking Act of 1935, which increased federal reserve requirements. The economy’s gradual recovery from its lowest point of production (around 1933) was interrupted and began to reverse, inciting mass public frustration at higher unemployment rates and sparking labor riots around the country. One such incident, the Memorial Day Massacre in Chicago, resulted in the deaths of ten steelworkers at the hands of rate police forces.

The tension between workers and industrialists exemplified the class and social struggles that were endemic to the Great Depression and in particular to the 1937 recession. While the economic consequences of the 1929 stock market crash were felt nearly universally, the gap between rich and poor was somewhat exacerbated by the added negative effects that the working classes suffered, such as mass unemployment and decreased farm prices. Financial insecurity prompted the upper classes to flaunt their wealth and status, even while they resented being taxed for New Deal programs which catered to the poor. The Memorial Day Massacre and its violent aftermath precipitated a battleground between their parents, Rose felt, at eighteen, unequal. Her relationships were inconstant: “My beau hasn’t arrived yet, he comes in the morning and stays until one o’clock every night. I’m so tired of him I could scream.” Edwina, her mother, realized, “For the past few years something unknown and fearful had been taking place in the mind of our spirited, imaginative Rose.” It was hoped a good marriage would settle her, but her debut was “a farce from the first,” wrote Edwina. The local paper ran a large photograph of a wistful-looking Rose announcing that she would be “the recipient of marked social attention.” She was, for a month; but none of the boys asked for a second date and, soon after, serious depression took hold. Severely stomach pains had Rose believing someone was trying to poison her; she fought bitterly with her father, who threatened to leave the family. She lacked self-confidence, and her failure to stick at secretarial jobs was diagnosed by her psychiatrist as a fear of sex.

Edwina determined that Rose should have respectable “gentleman callers” and wanted Tennessee to bring home “some young friend” (Mrs. Williams “never stopped talking,” recalled a friend of Rose’s). Yet Tennessee—still a virgin at 25, like his sister—hated her inempt attempts at promiscuity: “Rose, I heard you offer yourself to Colin, and I want you to know that you disgusted me.” At 26, Rose’s life began to go seriously off-kilter. Witness to a literary party given by her brother which got out of hand, she “informed” on him to their mother. It was a traumatic turning-point: “I hate the sight of your ugly old face!” Tennessee screamed at her; the cruelest thing he’d ever done, he said. In his diary, he wrote: “The house is wretched. Rose is on one of her neurotic sprees—fancies herself an invalid—talks in a silly dying-off way—trails the tragedy to come. Cornelius objected to the expense of private treatment and threatened to put Rose in the State Asylum. Tennessee found it all impossible to deal with: “We have had not deaths in our family but slowly...”
Women in 1930s America assumed a complicated and sometimes contradictory role, as they were often forced to substitute their labor for household items or services that had previously been bought, even as they were expected to retain their social position as housewives. Often, women were legally prevented from taking jobs outside the home, which were considered to be reserved for men. Until the beginning of the second World War, when jobs were freed up by the number of men entering military service, women were expected to concentrate on holding the family together, which was in many ways a step backward from the women's suffrage movement and the advances of the 1920s.

Culturally, the United States underwent a different kind of transformation in the 1930s, focusing on the creation of a national cultural identity. Even while artists experimented with new forms of expression, the country was obsessed with the simplicity of its past. Intellectuals such as the New Humanists saw modern values like individualism as the root of the country's social and economic problems, while traditional folk culture became increasingly popular. However, the impulse for modernism was never fully buried, as some dissatisfied thinkers began to look towards the future for solutions. Mass media and the widespread introduction of the radio (which reached over 80% of the population by 1939), proved to be crucial as a way of fostering a new community. Ultimately, the decade served as a time when the "American way" became a fully-developed cultural idea, providing a basis from which to integrate the developing divisions in society.
Memory plays

In simplest terms, The Glass Menagerie sets forth Tom’s ‘reasons’ for his renunciation of the conventional goals of the society in which he lives. The play is his memory, and his memory—not a rational analysis of it—is his evidence. It is not necessary that one accept the memory itself as a fact, the one fact of Tom’s existence. Tom’s world—from a distance “ill by lightning,” the war in Europe—is his description, not his defense. The world beyond, in rags and at war, is beyond his responsibility, beyond his memory.

Paul T. Nolan

The genre of memory play originates with The Glass Menagerie, but its influence has been far-reaching. Though other playwrights have used framing techniques, Tennessee Williams’s original conception of the frame-as-memory has been widely imitated in a range of works and influenced many later artists, including Harold Pinter and Neil Simon.

In a memory play like The Glass Menagerie, we watch the story progress through the recollections of Tom Wingfield, our narrator. Williams’s structural metadrama, with the theatre of Tom’s memories unfolding within the constructed theatre we inhabit, allows for a wide range of technical variations, given that memory lacks the realism inherent in most types of story-telling. In his extensive production notes to the play, Williams discusses the multiple ways in which sound, lighting and scenic design can be incorporated into a dream-like atmosphere, emphasizing the nostalgia, “which is the first condition of the play.” Memory is selective, and therefore the play’s content serves as a kind of ‘highlights’ reel, giving us only the crucial moments that lead towards the ultimate point Tom (or Tennessee) is making. But the form also reinforces the fact that memory is something we cannot run from, and that, like the small Wingfield tenement apartment, it is both the structure through which we experience the world and the prison from which we cannot escape.

Tennessee Williams

Production Notes to The Glass Menagerie

When you look at a piece of delicately spun glass you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken.

Paul T. Nolan