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The Glass Menagerie Is A Shattering Experience



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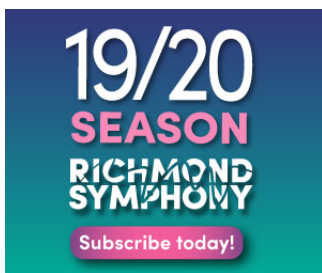
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ARTS

Without question, Tennessee Williams is one of America's greatest writers and his plays have had a significant impact on the direction that theatre took in the 20th Century. One of his most famous plays, *The Glass Menagerie* is the current offering by [5th Wall Theatre](#) and is being presented in [TheatreLAB's space, The Basement](#).

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The intimate setting puts the audience almost right on top of the actors and that has to be intimidating for the players. One false move, one wrong twitch, one slight lapse in



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character, even for a second, will knock the audience out of the play. Fortunately, on the night I saw the play, the four actors that make up the play performed flawlessly and I was swept away into the world of the play was as real to me as any faded memory.

Memory is what this play is all about. If reality is indeed what we are able to perceive then those half-remembered fever dreams are as real as anything. Through the lens of Williams' character of Tom, we hear the story of his dissatisfaction with his life; both home and work are as stifling as the heat and humidity that permeates the play.

Matt Bloch plays Tom Wingfield with a great deal of pent up frustration mixed with humor and some cruelty. Bloch is a very talented actor who has played a number of well-known roles, and here he has done justice to this complicated character. Bloch captures the anger towards the character's mother Amanda, played amazingly by Lian-Marie Holmes.

Amanda Wingfield is one of the truly great roles for women, and Holmes carries it with a mixture of grace and madness. She is desperate to hold onto her memories of the way things used to be in the old south, and she can't reconcile that with the harsh circumstances of her current reality. Holmes moves around the stage with the grace of a butterfly, flitting from place to place delicately and also like a charging rhino about to gore its prey. It is a bravura performance and one that should not be missed.

Then there's Laura, the most delicate creature, as fragile as the glass animals that she collects and fawns over in her corner of the living room. She refers to herself as "a cripple," and indeed, actress Louise Keeton does give her a slight

limp, sometimes more noticeable than others depending upon Laura's current circumstances.

Shy, scared, and completely vulnerable, Laura is trapped between the warring Tom and Amanda, but is in no way strong enough to stand up for herself, or to broker peace between the two. In complete transparency, Keeton works at VPM, as do several other great actresses, none of whom expect any kindness from this critic.

Simply put, Keeton was born to play this role. Her small stature and hesitant voice project her pain beautifully and she is totally mesmerizing in the role.

The fourth character is Jim O'Connor, the "gentleman caller" that Tom brings home one night for supper and to meet Laura. O'Connor is the embodiment of the American Self-Improvement Individual. He was the BMOOC in high school and is determined to pull himself up and out of the crowd by his own bootstraps. It's a tricky role to play, as he offers banal platitudes in order to give Laura some hope, and then accidentally wrecks everything. The role is essayed by Cooper Sved, and while I am not overly familiar with his work, he has played several major roles and shows great promise for the future.

A fifth character, if you will, is Tennessee Dixon's set and projections. Yes, projections. There are two versions of this play available – one a standard version with just the set, light, and music and one with those elements plus the addition of projections that play on a back screen that offer flashes of memory – old yearbook photos, a fire escape in an alley, and these play beautifully against the snatches of sound provided by Ryan Dygert.

Michael Jarett's lights are nice and moody, a tricky thing to do in such a small space, but apparently a skill he has mastered.

Director Morrie Piersol has beautifully blended all of these elements into a stunning production that should not be missed. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, there are only a few performances left and space may be limited. Do yourself a favor and make your reservations early for *The Glass Menagerie* as you do not want to miss this.



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