

Published February 16th, 2011 Martin Returns to THT with The Glass Menagerie By Sophie Braccini



El Beh plays Laura (forefront), Heidi Abbott plays Amanda (left) and Aleph Ayin is Tom in Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie Photo Stu Selland It's little wonder that Artistic Director Clive Worsley asks Susannah Martin to come back to Town Hall Theater every year. The awardwinning director, who gave us The Importance of Being Earnest and Rabbit Hole, and is now shaping Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, has strength and precision that result in crisp and impactful productions. One of Martin's many talents is her ability to select the cast for each play. Expect a powerful experience in this interpretation of The Glass Menagerie.

The fact that 2011 marks the100th birthday of Tennessee Williams was icing on a cake full of reasons that Martin wanted to direct The Glass Menagerie. "This script is very present and real, even if it is set in the past," she says, "it is romantic, greedy and hard edged. Pretty astounding considering it's his first play."

"I've loved Tennessee Williams since I was very young," says Martin, who remembers reading The Glass Menagerie when she was eleven, "I definitely related to Laura and Tom. The way they want to find their place in the world, the challenges of being rejected or not heard." Martin thinks that the way the characters speak makes them jump off the page, "They are so real and contemporary," she adds.

"I think that we have a fantastic cast," states Martin, "all of these

actors bring immediacy to this play, their work is so present that it becomes visceral and alive. I needed four people who were going to dive in. They are not a traditional casting, but they are the best people for the play."

Aleph Ayin's Tom is raw, uncensored, with an internal violence that burst at times. "I am boiling inside," he says in the play, and the spectator senses it. His mother Amanda, played by Heidi Abbott, is there right alongside him. During rehearsal, Abbott encouraged Ayin to act out his emotions, "Making it physical breaks down what was getting in the way of really hearing it," she said.

Martin trusts her actors but pushes them to question Williams' every intention behind every word. "The play is impeccably structured, everything is intentional," she says, "but it is not a realistic play, it is between realistic and expressionist." The play is narrated in the past from the son's point of view; is he rewriting history, wanting to do things differently? At times a ghost seems to pull a veil over the scene and for a second the actors are suspended in time. The slight lapse in time adds to the charm and mystery of the play.

Laura, played by El Beh, and Jim, played by Michael Perez, form a very believable tandem of characters. She is fragile, and extremely touching, while Perez portrays with determination the young American blessed with optimism. Abbott obviously enjoys exploring the many facets of the great iconic mother character, Amanda.

"It is a great pleasure to work on a play written by such a master of language," said Ayin, "every comma matters, there is no gap, everything is meaningful and timeless. It's an unlimited world opening to you."

The enthusiasm and the energy that this group of young actors brings to the play should make this performance one of Town Hall Theater's big successes. "Susannah and I talked a lot early on about not wanting this play to feel like a museum piece - something that can happen when people approach such an iconic piece of classic theater," said Worsley, "But rather we wanted to concentrate on what in the play is relevant to contemporary audiences and find ways to make the play feel real and alive for us today. The works of Williams have been branded on the American psyche and have become part of our emotional lexicon, tools that we use to explore and understand ourselves and the world around us. We're confident that our audiences will be delighted and moved by this brilliant script and thoughtful production."

The Glass Menagerie will be at the Town Hall Theater from February 19 to March 19, with previews on February 17 and 18, at 3535 School Street in Lafayette. The shadow cast composed of teen actors will perform on February 27 and March 5. For tickets, call the box office at 283-1557 or go to www.TownHallTheatre.com.

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