

'Glass Menagerie' faithful to playwright's intent



CATHIE BREIDENBACH

The enduring magic of Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie" lies in its ability to create a lyrical mood that vibrates with sadness, regret and love. — like a lone cello playing a waltz, now refrain in the half light of memory. Or like Tom (Daniel Pardo) who types from stage right — cigarette aglow in the dark — as he makes word music in this largely autobiographical play, which established Williams' reputation 50 years ago. But theatrical mood is fragile, as easily destroyed as Tom's pathological shy sister Laura (Amy Lammert) and as easily broken as the cherished unicorn in a collection of tiny, blown-glass animals that Laura's mother calls a glass menagerie.

Meadow Brook Theatre's mixed revival of Williams' classic creates a mood of delicate beauty with Dennis Parichy's magical lighting effects from candles and shadows and moonlight, with original music composed for the production by Oakland University's Karl Boelter, and with unique above-the-stage lighted captions that underscore the action similar to the way chapter titles in an 18th century novel did. The captions are part of the script. Williams preferred over more frequently staged later adaptations, and it is this earlier script Meadow Brook presents for the 50 year

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anniversary of the play's debut. For all director Rob Bundy's mastery in creating the illusion of events seen through a veil of memory, the fragile mood succumbs to frequent jarring notes from a cast that, on opening night muffled numerous lines and from sometimes too hard-edged interpretations of Tom's manipulative mother, Amanda (Peggy Cowles), and of Jim (J. Paul Boehmer), the gentleman caller who comes to dinner. Both Amanda and Jim jar the mood with their false laughs. Amanda's trilling laugh, too loud, too bright, too blatantly flirtatious fails to charm. Amanda is supposed to be chatty and charming as she flutters a fan, snatches in a dress that floats and swirls, and cloyingly flatters Jim when she comes to dinner. She survives on memories of her glory days as a young Southern belle courted by rich planters, and she buries her gentle past before her husband left and she had to live in a meager walk-up flat off an alley in St. Louis.

Her display of exaggerated Southern femininity is supposed to be a bit ridiculous and pathetic so we sympathize, at least a little, with a woman raising a son and a crippled daughter, alone during the hard times of the 1930s, a woman who clings to the past as if it held answers for the desperate present.

With Cowles' exaggerated interpretation of Amanda, however, we

instead discount her story that her husband left because he "fell in love with long distances" and conclude that she drove him away just as she for Tom to flee "to just as she for Tom to flee."

The gentleman caller, Jim, laughs more like a slap-on-the-back salesman — too hearty and forced for a man with a crippled daughter, alone during the hard times of the 1930s, a woman who clings to the past as if it held answers for the desperate present.

Mood and charisma revive in the scene when Jim dances with



Tennessee's play: "The Glass Menagerie," a play by Tennessee Williams is being staged at the Meadow Brook Theatre through April 9. Starring in the production are Amy Lammert and J. Paul Boehmer.

the crippled Laura and she seems, for a few moments, almost normal in the larger-than-life shadows lit by the candelabra. The scene faithfully captures the soft-lit

mood of a memory that in "a world lit by lightning" now even more than 50 years ago still has the power to move us with sadness, regret and love.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.

Don't miss splendid 'Guys & Dolls'



HELEN ZUCKER

Nancy Gurwin's production of "Guys & Dolls," directed and choreographed by Kathi Bush, is lively. The music, directed by Christopher Keen, is alive.

And, as all the world knows, so is Damon Runyon's cheeky story.

The leads are a skilled troupe; between them they carry the show. Paul Silver is especially strong as Sky Masterson. Silver's powerful build, deft movements, and fine voice make him a believable Sky — a brilliant gambler who knows his Bible, who manages to make good on his marker and deliver 12 bad souls to the mission on West 94th Street.

Silver gives an excellent rendition of the poignant "My Time of Day," and the male cast and Silver do a great "Luck Be a Lady."

Edgar A. Guest III is a splendid Nathan Detroit. Guest looks the Wizard of Oz, a look that serves him well as Nathan scurries around Times Square trying to find places to run his "Oldest Established Floating Crap Game."

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Only a wizard could have figured out how to stay engaged and unmarred to Adelaide for 14 years. Guest is easy onstage; he gives an amusing performance. He sings "Blue Me" in a natural, bruised, husbandly voice.

Nancy Gurwin plays Adelaide for all the laughs she can get. Gurwin has good legs, tons of energy, fine timing, and lots of funny little snuffles; she uses all to full effect. She's especially effective in "Adelaide's Lament" and "Marry the Man Today." Gurwin is a troupe.

Linda Barsamian's soprano voice serves her well as the mission girl, Sarah Brown. She does a fine "I'll Know," and is especially good in the duet, "The Never Been in Love Before." Barsamian delivers gutsy dialogue throughout the play. Like the rest

of the cast, she's clear as a bell. Gary Lee Temple turns in a funny Nico Nico Johnson; his rendition of "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat" is wonderful. Les Jones as Benny Southstreet, Nico's buddy and co-worker, displays great timing, and a fully realized sense of Runyon's world. Jac Cortes is comically as Arvido Abernathy, Sarah's grandfather, he gives us a tender "More I Cannot Wish You."

Melvin Hardiman is a frustrated Lt. Brannigan. Kors Van Mourik is a truly Brooklyn Harry the Horse. Gary E. Sturm, a huge Big Jullie from Chicago, is funny. The large cast works well together.

Chris Steinmeyer is a likable Society Max. Dan Parsons adds his weight as Angie the Ox John Srednicki and Sam Weiner round out the gamblers and sinners. Elaine Keiner is a strict General Cartwright. Gary E. Sturm, doubling as Joey Biltmore, who wants his cash in advance, yells believably from the sound booth.

The set, sound and musicians are dandy. So are the colorful



"Guys and Dolls"

THEATRE: Nancy Gurwin production at the Jewish Community Center in the Aaron DeRoy Studio Theatre. 6600 W. Maple, West Bloomfield.

CURTAIN TIMES: 8 p.m. Sat., March 25; 2 p.m. Sun., March 26; April 2 & 9; 8 p.m. Sat., April 1 & 8.

TICKETS: \$15 adults, \$12.50 senior citizens, \$10 students. Call (810) 352-3729 or (810) 354-0545.

suits and costumes by Patricia LaFramboise and props by Debbie Kiperman.

Helen Zucker has many years' experience reviewing for newspapers and magazines in Michigan, New York and Massachusetts.

Noteworthy concerts

Here are some noteworthy concerts you won't want to miss.

Dartmouth College Glee Club will perform 7:30 p.m. Thurs., March 23 in the Wallace Ballroom at the Community House, 380 S. Bates Street, Birmingham. An afterglow dessert reception will follow concert. Tickets \$10 adults, \$5 students, available at the door.

Glinka Gerova Ortega, flute, Peter Antonio Soave, bayan, with special guests Trio De Paris, winners of the 1994 Grand Prix Actor Pizzola International Competition in Italy, will present a concert 8 p.m. Fri., March 24 in the L. Johns Theatre on Oakland Community College's Royal Oak Campus. Call (810) 544-5588 for ticket information.

The Cleveland String Quartet, now in its 26th season as one of the premier chamber ensembles of our time, will present the last performance of the 43rd season of the Cranbrook Music Guild, 8 p.m. Saturday, March 25, in the Library of Cranbrook House, 380 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills.

Tickets are \$20 adults, \$7.50 students. Call (810) 751-2435. The evening will conclude with

the traditional Oak Room reception where patrons can meet the artists.

In addition to performances in the world's music capitals and award-winning recordings of more than 60 chamber works, the Quartet regularly tours the United States, Canada and Japan.

The Cleveland Quartet consists of violinists, William Preucil and Peter Salaff, violist, James Dunham, and cellist, Paul Katz. The program will feature the last Beethoven Quartet, opus 135 in F major; and the first Brahms Quartet, opus 51, no. 1 in c minor; and it will include a one-movement work by Joaquín Turina, "La Oración de Torero" (The Bull-fighter's Prayer).

"Trio con brio," a lively concert of light opera to Broadway in an art gallery setting, will be presented 8 p.m. Sat., March 25 at Nativity Episcopal Church, 21220 W. 14 Mile Road, Bloomfield Township (between Cranbrook and Lahar). Tickets \$10. Call (810) 646-4100. The concert features mezzo-soprano Dorothy Cornie and tenor, Gordon Finlay with pianist/comedian, James Maniscalco.

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