

## Preshow: The Glass Menagerie

Nina Marni.

Welcome to this Audio Introduction of ***The Glass Menagerie***, by Tennessee Williams, presented by State Theatre Company of South Australia at the Odeon Theatre in Norwood.

*The Glass Menagerie is presented by special arrangement with The University of the South, Suh-wah-nee, Tennessee.*

### CONTENT WARNING

It contains adult themes, historical language that may cause offense, theatrical haze and smoke effects, herbal cigarettes smoked onstage and flashing/strobe lights.

The performance runs 2 hours and 25 minutes, including an interval.

The Glass Menagerie is Tennessee Williams' *semi-auto-bio-graph-ical* play and is considered an American classic. He coined the expression 'a memory play' to describe how The Glass Menagerie is guided by a narrator who is also a character, Tom, looking back on the past.

The other characters and their locations are portrayed not as they objectively were, but as the narrator subjectively remembers them.

Using memory to drive the story, allows the narrator to exaggerate or leave out details for effect.

Amanda Wingfield and her two adult children, Tom and Laura, live in a small apartment in 1930s, St Lewis, Missouri.

### Set & Lighting description

The interior of the Wingfield's open-plan apartment spans almost the full width of the theatre.

It is flanked on both sides by a dark, narrow alleyway leading to a latticework of metal fire escapes, typical of the tenement building style of the time. Neighbours' clothes-lines, hung with washing, are strung across the alleyways.

The apartment is on four levels, much lower at the front than at the back, and with no walls between rooms. Nearest to the audience, a vinyl floor covering is patterned in blue, red and cream squares, and motifs. It runs the width of the apartment, across the front, at floor level.

At the front right, two steps lead from the floor to a raised area, 45 centimetres high. It is a small living room, with a three-seater sofa.

## RECORDED PRE-SHOW NOTES

The sofa has a carved, wooden back and arms, with cushions upholstered in a blue-grey fabric. A brown-checked blanket is folded over the back of the sofa at one end. Two small pillows lean against the left arm.

Next to it, on the left, is a small, rectangular table, in polished wood, approximately 80 centimetres high.

It has a single drawer. A small table-lamp sits on top, with a folded newspaper next to it. The wooden floor is bare.

At the far right of the living room, two steps, with faded carpet runners, lead up to the main room, 50 centimetres higher than the living room.

On the far right of the main room is a full length mirror and next to it, a single coat-stand, with three coats hanging on the hooks.

Central in the room is a wooden dining table with three, upholstered, wooden chairs, one at either end and one behind.

The table is set with plates, cutlery and serviettes. Above the dining table hangs a single light bulb. The wooden floor is bare.

Behind, and to the left of the dining table, is a small kitchen, separated from the main room by a transparent, black-gauze curtain.

In the kitchen, facing us, is a 1930s gas cooker, next to a set of green and white cupboards and drawers, with a ceramic sink set into the middle of it.

A large, sash-window is above the kitchen sink. A single hanging light, with a white, ceramic shade, is the only source of lighting in the kitchen. A set of stairs lead from the kitchen, down to another part of the apartment.

Behind the dining table, a telephone and old portable typewriter, with its cover off, sit on a small desk. A wooden swivel chair, with a leather upholstered seat, is pushed up to the desk.

Above the desk is a very large, ornately carved, gilded, picture-frame. It is looked at and referred to several times, as a portrait of the absent husband and father of the Wingfields.

The frame is empty. However, a huge, three-metre high, unsmiling portrait of the handsome, dark-haired man, is projected onto the black-gauze curtain whenever he is mentioned, as well as at times of stress and disruption within the household. The image fades and increases in intensity, throughout. A constant, brooding, presence even in his absence.

To the right of the desk a set of four wooden steps, with faded carpet runners, lead up to the fourth level, the terrace – about a metre higher than the main room.

This leads to the fire escape at the very back, by which the characters leave or enter the apartment.

## RECORDED PRE-SHOW NOTES

The terrace is bare except for an oversized, wooden doorframe at the top of the apartment steps and a high stool next to a handrail, at the end closest to us. The neighbour's washing hangs against the right wall.

On the front left corner of the main room, three wooden steps with faded carpet runners, lead down to a nook, at floor level.

In the nook, the glass menagerie, Laura's collection of miniature glass animals, hangs suspended on 12 delicate strings from ceiling to floor: Horses, birds, elephants, camels, deer, rabbits and a unicorn. Each only 8 to 10 centimetres high, they are downlit from above.

Nearby, is Laura's beloved Victrola (a brand name for a particular wind-up gramophone of the period, with its horn, concealed inside a wooden cabinet). Several '78 records are stacked in their brown covers, underneath the Victrola.

Laura often sits on the steps to listen to the music.

In keeping with the atmosphere of memory, the lighting is mostly quite dim, as though only lit by the table lamps, or hanging bulbs.

Shafts of light are focused on selected areas or actors, sometimes in contrast to the main action.

Lighting on the cloth at the very back of the set, often depicts a cold blue for night-time and white, or pink hues, for day-time. The tenement fire escapes are silhouetted against the cloth.

## Cast and Costumes

**Amanda Wingfield** is the mother of Tom and Laura. Her husband deserted her years ago, leaving her with a son and daughter to raise. A faded Southern belle who has suffered a reversal of economic and social fortune, she has difficulty coming to terms with the family's new status in society.

Played by Ksenja Logos, Amanda is a slight woman with faded golden hair, side swept into genteel curls, 1930's style. She has a theatrical flair and uses dramatic hand flourishes, while maintaining the perfect posture of her youth.

Amanda's day clothes are shades of mid brown. Her blouse is pressed but cream with age. Her service-able skirt falls below her knee, worn with seamed stockings and low pump shoes.

Her overcoat has imitation fur cuffs and collar. Brown gloves and a large shiny-brown handbag complete her 'going out' ensemble.

In the mornings, she wears a full-length, man's dressing gown with blue checks and cord tie, and slippers with pompoms on the toes.

## RECORDED PRE-SHOW NOTES

Amanda has the most costume changes of any character, also appearing in the last scene of the first half, in a pink, floral, brushed-cotton dress, with cinched waist, and a full, gathered skirt over many petticoats.

In the second half, during the gentleman caller's visit, she emerges carrying a bunch of jonquils and wearing a startling, sunshine-yellow frock, from her youth.

The wide, tight belt, emphasizes the many petticoated, full, bell skirt. Deep flounces on sleeves and neck, hair in ringlets with a large yellow satin bow, and her face made up with exaggerated rouged cheeks, all create a doll-like caricature of youth.

**Laura** is Amanda's daughter. She has a stiff left leg which causes her to limp slightly. Laura self-isolates and lives in a world of her absent father's old records and miniature glass animals.

Laura's quiet and shy presence shapes the action of the play and key symbols, like blue roses, the unicorn, and the glass menagerie all represent her.

Played by Kathryn Adams, Laura's body seems to curl protectively about her, shoulders slightly slumped, mouse brown hair falling in un-structured and somewhat messy waves to her shoulders.

She dresses almost exclusively in shades of pink. A dusty, faded day dress, loosely tied at the waist, a kimono dressing gown, with large pink roses.

Her overcoat is black with grey imitation fur trim and her shoes are clunky. For the gentleman caller's visit, her mother makes her a soft and pretty aqua green, floral dress with sheer, lavender short sleeves and belt, worn over a satin slip.

Her hair is curled and a bright blue bow sits above her left ear, mirroring her mother's style.

**Tom**, Amanda's son and Laura's younger brother, plays a dual role in the play as both narrator and protagonist.

He often steps out of character into the role of the playwright, jotting notes, and mouthing their words when other characters speak.

During narrator monologues, when he addresses the audience directly, he is spotlighted. The other characters freeze mid-pose and their lights dim.

Tom frequently goes to the terrace, near the fire escape and smokes cigarettes, symbolically escaping the house yet remaining trapped within its confines.

In order to support the family, Tom grudgingly works in a shoe warehouse. He reads literature, writes poetry, and dreams of escape and adventure.

## RECORDED PRE-SHOW NOTES

Played by Laurence Boxhall, Tom is a young man of average build, with short back and sides brown hair. His trousers and vest are brown, and his crumpled, blue shirt indicates his blue-collar working status.

His only change in costume is adding a fawn overcoat, black cap and deep red scarf. He carries a pencil and small notebook in his waistcoat pocket, into which he jots notes.

**Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller** is an ordinary young man who brings a touch of the common world into the Wingfield world of dreams. He is a shipping clerk at the same shoe warehouse where Tom works.

Played by Jono Darby, Jim has dark, slicked-back hair and a trim moustache. He is sharply dressed in a double breasted, light-grey, suit-jacket and mid grey trousers, with crisp **white** shirt and blue tie.

A tan vest, black trilby hat and brown overcoat complete his outfit.

### **Mr. Wingfield**

Amanda's husband and Laura and Tom's absent father was a handsome dark-haired man. He abandoned his family years before the action of the play and never appears on stage, except as a projected, unsmiling face.

## Production Credits

**Playwright** Tennessee Williams

**Director** Shannon Rush

**Set and Costume Designer** Mark Thompson

**Lighting Designer** Gavin Norris

**Sound Designer** Andrew Hughes

**Composer** Jamie Hornsby

**Stage Manager** Bridget Samuel

**Assistant Stage Manager** Jennifer King

## Event Details

The Odeon Theatre is located at 57a Queen Street, Norwood.

The Audio Described performances are on:

- Tues 25th November at 6.30pm, with a touch tour starting at 5.30pm, followed by a Q&A, immediately after the show. And on
- Saturday 29th November at 2pm, with a touch tour starting at 1pm

## Access Information

Headsets will be provided by the audio describers, immediately after the touch tour. If you're not attending the touch tour you can collect a pre-booked headset from the foyer box office, one hour before Showtime.

### **The Venue**

The Odeon Theatre is wheelchair accessible and guide dog friendly. With prior notice, seats are removed from the front row on ground level, for wheelchairs. There is an accessible toilet at the Odeon Theatre.

As you enter the foyer, there is a small bar at the left hand end of the foyer. It will be open before the show.

The bar and venue are cashless (ie: card payment only)

For more information on audio described performances, please contact Access2Arts, where 2 is a number! using the email address, [audio.describer@access2arts.org.au](mailto:audio.describer@access2arts.org.au) or Voice/Text: zero 415 zero 9 zero 547.

Or speak to one of the audio describers at the theatre.

These introductory notes have been produced by Kay Jamieson and Catherine Fitz-Gerald / for Access2Arts.