



ENTERTAINMENT: Life & Style March 27, 2008

Play Review: The Glass Menagerie

By Janeane Anderson



Director Bill Earl Ray's rendition of "The Glass Menagerie," an American classic by Southern playwright Tennessee Williams, is worth seeing. The play boasts an all-Black cast **of talented, accomplished local actors including Naima Imani Lett (Dallas Weekly's 2008 "Top 25 to Watch" list) and Regina Washington and Vince McGill**, founding partners (along with Irma P. Hall) of the African-American Repertory Theater in Desoto.

"The Glass Menagerie" is a semi-autobiographical account of the playwright's early years in St. Louis in the 1930s. The humorous yet painful "memory play" tells the story of the Wingfields, a family desperate to escape the burdens

of their present existence, while remaining steadfast to former days of glory and hopeful for better days ahead. Tom's mother, Amanda (Regina Washington), has been abandoned by her husband and now lives only for her children; his unmarried sister, **Laura (Naima Lett), is a fragile and painfully shy creature who retreats into a world of glass animals**; and Tom (Vince McGill) himself is torn between his dreams and the responsibility of supporting his mother and sister. Each escapes into their own personal "glass menagerie" as a means of eluding the pain of their own –and each other's - existence.

Washington and Lett give moving performances in their mother and daughter roles. **The beauty of Lett's performance is the subtle grace with which she brings her character to life. Whereas some might have overacted in order to convey the complexity of Laura's personality, Lett's physicality on stage effortlessly translates to the audience reaction to and empathy for Laura's plight and circumstance. Laura is a young woman caught up in her own inadequacies and insecurities; Lett's performance compels audience members to look at their own.** Washington also gives a memorable performance. Her character's humorous oblivion provides levity to the play's serious undertones. Washington successfully encourages audience members to ride the wave of her character's emotional roller coaster.

Although I was pleased with the overall theatrical performance, I wasn't a fan of the cutting of the piece and there were periods during the performance that lagged; I couldn't help but leave the theater with a twinge of longing for more. Nevertheless, "The Glass Menagerie" is the type of transcendent theatrical work that should definitely be seen, and the performances given by these local actors are worth the ticket price.

"The Glass Menagerie" is playing at the Teatro delle Muse ArtCentre Theatre in Plano through March 30. For more information about show times or ticket prices, visit www.MuseTheatre.com or call the box office at 972.424.MUSE (6873).