

## THEATER REVIEW: Teatro delle Muse recasts 'Menagerie'

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By LAWSON TAITTE / The Dallas Morning News



PLANO – Teatro delle Muse's *The Glass Menagerie* has a solidly professional cast doing serious work.

It's hard not to feel, though, that most of them are in the wrong roles.

It happens that all the actors are black, but that's not the issue. A couple of times, lines about Southern planters and their servants strike a momentary discord, but that soon passes. No, the problems are of type and temperament.

*The Glass Menagerie*, the first and most personal of Tennessee Williams' major plays, remains the trickiest to bring off. The text continuously hints that this isn't entirely the realistic little play it seems in most productions. At bottom it's an expressionist memory piece centered on the narrator, Tom. He sets the scene and occasionally leaves the action to comment on it.

Generally, however, Tom's mother – Amanda Wingfield, the most gloriously flighty matron in American drama – pulls the focus her way. Given her head, she dominates the play the way she dominates her little family, Tom and his crippled, painfully shy sister, Laura.

In the Teatro delle Muse version that opened on Friday, director William (Bill) Earl Ray maintains the delicate balance between dreamlike past and desperate present. As Tom, Vince McGill speaks the lines beautifully and moves us deeply in the final scene. But Tom is Williams' neurasthenic, oddball alter ego, and Mr. McGill is the most cheerful and charming of actors.

Charm is a word that Amanda uses repeatedly. Regina Washington has a lot of sterling qualities as an actress – force, seriousness of purpose, nobility. But a charming flightiness isn't exactly her normal territory. Amanda resembles what Scarlett O'Hara might become after a few decades of hardship. Ms. Washington reminds me more of another great Southern literary femme fatale, Lillian Hellman's Regina Hubbard from *The Little Foxes* – altogether grimmer and more imperious.

Mr. McGill seems a little young for Tom, but sometimes that role is cast older so that we can see the character looking back at a remote past. Ms. Washington seems way too young to be his mother – really, way too young still to play Amanda.

**Naima Imani Lett is the right age and type to play Laura, and she's striking in the role. She makes Laura odder, more peculiar than we are used to – but Laura is decidedly odd, after all. It's a valid interpretation.** Alonzo Waller left his mid-20s behind some time ago, but he does capture the Gentleman Caller's optimism – if not his sincerity, not to say naïveté.

Plan your life: Through March 30 at the ArtCentre Theatre, 1028 15th Place, Plano. Runs 140 mins. \$20. 972-424-6873, [www.glassmenagerie.com](http://www.glassmenagerie.com).