

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

The Glass Menagerie

Tennessee Williams

Booth Theatre, New York

From 5 September 2013

Proof that nobody does it better than the Brits is everywhere on Broadway. In terms of straight plays, Mark Rylance and Stephen Fry have been in town with their all-male [Globe versions of *Twelfth Night*](#) and [Richard III](#), while *Waiting for Godot* is being played in tandem with Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land* with a starry Anglo-American cast led by Sir Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart.

The ladies are out in strength too, with Anne-Marie Duff outplaying Ethan Hawke in the [LCT *Macbeth*](#) and Rebecca Hall leading the cast of *Machinal* currently in previews with yet more British talent in director Lyndsey ([Chimerica](#)) Turner.

The talented actors in this edgy new version of *The Glass Menagerie* might be home-grown but the creative team is led by yet more visitors.

All five of the core backstage team are from the team that made [Once](#) a hit in New York and then London. Director John Tiffany is well known for his work with National Theatre of Scotland, most memorably [Black Watch](#).

His designer, Bob Crowley has created a deliberately disjointed set with a symbolic, Escher-inspired fire escape staircase going nowhere, exactly like every member of the Williams (oops, that should really be Wingfield) family in a purely autobiographical memoir of the playwright's early adult years. Nico Muhly's haunting, minimalist score then adds to the impression of ineffable sadness.

Though hailing from the Deep South, by the Depressing 1930s the Wingfields have landed up in St Louis, long abandoned by the master of the household leaving son Tom as breadwinner. However, Zachary Quinto's character, who also narrates, is happier writing poetry and dreaming of escape than working diligently at his factory job.

Dreaming runs in this family. 24's Cherry Jones as larger-than-life mother Amanda lives in her mildly aristocratic past, recalling a time when she was burdened by as many as 17 gentleman callers on a single delightful day. Quite why she picked the wrong one with such a choice will remain shrouded in mystery.

She loves her children far too much, smothering Tom but even more his sister Laura. Celia Keenan-Bolger manages to convey congenital shyness as if it were her natural state, never over-egging the pudding as embarrassments pile up.

Crippled and limping, she is not the greatest catch and hasn't even the courage to return to secretarial school, walking the streets rather than letting Amanda know that she has dropped out.

The only joy for Laura is her menagerie of glass animals, allowing the kind of escapism that would be provided by chicklit or romcoms these days.

Hope arrives in the handsome form of her very own gentleman caller, Brian J Smith as cheery Jim O'Connor. The meeting of this pair is perfectly realised in a fashion that might bring tears to the eye.

John Tiffany's vision relies on his actors to create larger than life characters that are still believable. Their behaviour is exaggerated by Steven Hoggett's direction of movement so that viewers are left to witness what might be caricatures, did we not know that people (especially the Williams brood) really are like this and will behave irrationally following their own strange logic.

Once again, Broadway must be thanking its lucky stars that Britain is capable of helping it to make the most of America's finest, while asking why its producers don't have the confidence to trust more in local talent?

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)