Tennessee Williams

**THE GLASS MENAGERIE**

Director

Rob Phillips

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*The Glass Menagerie* was the first of Tennessee Williams’ plays to achieve success, catapulting him to fame from obscurity.

This hauntingly poetic play is highly autobiographical and features characters based on the author, his histrionic mother and his mentally fragile sister and is regarded by many critics as being a theatrical masterpiece.

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| **Performance Dates** | Tuesday 7 May – Saturday 11 May 2024N.B. There will be two performances on the Saturday 11 May |
| **Performance Venue** | Seligman Theatre, Chapter |
| **Rehearsal Dates** | Rehearsals will commence in late February 2024 on Tuesdays and Thursdays (7:30 pm to 9:30 pm) and Sundays (10:30 – 12:30).Get-in: Sunday 5 May 2024Dress rehearsal: Monday 6 May 2024 |
| **Auditions** | Everyman Clubroom, ChapterSaturday 13 January 2024 (morning) Monday 15 January 2024 (evening). |
| **Book your audition:** | CONTACT EVERYMANEmail: auditions@everymantheatre.co.ukAn audition form is provided, please send as an attachment to your email*Please state your preferred audition date.*  |
| **Preparation:** | Please include as much information as possible on the accompanying form and send it **when booking your audition**.You do not need to prepare anything in advance. Auditions will take the form of workshops and reading scenes from the script, handed to you at the audition.  |

**DIRECTOR’S NOTES**

1. **About the play**

*The Glass Menagerie* tells of a single mother and her two adult children struggling to get by in Depression-era St. Louis. In spite of her best efforts, Amanda manages to distance her children from her, with Laura retreating into her own imaginary world and Tom plotting to escape the "prison" he sees himself in. Williams’ story about the Wingfields contains themes which continue to resonate with audiences in the present day. It is a selected text for AQA A Level Drama

1. **Synopsis**

The play is introduced to the audience by Tom, the narrator and protagonist, as a memory play based on his recollection of his mother Amanda and his sister Laura. Because the play is based on memory, Tom cautions the audience that what they see may not be precisely what happened.

Amanda Wingfield, a faded Southern belle of middle age, shares a drab St. Louis apartment with her son Tom, in his early 20s, and his slightly older sister, Laura. Although she is a survivor and a pragmatist, Amanda yearns for the comforts and admiration she remembers from her days as a fêted debutante in her youth. She is particularly worried about the future of her daughter Laura, a young woman with a limp (an after-effect of a bout of pleurosis) and a tremulous insecurity about the outside world. Tom works in a shoe warehouse doing his best to support the family. He chafes under the banality and boredom of everyday life and struggles to write while spending much of his spare time going to the movies—or so he says—at all hours of the night.

Amanda is obsessed with finding a suitor (or, as she puts it, a "gentleman caller") for Laura, whose crippling shyness has led her to drop out of both high school and a subsequent secretarial course, and who spends much of her time polishing and arranging her collection of little glass animals. Pressured by his mother to help find a caller for Laura, Tom invites Jim, an acquaintance from work, home for dinner.

The delighted Amanda spruces up the apartment, prepares a special dinner, and converses coquettishly with Jim, almost reliving her youth when she had an abundance of suitors calling on her. Laura discovers that Jim is the boy she was attracted to in high school and has often thought of since, though the relationship between the shy Laura and the "most likely to succeed" Jim was never more than a distant acquaintanceship. Initially, Laura is so overcome by shyness that she is unable to join the others at dinner, and she claims to be ill. After dinner, however, Jim and Laura are left alone by candlelight in the living room, waiting for the electricity to be restored. (Tom has not paid the power bill, which hints to the audience that he is banking the bill money and preparing to leave the household.) As the evening progresses, Jim recognizes Laura's feelings of inferiority and encourages her to think better of herself. He and Laura share a quiet dance, in which he accidentally brushes against her glass menagerie, knocking a glass unicorn to the floor and breaking off its horn. Jim then compliments Laura and kisses her. After Jim tells Laura that he is engaged to be married, Laura asks him to take the broken unicorn as a gift and he then leaves. When Amanda learns that Jim is to be married, she turns her anger upon Tom and cruelly lashes out at him, although Tom did not know that Jim was engaged and seems quite surprised by this. The play concludes with Tom saying that he left home soon afterward and never returned. He then bids farewell to his mother and sister and asks Laura to blow out the candles to end the play.

1. **The characters in the play**

**Amanda Wingfield (the mother)**

A faded southern belle who grew up in Blue Mountain, Mississippi, was abandoned by her husband, and who is trying to raise her two children under harsh financial conditions. Amanda yearns for the comforts of her youth and also longs for her children to have the same comforts, but her devotion to them has made her – as she admits at one point – almost "hateful" towards them.

**Tom Wingfield (Amanda’s son and the narrator of the play)**

Amanda's son. Tom works at a shoe warehouse to support his family but is frustrated by his job and aspires to be a poet. He struggles to write, all the while being sleep-deprived and irritable. Yet, he escapes from reality through nightly excursions to the movies. Tom feels both obligated toward yet burdened by his family and longs to escape.

**Laura Wingfield (Amanda’s daughter)**

Amanda's daughter and Tom's elder sister. A childhood illness has left her with a limp, and she has a mental fragility and an inferiority complex that has isolated her from the outside world. She has created a world of her own symbolized by her collection of glass figurines. The unicorn can be said to represent Laura because it is unique and fragile.

**Jim O'Connor**

An old high school acquaintance of Tom and Laura. Jim was a popular athlete and actor during his days at High School. Subsequent years have been less kind to Jim; by the time of the play's action, he is working as a shipping clerk at the same shoe warehouse as Tom. His hope to shine

1. **Playing ages of the Characters**

The Glass Menagerie” is described by Williams himself as a “memory play”, with the characters and events rooted in his own life, **seen through the filter of time**. This permits a degree of latitude in terms of the playing ages of the characters.

As far as playing ages go, **Amanda** should appear old enough to be Laura’s mother.

As their characters were in the same class in high school, **Laura** and **Jim** should appear to be the same age, anywhere from early **20s to early 30s.**

Although **Tom** is mentioned as being two years younger than Laura, because the play’s events are his memories, the actor playing Tom can technically range anywhere from **30s to late 40s**. (The original Tom, Eddie Dowling, was 55 when he played the part.)

Care will need to be taken on the casting to make sure that the combination of actors selected works in terms of their relative ages.

All of the characters will need to be played with American accents, with Amanda having a particularly strong, deep southern accent.