


THEATER

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Critics Shattered by Bway Glass Menagerie



Apart from mostly welcoming reviews for the return of "Forever Tango" this summer, the Broadway season has gotten off to a tepid start, with disappointing box office grosses and middling reviews for "Soul Doctor", "First Date" and the Bloom-Rashad "Romeo and Juliet". But the cold streak stopped on Thursday night with the opening of John Tiffany's staging of "The Glass Menagerie", featuring Cherry Jones and Celia Keenan-Bolger as mother and daughter Wingfield in Tennessee Williams' classic.

Newsday's Linda Winer calls the production "unsettling" and "viscerally powerful." "What could be ridiculous and mannered is, instead, bold and terrifically effective in this willful but fascinating vision," she adds, also noting that Jones' Amanda "has less of the narcissism and coquetry we expect in Amanda, and more of a nagging agony for the children she is incapable of helping."

In her three-star review for the New York Post, Elisabeth Vincentelli is less enthused but still called the production "a fine evening at the theater." John Tiffany's staging and all its eerie design elements, "match Williams' melancholy poetry on a gut level," she notes. However, she finds Jones mannered and jokes, "You always see the cogs whirring behind her affected performance. Boy, this pretending thing is a lot of work!"

Zachary Stewart, in Theatermania, disagrees, calling Jones "brilliant" and saying that with her Amanda, "every word and gesture feels carefully calibrated to extract guilt." Stewart adds that the "stellar production" under Tiffany's "economical direction" is "well-acted and boldly imagined."

Writing for the Hollywood Reporter, David Rooney says it all in his first paragraph: "...John Tiffany's transfixing production...accesses the extraordinary intimacy of this landmark 1944 play in ways that give the impression you're seeing it for the first time. A performance of towering complexity from Cherry Jones is flanked by equally illuminating work from her three co-stars, making this essential theater." He lauds Zachary Quinto's "knockout Broadway debut," and Natasha Katz's "exquisite lighting."

Reviewing for Entertainment Weekly, Thom Geier uses the word "exquisite" to describe the whole production, in that it "strikes a delicate balance between realism and stylized abstraction." Giving the show an "A" grade, Geier notes that "Menagerie's" "mythic characters become at once familiar and true."

"Stunning" adds the New York Times' Ben Brantley, who opines that Jones and Quinto give "career-defining performances." "Be prepared to have the breath knocked out of you."

Writing for the Associated Press, Mark Kennedy is equally enthralled, saying the "thrilling" and "unforgettable" production features "magic from start to finish." Regarding Quinto: "His performance has so many colors, so much feeling, that it's breathtaking."

In his review for the Chicago Tribune, Chris Jones lauds the "beautiful" production (and a recent Chi-town staging of "Menagerie") for pulling Williams' play fully into stylization and memory – "Amanda, Laura and her Gentleman Caller," he writes, "are really all shadows in the mind of Tom." He applauds Jones for making Amanda "a great, gutsy woman from a time lousy for her gender" and Keenan-Bolger for letting Laura find "some small victories to overcome her own despair."

"This 'Menagerie'," writes USA Today's Elysa Gardner, "is by no means Jones' triumph alone. The four-person cast is as meticulously assembled as the titular collection of tiny glass animals that is Laura's most cherished possession." Gardner's four-star review lauds Keenan-Bolger's "exquisite physical and vocal delicacy" and promises that Jones' performance "will amaze even her most ardent admirers in its depth and compassion."

The Glass Menagerie plays at Broadway's Booth Theater in a limited run through Jan. 5.

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