

DIRECTOR'S NOTES



The Glass Menagerie, Tennessee Williams' first Broadway production, launched his name to the forefront of American theatre. This semi-autobiographical play is remembered for its rich characterization of a loving family clinging to its dreams in order to survive in a changing socio-economic and political landscape.

The Wingfield family comprised of the absent father, the vibrant controlling mother, the artistic son yearning for his own life and the incapacitatingly shy sister doesn't appear much different from an average American family today. In fact, this play set in 1937 translates amazingly well to May 2011.

When I began preparing to direct this production, the state of Wisconsin was in the throws of labor protests. As I am from Wisconsin and many of my relatives are teachers and public employees, this issue was particularly close to my heart. I quickly realized that the very play I was working on could be set in America today. In Tom's first monologue, he says:

"The time that quaint period when the huge middle class of America was matriculating from a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy. In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion and labor disturbances, sometimes violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit."

One has only to substitute Egypt for Spain and Madison for Chicago and this description could fit America in this very moment. We, too, are at war and our economy is suffering. The shouts from both the left and right are growing louder as fear for our future increases.

Although I don't believe that Williams intended his play to be political commentary, nor do I intend to make this production into a critique of American politics, the survival of the Wingfield family, and indeed our own families, is tied to the economic and political landscape that shaped the Wingfields' options for success, just as it shapes our future today.

The lasting beauty of this play lies in Williams' deep understanding and intimate portrayal of this family—whose members deeply love each other in spite of their conflicting objectives—in their struggle to survive. As America has circled back to a similar period in time, this is a struggle with which we, too, should understand and empathize.

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