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Martin Returns to THT with The Glass Menagerie

By Sophie Braccini



El Beh plays Laura (forefront), Heidi Abbott plays Amanda (left) and Aleph Ayin is Tom in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* Photo Stu Selland

It's little wonder that Artistic Director Clive Worsley asks Susannah Martin to come back to Town Hall Theater every year. The award-winning director, who gave us *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Rabbit Hole*, and is now shaping Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, has strength and precision that result in crisp and impactful productions. One of Martin's many talents is her ability to select the cast for each play. Expect a powerful experience in this interpretation of *The Glass Menagerie*.

The fact that 2011 marks the 100th birthday of Tennessee Williams was icing on a cake full of reasons that Martin wanted to direct *The Glass Menagerie*. "This script is very present and real, even if it is set in the past," she says, "it is ro-

matic, greedy and hard edged. Pretty astounding considering it's his first play."

"I've loved Tennessee Williams since I was very young," says Martin, who remembers reading *The Glass Menagerie* when she was eleven, "I definitely related to Laura and Tom. The way they want to find their place in the world, the challenges of being rejected or not heard." Martin thinks that the way the characters speak makes them jump off the page, "They are so real and contemporary," she adds.

"I think that we have a fantastic cast," states Martin, "all of these actors bring immediacy to this play, their work is so present that it becomes visceral and alive. I needed four people who were going to dive in. They are not a traditional casting, but they

are the best people for the play."

Aleph Ayin's Tom is raw, uncensored, with an internal violence that bursts at times. "I am boiling inside," he says in the play, and the spectator senses it. His mother Amanda, played by Heidi Abbott, is there right alongside him. During rehearsal, Abbott encouraged Ayin to act out his emotions, "Making it physical breaks down what was getting in the way of really hearing it," she said.

Martin trusts her actors but pushes them to question Williams' every intention behind every word. "The play is impeccably structured, everything is intentional," she says, "but it is not a realistic play, it is between realistic and expressionist." The play is narrated in the past from the son's point of view; is he rewriting history, wanting to do things differently? At times a ghost seems to pull a veil over the scene and for a second the actors are suspended in time. The slight lapse in time adds to the charm and mystery of the play.

Laura, played by El Beh, and Jim, played by Michael Perez, form a very believable tandem of characters. She is fragile, and extremely touching, while Perez portrays with determination the young American blessed with optimism. Abbott obviously enjoys exploring the many facets of the great iconic mother character, Amanda.

"It is a great pleasure to

work on a play written by such a master of language," said Ayin, "every comma matters, there is no gap, everything is meaningful and timeless. It's an unlimited world opening to you."

The enthusiasm and the energy that this group of young actors brings to the play should make this performance one of Town Hall Theater's big successes. "Susannah and I talked a lot early on about not wanting this play to feel like a museum piece – something that can happen when people approach such an iconic piece of classic theater," said Worsley, "But rather we wanted to concentrate on what in the play is relevant to contemporary audiences and find ways to make the play feel real and alive for us today. The works of Williams have been branded on the American psyche and have become part of our emotional lexicon, tools that we use to explore and understand ourselves and the world around us. We're confident that our audiences will be delighted and moved by this brilliant script and thoughtful production."

The *Glass Menagerie* will be at the Town Hall Theater from February 19 to March 19, with previews on February 17 and 18, at 3535 School Street in Lafayette. The shadow cast composed of teen actors will perform on February 27 and March 5. For tickets, call the box office at 283-1557 or go to www.TownHallTheatre.com.

Orinda International Film Showcase: First Great Hit and More to Come

By Sophie Braccini

The success of the first offering of the Orinda International Film Showcase exceeded all expectations. So many people came to see the film *Max Manus* that an extra week was added. Now picking up on Efi Lubliner and Jo Alice Canterbury's success, a San Francisco theater has picked up the film.

The second movie proposed by the Orinda International Film Showcase at the end of the month could prove just as successful, and this time Orinda will be the first in the United States to present it to the public.

Many cheers and a few even cried at the Cannes Festival presentation of "Illegal" last spring. The movie tells the story of an illegal Russian immigrant who had been living in Belgium with her son for 8 years, who finds herself incarcerated in a detention center for illegal immigrants and faces ex-

pulsion. Director Olivier Maset-Depasse present a realistic and blunt work of fiction, based on personal research into the illegal immigrant retention centers in Belgium. Actress Anne Coesens, who plays Tania, carries a lot of emotion, while playing the visceral determination of her character. The movie will play at the Orinda Theater from Friday, February 25 to Thursday, March 3. Go to lfe.org for more information.

But that is not all for Orinda. The East Bay International Jewish Film Festival, which will run from March 5 to the 13 and feature 50 independent and international movies, has scheduled some of its showings in Orinda. *The Matchmaker* and *Naomi* (Hitparzut X) will play on March 12, and on March 13 moviegoers can choose from nine different movies. For more information go to www.eastbay-jewishfilm.org.

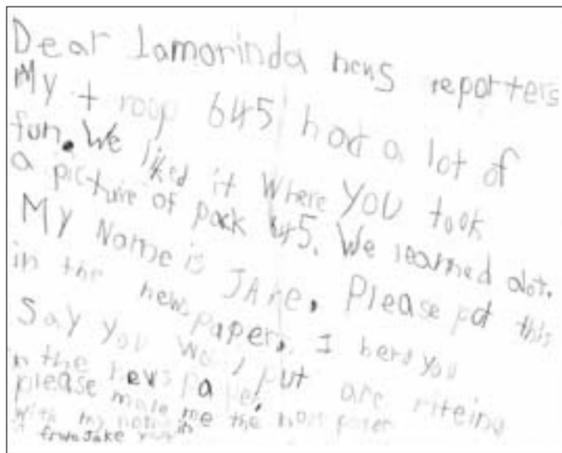
Pack 645 Visits Lamorinda Weekly



Pack 645

Photo Doug Kohen

The 1st grade Cub Scouts of Lafayette Pack 645 paid us a visit on Friday, January 21. We had a great time with them, and received a nice thank you note from Cub Scout Jake. You're very welcome, Jake!



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