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## A realistic and raw version of 'The Glass Menagerie' at CalShakes

By Sophie Braccini



Raphael Jordan and Phoebe Fico. Photo provided

even more unforgivable. This version of "The Glass Menagerie" is harsh and poignant, a modern take on a masterpiece definitely worth getting tickets.

The production is led by Portes' vision, and it is executed with great deftness by a cast of four actors. Karen Aldridge shines as the mother, Amanda. Portes gave the role of the anxious and socially humbled former southern "belle" to an African-American actress, explaining that there were indeed black debutantes in the South at the turn of the 20th Century. But ethnicity is irrelevant here. Aldridge is a superb actress who portrays Amanda with energy and passion, charm and vulnerability. At times overbearing, she is very touching in her desperate attempt to create a family and a future as her children are drifting away.

Sean San José is Tom Aldridge, the son and narrator of the story. The actor is very strong and assured, physically moving furniture, jumping on and out of stage, with untrammelled energy, displaying physically his impatience at leaving the suffocating nest.

In the middle of the battle between a mother wanting to control and a son wanting to escape, there is a fragile angel of purity, Laura, the daughter who escapes reality in the world of her glass menagerie. The character played by Phoebe Fico is heartbreaking and casting it a young woman who is indeed disabled shows Portes' determination to anchor the text in reality. When her character struggles to sit on the floor, the actress does so indeed, and to this writer the most moving scene is certainly when she dances with Jim, her "gentleman caller."

Raphael Jordan plays Jim, the former high school hero and classmate who comes to visit for a night. Jordan has the right vibe and jolliness to portray here the image of the American dream, the young man momentarily socially set back, but who deals with reality with determination and has a realistic and positive plan to make it. He also expresses with sensitivity his affection for Laura. For a few minutes, one might believe that something is possible between the two.

The staging, the costumes, the lights, and of course the marvelous natural setting of the Bruns Amphitheater add to the experience of the spectator.

"The Glass Menagerie" will play until July 30. For tickets go to [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org).

It starts slowly, almost softly like a sweet song on an old record player. Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie" is a play about memory, yes, but painful memories. The kind that tore you apart growing up and that can only be looked at with a nostalgic feeling of understanding and forgiveness many years later. Director Lisa Portes made the choice of realism by choosing to portray Laura as a young woman with a real handicap.

Why highlight the physical difference of one actor? Because it creates a different vision of Williams' work that affects the entire play. In Portes' "Menagerie," Laura is not a slightly limping young woman whose handicap is more in her head than in reality; it is a true challenge, and the traits, and the words of the characters around her become more real and raw. The mother's unrelenting expectations for her daughter seem even more unrealistic, the impending treason of the son to escape is

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