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The Glass Menagerie

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Sally Field stars at Amanda Wingfield in the latest revival of Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie," currently playing at the Belasco Theatre.

The play's set, meant to represent an apartment in St. Louis during the Depression, is little beyond the bare theater walls, a table and some chairs along with an old Victrola. Laura Wingfield, Amanda's disabled daughter, listens to her father's worn records on the Victrola while polishing her glass figurines, the titular "glass menagerie."

Field is strong as Amanda Wingfield, a faded Southern beauty who boasts of hosting many "gentlemen callers" in her youth. The family scrapes by financially after Mr. Wingfield abandoned Laura and his children some years ago.

Tom Wingfield, Amanda's son and younger brother of Laura, works in a shoe warehouse to support the family, but dreams of escape. Laura, played by Madison Ferris, is intensely shy and uses a wheelchair. Amanda fears for Laura, who lies to her mother about dropping out of secretarial school and seems unlikely to find a husband to support her.

Tom, played ably by Joe Mantello, longs to be a writer, but finds little time between work and the late nights he insists are spent at the movies. High-strung Amanda carps on Tom for his smoking, drinking and even how quickly he eats his dinner, in one scene causing him to explode after she interferes with his writing on a typewriter.

Amanda hints darkly to Tom that his dream of leaving home and being freed of supporting the family is dependent on Laura finding a husband. Amanda asks if Tom has any friends at the warehouse he can introduce to Laura.

Finn Wittrock brings exuberance as Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller Tom brings home to dinner. Amanda pulls out all the stops for the evening, including donning a bubblegum pink taffeta dress from her debutante days. Jim, who also works at the warehouse, preaches a message of positive thinking and self-improvement through night classes.

Though Laura is too shy to join dinner, she later shares a tender scene with Jim, who insists her problems are a result of low confidence. Though Laura and Jim form a connection, the meeting ultimately leads to heartbreak for all three Wingfields.

Though the performances are strong, the play is undermined by awkward staging. Field must drag Laura's wheelchair up the stage stairs in a sluggish start to the play, and having sprinklers pour rain during the dinner scene leads to Tom standing in a puddle for his last monologue and a wet Laura and Jim. The characters gesture silently while eating dinner while an indie rock song plays in a scene that seems to come from a different play entirely.

Though the characters wear contemporary clothing (including shearling-lined moccasins for Laura) the

dition of Field's line delivery seems to come from an earlier era, and overall the lyricism of Williams' dialogue is lost. With a bit of fine-tuning, this play could be much stronger.

"The Glass Menagerie" runs through July 2 at the Belasco Theatre, 111 West 44th Street, New York. For information or tickets, call 800-276-2392 or visit www.broadway.com/Glass/Menagerie

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