

Roadhouse Theater wins with "The Glass Menagerie"

Commendable performances compliment Williams' classic piece

The Glass Menagerie
at the Roadhouse Theater
1505 State Street
April 26-28 at 8pm
April 29 at 3pm

by Rob Prindle

The Roadhouse Theater decided to kick a little butt.

Sure, Tennessee Williams is perhaps the best American playwright, and sure "The Glass Menagerie" is probably one of the finest American Dramas. So was this a safe production by director Scott McClelland and company? Not even close.

"Continuity is for sissies" according to McClelland.

The Roadhouse opened a few years ago, shortly after the demise of The Lincoln, Erie's only alternative theater. Erie needed and deserved a small theater. The Erie Playhouse occasionally does something of merit, but too often they go for spectacle, trying to bring in the more Broadwayish crowd. Erie needed a new Lincoln, but the Roadhouse became something even better.

The Theater's maiden voyage was "Danny and the Deep Blue Sea." It was unique in every respect including the curtain time. The play started at midnight. Climbing into an old, almost abandoned downtown building is a scare no matter during what time of day you do

it, so you can imagine what doing it at midnight is like. The play, however, was fantastic. Since then the Roadhouse crew has reached startling highs with plays like "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" But I have also had my doubts when they've done average stuff like "Night Like a Cat." But the plays lined up for the next several months all look like winners. They include two by Shepard, a Beckett, another Williams. They are also planning a very enigmatic production that promises to put a few people behind bars for its sexual content.

But, back to the original question. The Roadhouse Theater and director Scott McClelland decided not to play this one safe. They did not because Tennessee Williams wrote a surreal dream, not just a drama, and the production that I saw a few days ago was a dream.

The stage was sparse, the walls were covered with clear plastic, the lights were dim and the music was haunting; changing from violin, to carousel, to swing. The actors moved slowly and deliberately and the players pronounced each word as if the entire play rested upon it alone.

Tom - played by Darren Setlow, a professional actor who moved to Erie to work on this production - opens the play by explaining "Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve.... I give you truth in the

pleasant disguise of illusion." The play is Tom's memory and he explains "Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic."

The cast never loses sight of this important line. The play turns out to be everything Tom promises, and more. I am not here to review Tennessee Williams' work. It stands proudly as one of America's ten best. It is a simple play about a complex family living in St. Louis in the

This is the play that every Erie dramatic production will be compared to for a very long time.

1930's. There are only four characters. Amanda is the mother of the narrator of the play, Tom. Amanda was once a southern belle, used to many gentleman callers, but the man she chose to marry left her several years prior with two children. Her daughter, Laura, a shy 24-year-old has very little chance of living up to her mother's past glory with men callers. Tom is a dreamer who would much rather travel and write poetry than work in a warehouse to support his mother and sister. Tom invites a friend to dinner to meet Laura. The "Gentleman Caller" is the forth

character.

Each of the characters was played with a distinct identity. Alberta Nelson Gilman, a retired professional actress, plays Amanda without fault. She is everyone's mother. She worries and she dotes and she gets angry when her children let her down, or when she lets down her children. Gilman played this character with all the ease and pain that it required. At no point in the play does this woman look like she is searching for an emotion. And she certainly does use a tremendous range of them.

Karen Shelinski played the daughter, Laura, to perfection. I have seen Shelinski work in other plays, but never has she played a character so well suited to her stage presence and to her eyes with their startled look of fear. In the second half of the play Shelinski gets a chance to come alive when the caller arrives. She is the focus of two of the finest scenes in the play. In one, because of her shyness, she begs and pleads in horror not to be forced to open the door when the man shows up. In another, when she is alone with the man, she conveys the kind of innocent sweetness that makes this play. Other actors could have played this part, but Shelinski took her character and set it deeply into the heart and mind of everyone who viewed this play.

Jim, the visitor, is played with just the right edge of

slickness by a Roadhouse regular, Dennis Dressler. He has done fine work before, but never has he put out with this kind of strength. He plays a high-school hero turned warehouse clerk and he plays it with all the artificial, misplaced arrogance that that type of character needs. Dressler made his character into the kind of too-slick, but largely sincere charmer that the play needed.

Darren Setlow describes his opportunity to play Tom in "Glass Menagerie" as a "dream come true" and I believe him. Setlow brings energy and passion to the role, his movements are mellowdramatic and tense and ultimately perfect.

From the candle lighting that makes up a good part of the play, to the background music, to the dark atmosphere of the Roadhouse, to the dramatic pauses in Tom's speech, to the frightened look in Laura's eyes, to the masterful writing of Williams with laugh out loud humor and curl up in your seat drama, to a thousand other small pieces of perfection, this play is a singular achievement. Unfortunately it is only running for one more week. I would call the Roadhouse for reservations now. Forget the Ninja Turtles, you can always catch them on videotape in a month.

Do not miss this opportunity. This is the play that every Erie dramatic production will be compared to for a very long time.

Ninja Turtles offers harmless fun Film has critics crying "Cowabunga!"

by Gary L. Nolan
Collegian Staff Writer

As finals approach and the mind is challenged to concentrate, it is often soothing to view something mindless. If you are in search of a movie with no symbolism, no confusing plot, and no need to apply any dormant brain cells, then *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is for you.

The movie currently occupies the number-one position in box office sales. The characters, created in 1984 by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, challenge street punks called "The Foot."

As the turtles (Leonardo, Donatello, Michaelangelo and Raphael) battle evil, their dialogue is much like that of the stereotyped "surfer dude." This conversation, though novel at first, quickly gets old. The attempts at cute jokes often fall short, but the turtles' adorable costumes and loyalty help reduce the frustrating language.

Their giant size, the result of a bizarre

nuclear accident, contributes to their appeal. The turtles find themselves more at home in the sewers of New York City than above the streets.

The turtles seek to avenge the kidnap of their Japanese *sensei*, Splinter. In their fight they are supported by two human allies, reporter April O'Neil and Casey Jones. (No relation, Deadheads.)

It is easy to find yourself attached and emotionally moved by both the turtles and Splinter as they learn various lessons about teamwork and loyalty in their ventures.

The fight scenes in the movie mirror Bruce Lee films, complete with flips, grunts, and sorry-looking stunts. The cast is proficient with several weapons, and the turtles challenge all that dare to remain on the side of their rival gang.

The movie is harmless fun, not to be taken seriously. Many will find this incredibly stupid and frustrating, but the film certainly succeeds in reaching the younger audience it targets.

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