



Audio Description Notes for *The Glass Menagerie*

WELCOME

Welcome to the Guthrie Theater's production of *The Glass Menagerie*, written by Tennessee Williams and directed by Guthrie Artistic Director Joseph Haj.

My name is Jean Wolff, and I will be your audio describer for this performance, which is approximately 2 hours and 25 minutes and includes one 20-minute intermission.

The Glass Menagerie is set in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1937. The story is based around the recollections of Tom Wingfield and memories of his family and their life in a tenement apartment during the depths of the Depression.

STAGING

"The play is a memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic." These words, spoken by Tom Wingfield at the top of *The Glass Menagerie*, are precisely what the Guthrie's creative team worked toward in bringing this production to life. And they succeeded spectacularly.

Upon arriving at the theater, the thrust stage is very dimly lit. When you take your seat, no matter where you are sitting, you have a wonderful view of every aspect of the set. This apartment and alley are not your typical set. There are no walls, no practical light switches, no doors. The setting, a masterpiece in grayscale and pale, muted colors, floats in a sea of black. Clear, unlit glass globes, some as small as a golf ball and some as large as an orange, hang above the stage, individually suspended on black cords. Randomly scattered at different heights high over the stage, they also spill down behind the set, some barely lit and looking like distant stars.

The stage itself is shaped like a hexagonal three-tiered cake. The bottom layer, a 10-inch step up from the floor of the theater, is a three-foot-wide gray, grated path. It represents being outside of the apartment in the street, sidewalk, alley or hallway. A step up from the walkway, the second tier is the front room of the Wingfield's apartment. At center stage, a wide, oxblood-colored fainting couch sits on a large, faded Oriental rug. A worn pink-and-white throw is neatly folded across its foot. In the shadows beneath the fainting couch are two shapes: a box and a cane.

To the left of the fainting couch is a small, wooden writing desk and chair with a small Oriental rug beneath. A pencil cup sits toward the front edge of the desktop, and the rest of the surface is scattered with books and papers.

To the right of the fainting couch, a gramophone, with its crank and large, morning-glory-shaped horn, sits on a low, round table. Next to the phonograph there is an oval-framed, black-and-white picture of a smiling, handsome, dark-haired man. Sitting on the rug beneath the table, leaning against its front, are a few music records in their sleeves.



STAGING (continued)

Several steps from gramophone and fainting couch, along the edge of the stage, characters enter and exit through the “front door” of the apartment. Turning right or left, the walkway follows the perimeter of the stage. Exiting the door and going straight on, the path leads into the tunnel exit under the audience.

Two steps up from the sitting area is the top tier of the stage, which is the dining room of the Wingfield’s modest home. An oval table is centered on another Oriental rug. It is covered with a pale tablecloth and surrounded by four wooden chairs. Above it hangs a ceiling lamp comprised of four, white, milk-glass shades suspended beneath a central metal piece of unremarkable design.

Behind and slightly to the right of the table is a buffet. Next to it is a tall coat rack with a few items hanging on it. The “topper” on this “cake” is a rectangular two-and-a-half-story structure at the back edge of the apartment. Through invisible walls, we observe a fire escape — a looming shadow of stairs and railings, zigzagging its way from floor to ceiling and beyond. The second level of the fire escape is used by all the characters at some point. It is an escape, an observation deck, a place to dream or a place to watch life going past.

Each landing is made of the same gray, metal grating as the walkway. Hanging above, level with the third floor of the fire escape, is a gray, metal, hexagon walkway that mirrors the one below. Overall, the set gives us the feeling that it extends up and down infinitely, like an endless hive of apartments and quiet, drab lives.

CAST

The Glass Menagerie features a four-person cast.

Remy Auberjonois returns to the Guthrie for his fourth production. Remy has performed on Broadway in *Death of a Salesman*, *Frost/Nixon* and many other shows. He’s also worked off-Broadway at theaters across the U.S. as well as in many film and television roles. In this production, Remy Auberjonois plays Tom Wingfield.

The other three actors are all making their Guthrie debuts.

Carey Cox plays Laura Wingfield. Carey understudied this role in the 2017 Broadway revival of *The Glass Menagerie* starring Sally Field. Carey has worked regionally and teaches in the theater department at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



CAST (continued)

Jennifer Van Dyck plays Amanda Wingfield. Jennifer is also a Broadway veteran with many film and television credits to her name, including “Bull,” “The Good Wife” and “The Blacklist.”

Grayson DeJesus plays Jim O’Connor, the gentleman caller. He was in *War Horse* on Broadway and has performed all over the U.S., including in film and television.

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

The clothing worn by the Wingfield family is generally faded and a bit threadbare — clothing that’s been repaired, taken in or let out, with hems changed and changed again over years of heavy use. Their economic class and constant financial struggles are easily seen in their garments. The gentleman caller’s suit, though inexpensive, is newer and sharper than anything worn by the other characters.

Tom Wingfield, as we see him first, is a gray-faced, salt-and-pepper-haired, middle-aged man with a paunch and three days of scraggly beard growth. His button-down shirt and brown pants are a little too baggy. His top coat and hat are of the plainest kind, forgettable in color and style. He smokes almost constantly, and he carries a small book in which he writes. In the world of the play, Tom appears as two different versions of himself. Older Tom, as already described, is the narrator through whose eyes we see the other characters. But he is also young Tom. There are no physical or costume changes as he moves from one version of himself to another. The audience is left to conjure a picture of a younger Tom in our minds — in his 20s, clean-shaven, with less gut and more hair, still living at home with his mother and sister.

Laura Wingfield is a thin, blond-haired girl. She is two years older than her brother Tom, but she looks and acts younger. Laura’s health is frail, and she walks with a pronounced limp, sometimes using a cane to assist her. Laura’s dresses are simple floral affairs with the hems hitting mid-calf. She wears low-heeled shoes and sometimes a cardigan. She is unadorned by jewelry or makeup. She is sweet, quiet and extremely shy.

Amanda Wingfield is Tom and Laura’s overbearing mother. She is a Southern belle to the nth degree, who wavers between being loving, protective, caustic and vicious. She wears floral housedresses, often with a cotton housecoat over the top. Her chin-length graying hair is perfectly coiffed in precise finger waves, a 1920s style nostalgic of her youth. She is always neat as a pin and as put together as possible given her financial limitations.

Jim O’Connor is the gentleman caller. He is a friend of Tom’s from work who visits the Wingfields for dinner. Jim is a good-looking young man with dark hair and a strong jawline. His suit is neat and clean, and he wears a wool driving coat and hat. He has a gentle, sincere personality and a charming smile.



PROPS

This is not a prop-heavy show, but there are a few key items to point out.

While all the plates, cutlery, glasses and serving ware are real, the food and beverages are not. For instance, coffee is “poured” from an empty pot into an empty cup. All drinking and eating is mimed onstage.

Laura’s cane is made of plain, brown wood with an L-shaped handle on the top.

There is a well-worn yearbook that sits near the gramophone.

And, of course, there is the glass menagerie itself — Laura’s collection of small glass animals, no more than three or four inches in size. These little sparkling constructs enticingly catch the light. They are mesmerizing, delicate and fragile.