

# Cat On a Hot Tin Roof

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Maggie (Katrina Clark) escaped poverty to marry Brick (Jacques Mitchell), part of a family rich only in material goods. <<photo by Stan Barouh>>

Reportedly Tennessee Williams's favorite of his plays — which is saying something — and what many consider his best — which is also saying something when you consider his prolific output — *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* premiered on Broadway in 1955 and won that year's Pulitzer Prize for drama.

Williams's proclivity for tearing the facades off the American dream, particularly those of southern Americans whose culture used to seem so different from the rest of the country, still resonates today. At its core is the very use and meaning of the word mendacity: the inability of so many families to be honest with themselves and each other.

The famous 1958 movie classic starring Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor is a diluted version of this powerful and at times jarring drama.

At Compass Rose Theater, director Lucinda Merry-Browne has assembled the cast of strong actors the play demands. They immerse themselves in the mendacious undercurrents of Williams's work while inviting the audience to understand the motivations that have led into each abyss of dishonesty. They do what is most critical in Williams's familial works: relate to each other and keep the pace moving.

These are icons of American drama. Big Daddy, the rich landowner, is protected by his family's lies from the truth about his mortality. Brick, his youngest son, douses with alcohol the flames of a forbidden love. Maggie the Cat, Brick's frustrated wife, escaped poverty to marry into a family rich only in material goods.

Each is depicted here by solid actors who understand what their lines mean and how they relate to those of the other characters. It's an accomplishment that can be subtle. Led by Browne and assistant director Steve Tobin, these talented actors bring to this well-known story realism that lends it freshness and an edge that cuts to the bone.

As Brick and Maggie, Jacques Mitchell and Katrina Clark open with a long scene of exposition that reveals their depth of despair. Mitchell gives us a Brick who seems a touch laid back at first, as he figuratively shuts down in the face of Maggie's pleading, cajoling and lecturing. But when he uncoils in anger or frustration or honesty, Mitchell's Brick is bared, earning our sympathy and scaring us a little.

Clark's Maggie is in love with her husband yet can sink her claws into his psyche with the twist of a word or a memory. We are so sucked in that it's a shock when they are suddenly interrupted by other characters.

As Big Daddy, Gary Goodson's physical command of the stage is matched by his vocal command, with modulations that can be funny or threatening. When Big Daddy and Brick have the protracted, emotional and probing conversation in which Brick, of all people, finally tells his father the truth, two fine actors allow themselves to be carried away by some of Williams's finest writing.

Hillary Mazer as Big Mama is as bombastic as the husband who loathes her. Chris Dwyer as Cooper, Brick's older brother, and Samantha Merrick, his wife, do a fine job as a couple whose love is driven by mendacity.

See it and be reminded of why Tennessee Williams is one of the best American playwrights ever to put to paper the pen of profundity.

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*Th 7pm, FSa 8pm, SaSu 2pm thru Feb 28. 49 Spa Rd., Annapolis, \$38  
w/discounts: [compassrosetheater.org](http://compassrosetheater.org).*

Stage manager, Michelle Wood; Lighting designer, Ethan Vail; Costume designer, Cameron Ashbaugh;  
Props, Mike & Joann Gidos.