

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof at Compass Rose Theater (review)

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Jill Kyle-Keith

Tennessee Williams, midway through his career, wrote the quintessential Southern family drama: filled with scheming relatives, family wealth, and an unspoken secret, it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1955.

As produced by Compass Rose Theater in Annapolis, Md, the play retains, at its core, the shifting power struggles not only within the family but within the characters themselves. To what lengths will Maggie, (Katrina Clark,) go to force her father in law Big Daddy (Gary Goodson) to settle his estate on her husband Brick (Chris Dwyer) and not his older brother Gooper (Chris Dwyer)? Director Lucinda Merry-Brown has taken a standby of American drama and given it some new interpretations.



Katrina Clark as Maggie and Jacques Mitchell as Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at Compass Rose Theater (Photo: Stan Barouh)

In most productions, the driving force of the action rests on Maggie: practically the whole of the first act is one long Maggie soliloquy. A shrewd and calculating woman, she is often seen as a sympathetic character despite her hardness, for her husband has become a hopeless drunkard. What was once, at least to outward appearances, a loving marriage has disintegrated into two people now worlds away from each other. Secrets lie between them, but the truth, as written by Williams, is never spelled out: it's up to us to discern what may or may not have occurred in the past.

Katrina Clark is quite beautiful, as befits Maggie the Cat, though at times she runs through her paces so

quickly that we don't get to see the light behind Maggie's eyes: the difference between what Maggie says and what Maggie intends is often lost here. It's a tough role; Maggie herself admits that she plays- and though Ms Clark is earnest enough, the depth of this character isn't quite realized consistently through the evening.

As Brick, Jacques Mitchell is also as handsome as befits his role, and admittedly has an easier job of it: never meeting anyone's gaze, Brick seems to just want to get to the point of drunkenness where nothing matters. As played by Mr Mithcell, he's an empty enigma of a character, with no aims or desires of his own, save oblivion.

Big Daddy is often seen as a fulcrum, if you will, upon which the rest of the action revolves. Does he know he's dying or doesn't he? Does he see through his elder son's machinations or not? Did he once love his wife, or has his disdain been there throughout the marriage? Big Mama (Hillary Mazer) is his despised and delusional wife: depending on interpretation, she can be seen as an abused spouse or one who is simply out of touch and not all that intelligent to begin with. Williams wrote this role fluidly: the part, as written, has been performed any number of ways. Ms. Mazer inhabits this role, but often doesn't give much of a clue as to what directions have been taken: we just don't know, seeing her with Big Daddy, what kind of a marriage she has or whether she loves or fears the man – or both.



Jacques Mitchell as Brick and Gary Goodson as Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at Compass Rose Theater (Photo: Stan Barouh)

Gary Goodson is by far the strongest actor in the cast. His portrayal of Big Daddy makes for some interesting light shed on this play, and an intriguing reversal of who's the lead. Though he isn't often on stage, when he is, Goodson is a force to watch: larger than life, he alternately bullies and ignores his family: the sense that this man has been not only the do-as-I-say head of the family but a captain of industry is palpable. And his realization, and acceptance of his terminal diagnosis is lightning quick and heartbreaking to watch. He's the best thing in an already good show.

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF



January 22 – February 28, 2016

Compass Rose Theater

49 Spa Road

Annapolis, MD 21401

2 hours, 15 minutes with 1 intermission

Thursdays thru Sundays

Tickets: \$38

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Supporting cast is good: Gooper is envious and snakelike; Sister Woman, his wife, echoes his parents' marriage and hints at a less than ideal homelife; and their children, the No-Neck Monsters, are appropriately hideous little beasts.

The set is simple but effective, (no designer given) with a nice period sofa and Maggie and Brick's bed taking center stage, but the painted wallpaper of daggerlike red palmetto leaves on a yellow background was an unfortunate choice- after awhile they started to wiggle back and forth on the eyeballs like a 3D painting. Costumes by Mary Ruth Cowgill were sufficient, but were occasionally hampered by a mixture of styles and periods- Big Mama wore an 80s mother of the bride dress, while Maggie the Cat, with that actress' glorious figure, wore a shapeless red satin dress for much of the second act. The mens' period costumes, so often the bane of costumers, fared better, with Brick in a good pair of dark satin pyjamas and Big Daddy attired in a well-fitting period white suit.

It should be mentioned here that the weeklong aftereffects of the snowstorm was responsible for the entire opening weekend being canceled- and for final rehearsals being interrupted. With other shows' dates still occurring as planned, the run for *Cat* is a short one, so hurry in. And mention must be made of the theatre's generosity: curtain for the show this reviewer attended was a few minutes late due to technical difficulties, so concessions were free, a nice gesture from a small theater with a small budget.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams . Director: Lucinda Merry-Browne . Assistant Director: Steve Tobin . Cast: Jacques Mitchell as Brick; Katerina Clark as Margaret; Gary Goodson as Big Daddy; Hillary Mazer as Big Mama; Chris Dwyer as Gooper; Samantha Merrick as Mae, Sister Woman; Vashti Gray Sadjedy as Sooke; Joe Arnett as Reverend Tooker; Adam Harley as Dr Baugh; Darby Carrol as Buster; Haven Hitchcock as Sonny; Mackenzie Carroll as Dixie; Campbell Goodburn as Trixie . Costume Design: Mary Ruth Cowgill . Scenic Painter: Jane Knuth, Christina Charles . Lighting Design: Ethan Vail . Properties/Set Decoration: Joann Gidos, Mike Gidos . Stage Manager: Michelle Wood . Reviewed by Jill Kyle-Keith.

