

Review: 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' at Compass Rose Theater

Danielle Angeline

Compass Rose Theater delivers an intense rendition of Tennessee Williams' classic play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a southern drama set in the 1950s. Williams offers up a scandalous subject matter of its time, and Director Lucinda Merry-Browne brings it home with Assistant Director Steve Tobin and Stage Manager Michelle Wood.



The ensemble of 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof'. Photo by Stan Barouh.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof centers around the estranged marriage of Brick (Jacques Mitchell) and Maggie (Katrina Clark). Brick is an ex-athlete who is still quite athletic, despite his non-stop drinking and his injury from running hurdles at two in the morning. As a charming southern man, he is attractive; as a tortured drunk, he is repellent and Mitchell manages a smooth transition from quiet to boisterous. When Brick is quiet, his shoulders are hunched and his hand is pouring himself another drink. When Brick raises his voice, he also raises his crutch to his wife, Maggie. The intensity of Brick's anger shows in his taut facial and neck muscles. Mitchell is incredibly handsome and it is astonishing how he is able to take his character to such a threatening level.

Clark as Maggie is stunning with her svelte physique, her southern drawl, and her seductive ways, has her commanding the stage and Maggie demanding the attention of her husband. Far from a submissive southern belle (even in contemporary times), Maggie plays it smart. She is very aware of the family happenings and offers up suggestions without revealing her intentions. She is also a charmer but it is her father-in-law, Big Daddy, who is onto her. Maggie is also quite passionate and not afraid to show it – especially for her husband.

Big Daddy (Gary Goodson), Brick's father, starts out as a quiet man too but then he raises his voice that is wrapped in bitterness. Goodson is powerful in this role. Big Daddy is a significantly tall, brash, and vulgar plantation owner that is made of millionaires. Aware of the family chatter, he is smart like Maggie. Goodson brings out the emotion in this character when he attempts to be a one-man intervention with Brick. He adores Brick and wants nothing more than to save him from his alcoholic demise.

Big Mama (Hillary Mazer), wife of Big Daddy, is a bit of a flake. She is sincere but there seems to be a part of her that would have no problem burying her head in the sand. She denies Big Daddy's lack of affection for her as well as his

test results.

The other son, Gooper (Chris Dwyer) and his wife Mae (Samantha Merrick) are far from liked by Big Daddy and Big Mama. Gooper is a corporate lawyer and is full of resentful for his parents and his younger brother, Brick. However, Gooper is pretty slick in trying to gain the inheritance of the plantation, knowing Big Daddy's test results.

Mae is a society woman who has five children (only 4 are on stage) and has a sixth on the way. She is also sassy and thinks everything she has to say is of value. She aligns with her husband in trying to make sure they are the ones to inherent the family estate. Dwyer and Merrick play well off of each other and are strong as partners-in-crime more so than an amorous couple.



Brick (Jacques Mitchell) and Maggie (Katrina Clark). Photo by Stan Barouh.

Mae and Gooper's four children, Buster (Darby Carroll), Sonny (Haven Hitchcock), Dixie (Mackenzie Carroll) and Trixie (Campbell Goodburn), are rambunctious and definitely need Miss Manners training. Because these young actors have very few lines, their performances are on point when pretending to shoot an adult, jumping on the bed, and getting into fights with their toys. Maggie "affectionately" references to them as "no-neck monsters," and they live up to their reputation.

Doctor Baugh (Adam Harvley) is the family doctor who deceives Big Daddy about his diagnosis. He shows up for Big Daddy's 65th birthday party and in the end leaves a vial of morphine with Big Mama. It is debatable if his actions are serious or sinister. Harvley supports the main characters along with Reverend Tooker (Joe Arnett). However, the local preacher wants to make sure he gets his share upon Big Daddy's passing. Sookey (Vashti Gray Sadjedy) is the family housekeeper that has a voice that is as sweet and smooth as a lullaby.

The play takes place in Brick and Maggie's bedroom that intersects one side of the house with the other. Jane Knuth and Christina Charles are the scenic painters that demonstrated their talents with the weeping willow mural that is center to the balcony. The white railing adds a crispness to the décor and the patterned wallpaper with a terra cotta colored leaf pattern. The main set pieces are a period Victorian-like sofa, Brick and Maggie's bed covered with a textured bedspread, and a bookshelf that houses more liquor than books.

May Ruth Cowgill's costume design demonstrates how affluent this family is. Maggie starts with a black and white lace dress than dons a silk slip and robe to her final ensemble, a wrap dress made of red satin. Big Mama's dress is black and gold whereas Mae wore a white top with pink accents and a white lace skirt. Sookey wears a black maid's

uniform.

The men wore suits: Big Daddy's three-piece suit is beige while Gooper's jacket and tie were navy blue, his shirt yellow, and his trousers were dark gray. The Reverend wore black and the Doctor's jacket is gray with dark pants.

Lighting Designer Ethan Vail and Sound Designer Michelle Wood coordinate light and sound cues to match with the mood of the show. Additionally, they bring about a believable thunderstorm that works in association with the announcement of Big Daddy's diagnosis.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is a memorable tale revolving around two central relationships: Brick and his wife, Maggie and Big Daddy, and Big Mama. Brick is a reflection of his father from their quietest of moments to wanting to raise a hand to their spouse. The show also captures the essences of failed relationships when communication is cut off and secrets are kept.

Compass Rose Theater always delivers good, solid dramas and this production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is no exception. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is both entertaining and honest, and should not be missed.

Running Time: Two hours, with a 15-minute intermission.



Cat on a Hot Tin Roof plays through February 28, 2016 at Compass Rose Theater – 49 Spa Road, in Annapolis, MD. For tickets, call the box office at (410) 980-6662, or purchase them [online](#). Parking is available in nearby garages.

RATING: ★★★★☆

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