



WRITTEN BY
CLARE COCKBURN

TENNESSEE, ROSE

PRESS PACK

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TENNESSEE, ROSE PLAY SYNOPSIS

Delve into the childhood of siblings Tennessee and Rose Williams and the rooted guilt of one of America's greatest playwrights. Rose provided the inspiration for many of Williams' greatest characters, (Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* and Catherine in *Suddenly Last Summer*) - a woman who suffered betrayal at the hands of her family and society as a whole.

The play starts when Rose, in her 80s, is in a medical facility. Tennessee has died, leaving provision for flowers to be sent to her every week from beyond the grave but he is still very alive in her mind and on stage. An inquisitive nurse wants to connect with Rose and tries, against medical advice, to help her find peace, something she may later come to regret.

What might Rose say, if she was given a voice? To her brother, to her mother, to her nurse, to the world? The play examines mental health, guilt, and the role of family tragedy in artistic creation...

TENNESSEE, ROSE

THE CAST



ANNE KIDD -
Rose Williams

Last time at the Edinburgh fringe and at the Pleasance Courtyard, was with 7.84 in the late nineties but very happy to be back.

Most recent theatre was Tay Bridge (Dundee), A Respectable Woman Takes to Vulgarity (Oran Mor), Scotties (Theatre Gu Leor), The Choir (Citizens Theatre).

TV includes 7 series of Shetland playing Cora McLean, Doctors, Step 9, Outlander, Vigil, Victoria, One of Us.

Films include Wise Blood, Despite the Falling Snow, Red Road, The Jacket.



ARON DOCHARD -
Tennessee Williams/Colin/Doctor/Psychiatrist

Aron studied at Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance.

Theatre includes: Peter Pan (Hull Truck Theatre), Life Apparently (Hoxton Hall), Dates and Measures (Bromley Churchill Theatre), A Midsummer Nights Dream (Garden Shakespeare).

TV and film includes: The Witcher: Blood Origin (Netflix), Bodies (Netflix), Unreleased (Disney/Lucasfilm).

Aron is delighted to be making his professional Edinburgh Fringe and Scottish theatre debut in Tennessee, Rose.



HELEN KATAMBA -
Felicia/Edwina

Helen trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Theatre credits include: Red Ellen (Northern Stage, Edinburgh Lyceum, Nottingham Playhouse); Move (Disaster Plan/Slung Low/Traverse Theatre); Inheritance (Play Pie Pint/Mull Theatre); Christmas Tales: Jackie Kay's Christmas with Angela Davis (Edinburgh Lyceum); Breakfast Plays (Edinburgh Traverse); Pinocchio (Glasgow Citizens'); The Ugly One (Glasgow Tron); Macbeth (National Theatre, UK & Ireland tour); The Three Musketeers (The Dukes); The Mad Hatter's Tea Party (Bolton Octagon).

Helen's recent TV and film credits include: Annika: Series II (Black Camel Pictures/Alibi); The Lost King (Feature, dir Stephen Frears); The Nest (BBC/Studio Lambert); The Feed (Amazon); Wild Rose (Feature, Fable Pictures); Last Commanders (CBBC/Objective Media).



The Scotsman

JOYCE MACMILLAN

"The delicate and heartfelt production offers plenty of food for thought for those interested in the social forces that helped destroy Rose Williams; with Anne Kidd, as Rose, a poignant elderly presence, reliving both the pain and the joy of a tempestuous youth".

Entertainment Now

"It was a wonderful display of the striking entertainment value an older actress can have, nestled in an industry that tends to put forth women untouched by age as their leads".

"Don't be fooled by the razzle and dazzle of the Fringe, good old classic theatre still persists as an anchor of familiar entertainment".

REVIEWS

BROADWAYBABY.COM

REVIEW ★★★★★

The works of Tennessee Williams rank as some of the greatest and most iconic plays ever written. The images he forged are so powerful that they continue to cause dramatic and emotional ripples decades on; and the names of his most famous characters are loaded with the complex psychology they were gifted by their creator.

Thrums with a Southern Gothic suffocation. The delicacy and raw truth with which Williams crafted the fragility of the human condition continues to provoke an exquisite and intricate sadness: the recurring themes of forbidden love, rejection, frustration, betrayal and mental imbalance seeming to confirm the theory that he explored many of the difficulties of his own life through his scripts.

Whether this was a form of catharsis, or an opportunity to educate his audience matters little: his legacy remains heady with an emotionally heavy weight that permeates theatre history.

One of the major themes that Williams returned to time and again was that of mental health: a brave and potentially poisonous box office choice at a time when it was considered deeply shameful to admit living with such a condition. Famously, the character of Blanche DuBois cast such a long shadow over its most famous actress – Vivien Leigh – that she suffered one of her not infrequent breakdowns as a result of over-identifying with the faded and damaged Southern Belle she played onstage and screen.

It is thought that Williams (born Thomas Lanier Williams) based elements of Blanche's personality on his older sister Rose; who was also a model for the shy and lonely Laura (The Glass Menagerie) and the terrified and traumatised Catherine (Suddenly Last Summer). And in this powerful new play by The Style Theatre, we can see glimpses of each of these women in the sad ghost of Rose we are introduced to in her care home towards the end of her life.

Anne Kidd gives a stellar performance as central character Rose, a woman whose own mother authorised the lobotomy that promised to still her schizophrenic outbursts and socially unacceptable 'imaginative' ways. It was a brutal operation which Tom deemed to have ripped away Rose's soul, and it would torment him until the end of his days. He obsessively revisited his old diaries to berate his own lack of understanding; used handsome theatre royalties to pay for Rose's hospital care; and of course, immortalised her troubled soul for posterity in script after heart-aching script.

Kidd captures the older Rose's confused state with subtlety and sensitivity; and there is a horrible poignancy in the wide-eyed vibrancy she displays in her earlier years. There is super support from Helen Katamba multi-rolling as the big-hearted Nurse Felicia and the Williams matriarch worn down by a disappointing husband and an unforgiving life; trying to do the right thing without knowing what on earth that might be.

Aron Dochard plays Tom with a discomfiting intensity which evokes the circular burden of anger and impotence he has been forced to navigate on behalf of his sister. He is effective too as Rose's doomed love interest and a series of doctors who prioritise the 'quiet life' strategy above patient care.

Clare Cockburn has written a beautifully researched and well-loved piece, which is directed with empathy and sincerity by Patrick Sandford. The whole piece thrums with a Southern Gothic suffocation made all the more smothering by the knowledge that we are witnessing a true story. That of Rose herself, but also of Tom: bravely allowing others acknowledge to their own demons through his work, but never quite absolving himself of his own.

BRITISH THEATRE GUIDE

REVIEW ★★★★★

The name Tennessee Williams is familiar to almost anyone with even a cursory knowledge of theatre. But through all his life and much of his work runs great threads of sadness, guilt and sorrow, much of which can be traced to his great love for his sister, Rose.

Taking place in a private nursing home in the 1990s, Tennessee, Rose tells the story of the 80-year-old Rose Williams flashing back through time and her jumbled memories to show her troubled youth and her relationships with her brother Tom and her strict mother Edwina. Rose's new nurse, Felicia, is desperate to make a connection with the troubled old woman, and, despite the warnings of the Doctor, tries to break through.

It's difficult to portray mental illness accurately, and it's to the credit of the script, direction and the actors that Anne Kidd's portrayal of Rose is both believable and tasteful. It's a varied and nuanced performance, with sudden flits from the quiet and monosyllabic patient to the frenetic and wide-eyed girl struggling with bouts of schizophrenia.

In contrast is the gentle and coaxing presence of Felicia (Helen Katamba), always kind and trying to help, feeling like an island of sweet calm. Tennessee Tom himself, as played by Aron Dochar, is an at first surprisingly rare participant in events, but that fits the thematic sense of his guilt and his pain at Rose's fate. Additionally, if one ever needs to look at his feelings on the matter, Williams's oeuvre more than covers it.

It's a beautiful play, stepping through the life of a figure known far better for the echoed ripples she left running through the life and work of her famous sibling allowed to shine. What's more, the play, if a little stilted at moments, still captures the sorrowful waste of lives in times when mental illness was less well understood and barbarously treated.

This is a fitting epitaph to the love between a brother and a sister, as well as between a carer and a patient.

REVIEWS

EDINBURGH GUIDE

REVIEW ★★★★★

“The two most influential forces in the life of Tennessee Williams were his writing and his sister Rose. They shared a traumatic childhood due to an abusive, alcoholic father and a compliant, depressed mother. Following years of mental instability, Rose underwent a prefrontal lobotomy to cure her schizophrenia, but the operation failed and she was institutionalised for the rest of her life. Profoundly affected by this, thereafter she became his muse and inspired the creation of his fragile female characters.

In this dramatic portrait of Rose, we first meet her as an elderly woman in hospital where the doctor prescribes medication, with personal care by Nurse Felicia. Wrapped up in a cosy dressing gown, Rose looks blankly into space, unable to communicate. Meanwhile, Tennessee has arranged for a regular bunch of roses to be delivered, ‘Roses for my precious rose, who has no soul.’

While the doctor dismissively concludes that Rose is old and cannot connect, Felicia is keen to help, ‘I can reach her, I don’t give up, she is a person.’ She tries to persuade Rose to start talking by sewing a quilt with images of her favourite things. This triggers a vision of childhood, playing games with Tom and recalling how their domineering, unsympathetic mother caused the young girl to rebel in anger.

And so we move in flashback between present day and the past through various scenes, meeting a potential boyfriend, her ‘gentleman caller’ and an inspirational visit to an art gallery which gives her such joy. Then she snaps back to the bleak emptiness of the hospital ward, with nothing but her beloved collection of tiny glass animals.

Many of Tennessee’s female characters are seen as emotionally alienated and mentally unstable. Suddenly Last Summer, features a scheming plot to have Catherine lobotomized to keep her from revealing a secret; In the final scene of A Streetcar Named Desire, the flighty, flirtatious Blanche DuBois is carried off to an institution; In A Glass Menagerie, fragile-as-glass Laura is known to her Gentleman Caller as “Blue Roses,” based directly on Rose.

REVIEWS

EDINBURGH GUIDE

REVIEW ★★★★★

CONTINUED

Apart from a brief reference to Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois in the movie, curiously there's little detail of the literary creation of these fragile women through Tennessee typing a script. Taking on no less than four roles, Aron Dochard seamlessly switches between authoritative doctors, shy, stammering Colin as well as a brief, haunting sketches of Tennessee as a boy and, and as the thoughtful, sad demeanour as the playwright. He felt so guilty by the fact that his success was entirely due to the consequences of Rose's tragic life.

Clare Cockburn imaginatively uses the concept of the memory play, 'The Glass Menagerie,' which is narrated by Tom as Tennessee Williams describes in his stage directions: "The scene is memory and is therefore non-realistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details, others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value .. for memory is seated predominantly in the heart."

Likewise, the events of Tennessee, Rose are related through the perspective of Rose's experiences and faint, fractured journey of memories. Anne Kidd portrays Rose with extraordinary sensitivity and emotional insight as we observe her from a vulnerable teenager, screaming in schizophrenic rage, to the quiet, gentle octogenarian lady, lost and confused in a muddled fog of forgotten dreams".

(Blanche stands quite still for some moments, a look of sorrowful perplexity as though all human experience shows on her face. She finally speaks but with sudden hysteria).

Blanche: What's going on here?

Doctor: Miss DuBois ?

Blanche: [holding tight to his arm]: Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

(Blanche walks on without turning, followed by the Doctor and Matron.

From 'A Streetcar named Desire' Tennessee Williams

REVIEWS

Broadway Baby interview

with Clare Cockburn By Richard Beck

We talked to Clare Cockburn, who, at the age of 54, is presenting her debut play Tennessee, Rose at this year's Edinburgh Fringe. It focuses on the life of Tennessee Williams' sister, Rose, whose treatment for her mental health caused him a lifetime of guilt.

Producing is a big responsibility; hectic, with highs and lows to navigate. This is your debut play which you are co-producing with The Pleasance. How has the experience of putting this on at the Fringe been?

I am fortunate that all those involved in this production are committed, talented artists who believe in my script, that is the foundation from which everything has grown. It feels solid. This is my first-time experience of being involved in the production of a play and I now realise that producing is a big responsibility; hectic, with highs and lows to navigate. Belief in what I am doing and why is fundamental - and with good people by your side you can achieve what you set out to do.

What inspired you to write about Tennessee Williams' sister?

I was reading about Rose in a biography of Williams ten years ago now and I was fascinated to know more about what happened to this bright, sparky older sister who meant so much to him. My understanding from the book was that guilt was the driving force behind his work and tortured private life. Many of his fragile female characters are based on his older sister, to whom he was close. He took responsibility for her care at a time when mental health was a taboo subject, causing great suffering for those affected and their families. I felt that Rose could give these silenced issues a platform so I wrapped fiction around facts as I wrote the play.

You have a great cast and director. How did you pull them together?

Oh yes, I really do! Director Patrick Sandford has a special interest in the work of Tennessee Williams and we were introduced at the Pleasance by Anthony Alderson several years ago. I told him what I was writing and researching and we started to work together, developing the play. He was also inspired by Rose's story and we also both have an interest in mental health and in survivors of childhood trauma finding their voice. Patrick brought the cast together and he has done an amazing job - I marvel at the work being done in the rehearsal room.

Between starting the play and this year's Fringe you did an MSc in playwriting. What did you learn from that?

I submitted some early scenes from the play which got me a place on the course but that was only the beginning. I would say I learned a great deal thanks to the course and playwright Nicola McCartney who runs it. It's about breaking down old patterns and realising that having some latent talent won't always get you where you want to go. This is a collaborative, multi-faceted industry; it's a vocational course and you come out of it at the bottom of the pile. Is your work going to be relevant? So, I have learned you also need perseverance, determination, a business brain and above all a need to refine your own voice so that you know exactly why you are writing plays in the first place.

With grateful thanks to the following for their important contribution to the development and support of Tennessee, Rose:

Betsy Williamson and Stuart Gunderson
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Vanessa Roeves
Perth Theatre
Rory, Francesca and Nicholas Martin
Emma Welsh and The Little White Pig



T H E S T Y L E T H E A T R E

• PLEASANCE •

The Style Theatre (www.thestyletheatre.co.uk) is delighted to be co-producing Tennessee, Rose with the Pleasance and giving a forgotten woman with an important place in literary and theatrical history a voice.

The Pleasance Theatre Trust has been at the heart of Fringe theatre and comedy since 1985. With an international profile and a network of alumni that reads like a Who's Who of contemporary comedy, drama and entertainment. The Pleasance is a place for the experimental and the new and we're proud to be one of the most highly respected theatre venues at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and in London.

Production Credits

Director - Patrick Sandford
Producer - The Style Theatre and the Pleasance
Production Manager - Ali Day for Macrocosmic
Stage Manager - Becky North
Sound Design - Victor Hill
LX programmer- Joe Hawkings for Macrocosmic
Dialect Coach - Carol Ann Crawford
Quilt design and creation - Becky North

For future booking contact: anthony@pleasance.co.uk