

Originally produced in 1993 at PS122(NY) and then presented Off-Broadway at the Classic Stage Company (NY), *Faith Healing* subsequently toured to the Baltimore Museum of Art (MD), Actors Theatre of Louisville (KY), N.C.S.U. Center Stage (NC), and the Atlanta Dancers Collective (GA).

*Faith Healing* takes the story line of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* as its point of departure. The issues of nostalgia, regret, fantasy, hope, anger, and unrequited love addressed in *The Glass Menagerie* are given a vivid and fresh examination through Comfort's perspective of movement and performance theater. Additionally, the play's themes of fantasy and nostalgia are embodied by multiple escapes into contemporary pop culture.

Comfort's approach to the play is a distillation of elements, focusing on the musicality and rhythm of language, the telling psychology of movement, and the visualization of fantasy. Various scenes are stacked on top of each other; others are danced. Gesture is used to undermine the spoken text. Comfort's own text runs underneath and behind Tennessee Williams', almost as an unconscious thought. Williams' text is used in choral, canon, and call and response forms. The result, as Suzanne Carbonneau of the Washington Post said, is "*a compelling work of truly original imagination and form. And, without distorting Williams' intent, Comfort has found a way to preserve the poignancy and desperation of the original, while enriching it with humor.*"

In Williams' play, the members of the Wingfield family escape their grim lives through fantasy. Laura immerses herself in her glass collection, Tom spends every night at the movie theater, and Amanda conjures up memories of her youth allowing herself to imagine her infinite possibility. In *Faith Healing* we physically follow them into their Technicolor worlds. Comfort uses Tom's infatuation with the movies as a device for the entire family to acquire super personas as each character steps into scenes from American films. Just as the American public transforms its psyche into a heroic and romantic one within the walls of a movie theater, so do the Wingfield family members in their imagined cinematic extravaganzas. Tom becomes an action hero and lover before us, and as Laura shyly greets the gentleman caller, we see her transform into a fantasized femme fatale sensuously dancing with her lover. The juxtaposition of dream and reality brings the subtext of longing to center stage.

In *Faith Healing*, the role of the mother, Amanda Wingfield, is played by a male. The celebrated Bessie-award winning Mark Dendy will reprise his critically acclaimed portrayal of Amanda. This is not a drag role, but an attempt to deal with the male, the animus in each female, with particular reference to Southern matriarchs. In 1993 Deborah Jowitt of The Village Voice said of Dendy's performance, "*Dendy's Amanda is great by any standards, the cross-dressing devoid of gimmickry or sensationalism. What Dendy achieves is something of the objectification of feminine character sought by the onnagata performers of Kabuki Theater...he reveals Amanda's fussiness, her nostalgia for her days as a belle, her theatrical pronouncements, her streak of practicality as subtly and profoundly as might any of our major actresses.*" Jennifer Dunning of The New York Times said, "*Mr. Dendy is superb.*"

The sets and costumes by Bessie award-winning designer Liz Prince encompass a beautiful, luscious fantasy life and crumbling, dusty reality. As the fantasy world engulfs the characters, gorgeous costumes and props will suddenly appear and disappear. The bright colors of a fantasy dress from Laura's secret life are whisked away as another character enters the room. Richard Landry and Brooks Williams evocative music is often used as an entrance into Laura's descent into her dream world and helps indicate a strong duality of existence present in each character's consciousness.