



Actor Zachary Quinto guests at Williams festival gala

By **KATHI SCRIZZI DRISCOLL**

kdriscoll@capecodonline.com

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His Broadway debut may have closed in February, but Zachary Quinto thinks the close connection he feels to its writer will last for a lifetime.

Quinto, most widely known as Spock in the rebooted "Star Trek" films, and for TV's "American Horror Story" and "Heroes," won rave notices as Tom — the character playwright Tennessee Williams most closely modeled on himself — in the acclaimed revival of "The Glass Menagerie."

That production — which premiered at American Repertory Theater in Cambridge last year — was a life- and career-altering experience for Quinto, who did copious research for Williams' largely autobiographical role. Now, Quinto says, he's "endlessly fascinated by (Williams), drawn to him, and endlessly interested in things he enjoyed."

That's why Quinto said yes when asked if he'd be the guest star at tonight's fundraising dinner for the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival. Williams spent four summers in Provincetown and worked on some of his most famous plays — including "The Glass Menagerie" — in Provincetown.

Quinto, who will turn 37 on Monday, visited the town years ago on a family trip, but had never spent time there as an adult. While festival events had never previously fit his busy schedule, that was "all before 'Glass Menagerie' and having had that experience and feeling more connected to and dialed into Tennessee and his world," Quinto says. Now, this visit will be a great opportunity for him "to see some of the things (Williams) experienced."

While Williams, his family and other people he knew are represented in many of his plays, Quinto notes, "Tom is the clearest representation of him."

"I'm more connected to the writer Tennessee than if I'd played another character," Quinto adds.

The memory play is about a would-be writer who felt chained by responsibility for his overbearing mother and shy, disabled sister and is haunted by his guilt after leaving them.

New York Times critic Ben Brantley called Quinto's Tom "a career-defining performance." The actor says he found the key to his portrayal in Williams' description of Tom as "someone who is not remorseless but, to survive, must act without pity," a description that Quinto says "allowed me to understand and embrace the character with the kind of love you might not have for him at first glance."

Quinto will talk about that role and the play in a question-and-answer session following a reception and dinner tonight at Provincetown Town Hall. The program lineup for the Sept. 25-28 festival will also be announced at the fundraiser.

In a brief phone interview last week, Quinto seemed eager and enthusiastic to be back in Williams' world and revisit the "Menagerie" time, especially after probably not having had enough of a chance to savor and reflect on that experience earlier this year.

Quinto closed "Menagerie" with a Sunday matinee in February, then was on a plane the next day to Europe to film "Agent 47," a movie based on a video game that is a reboot of 2007's "Hitman."

The actor's 959,000 Twitter followers and close to 234,000 Instagram followers will know he's been in Berlin and other exotic locations all spring, and the actor acknowledges now that "it's a lot to go from one thing immediately into the next." He doesn't think he would make that same choice again, instead wanting to give himself "a little time to be still and process."

"I wanted the work. I love to keep busy, and it was such a different kind of project that I was going to. It was a good

challenge and I definitely rose to meet it," Quinto says of "Agent 47." "I learned from (the experience) and I had a good time, but I'm also really glad I'm back and I'm done with it."

And he was able to almost immediately return to the "Menagerie" world. He arrived in New York City on May 15, and the next day attended the Drama League Awards luncheon, where he reunited with castmates Cherry Jones, Celia Keenan-Bolger and Brian J. Smith. Quinto was nominated for a distinguished performance award, and "The Glass Menagerie" won as outstanding revival of a Broadway or off-Broadway play. (A.R.T.-nurtured plays went two for two, with "All the Way," about President Lyndon B. Johnson, winning as outstanding production of a Broadway or off-Broadway play.)

Quinto says he feels like this weekend's Provincetown visit will continue that reconnection to an experience he treasures.

"Being in that production was definitely one of the highlights of my creative experience, from beginning to end," he says, referring also to the time at A.R.T. The "undercurrent of trust and love, and the caliber of the work" with his castmates and director John Tiffany reminded him "how fortunate we are to do what we do at this level," he says.

And from that connection to Williams, he began to understand that "the most important thing will be the work, will always be the work, and that's what should matter to you."

For Quinto, the acting work began in high school in Pittsburgh, then at Carnegie-Mellon University, where he met the two friends with whom he now runs a film production company. Quinto's career began on stage, including at Vineyard Playhouse in Vineyard Haven in a play called "A Lonely Impulse of Delight," and he started getting TV work in 2000, according to imdb.com. Besides guest-star spots, he played analyst Adam Kaufman in the 2003-2004 season of "24"; then in 2006, his career started accelerating. He gained attention and fandom as psychopathic killer Sylar in "Heroes" from 2006-2010 and two seasons of FX's "American Horror Story," most famously as villainous Bloody Face.

His movie debut came as Spock in 2009's "Star Trek," a role for which he was hand-picked by Leonard Nimoy, who originated the iconic Vulcan. Quinto reprised the part in 2013's "Star Trek: Into Darkness" and says he is ready for a third installment, but he has not heard what might be happening with another "Trek" film.

Quinto became better known on stage with his off-Broadway debut in the 2010 revival of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America." The next year, he made headlines by publicly acknowledging he is gay, following the suicide of gay teenager Jamey Rodemeyer. Quinto noted in a blog post (capitalization added): "It became clear to me in an instant that living a gay life without publicly acknowledging it — is simply not enough to make any significant contribution to the immense work that lies ahead on the road to complete equality. "» Jamey Rodemeyer's life changed mine. And while his death only makes me wish that I had done this sooner — I am eternally grateful to him for being the catalyst for change within me. Now I can only hope to serve as the same catalyst for even one other person in this world."

Quinto's Broadway debut then came last September, after "Menagerie" was produced in Cambridge the previous winter. The actor had read the play in high school. But, he says, "It felt a little dusty to me. I'd seen a number of productions of (Williams') work, and always recognized the talent, and always recognized the power of his work" but had never felt the need to be part of a Williams play.

Now, Quinto praises Williams' "capacity for poetry," his ability to write dialogue that is "so emotionally present, relevant and powerful" and to use "such colorful and vivid language (that is) never too flowery, never too grand and sweeping to blow past the emotional truth."

After his experience, the actor says, "Glass Menagerie" is "far and away my favorite play. It will always be."

Quinto clearly wants to return to the stage, but has no specific plans. He's jumped back into work with Before the Door Pictures, the production company he co-founded in 2008, which debuted with "Margin Call" — in which he co-starred and which was Oscar-nominated for best original screenplay — and most recently produced "All Is Lost," starring Robert Redford. The company's next project is the Starz documentary series "The Chair," debuting this fall, in which two film directors are given the same script to make a movie and the audience votes on which one turned out better.

Quinto is co-executive producer on that and is also producing two independent films that he'll star in. His next filming commitment as an actor starts at the end of July, and he's waiting for word on what happens next with "Star Trek."

In between all that, he says he's trying to be very careful that the next stage project is the right one.

"It's a difficult thing," he says, "to follow up on an experience like I just had."

ON STAGE

What: The Tennessee Williams Annual Dinner

Presented by: Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival

Special guest: actor Zachary Quinto

When: cocktails, 6:30 tonight; dinner, 7:30 p.m.

Where: Provincetown Town Hall, 260 Commercial St.

Tickets: Dinner sold out; \$75 for cocktail hour only

Reservations and information: twptown.org

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