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## Wishful Thinking: The Provincetown Tennessee Williams 13th Annual Theater Festival, Part 2

*This is part two of a three part series on The Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival that took place in September of 2018, click [here](#) for part one.*



(l to r) Swan Gruen and Naomi Warner in Tennessee Williams's *Some Problems for the Moose Lodge*, directed by Rory Pelsue. Photo credit: Ride Hamilton.

### *Some Problems for the Moose Lodge & Steps Must be Gentle*

My first Williams play of the festival this year was the one-act *Some Problems for the Moose Lodge*, which Williams ended up reworking into his final full-length play, *A House Not Meant to Stand*. *Moose Lodge* was first shown in 1980 and has not received a professional production since that time. I have always enjoyed the zany comedy of this piece and am thrilled to have finally had a chance to see it done. In case anyone was expecting the more general Williams fare, this play begins

with Charlie (played by Swan Gruen) frantically trying to find a hiding place for his pregnant girlfriend Stacey (Naomi Warner) as his parents Cornelius (Ross DeGraw) and Bella (Nina Mehta) arrive home earlier than expected. Cornelius, who shares a name with Williams's father, and Bella have just returned from their gay son's funeral, but rather than being a somber meditation on death, *Moose Lodge* is a madcap slapstick complete with prat falls, one-liners, and a bit about speaking in tongues. Director Rory Pelsue and the whole cast did a wonderful job of bringing this unusual play to life, and the audience asides were handled particularly well.

The second short play of this bill was *Steps Must be Gentle*, Williams's meditation on an imagined conversation between deceased playwright Hart Crane and Crane's mother, Grace. This play clearly uses Crane as a Williams stand-in to discuss many of the same themes of love and loss that are so often repeated. Brandon T. Snider's Hart was well-performed, but the unusual choice of having the entire play take place as Karen Chamberlain's Grace continually circled her son was distracting. This play also suffered from having to follow such an outrageous comedy, as the subtle and subdued tone of the play seemed to pale in comparison without factoring in the problematic staging. This was not enough to detract from my feeling that The Collective NY made a very enjoyable evening of plays.



(l to r) Leslee Young as Nora and Laura Sebastian as Louise in Tennessee Williams's *Will Mister Merriwether Return From Memphis?*, directed by Jeff Glickman. Photo credit: Ride Hamilton.

*Will Mr. Merriwether Return from Memphis?*

Spoiler alert: the answer is yes! That's right, this Williams play not only has characters who can summon ghosts and musical interludes, but also a seemingly happy ending! I think this is one of the most interesting Williams plays in terms of form as it is characterized by a through-line of surreal comedy. This production came to the festival from Pensacola Little Theatre in Florida, last seen in 2009's festival with a production of *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. Director Jeff Glickman not only showed a clear understanding of the complexities of this text, but also led by example by playing the Banjo Player, a small, but important role. I was absolutely delighted by the entire production, which was filled with wonderful timing and energy.

The entire cast performed beautifully, but the two standouts were very clearly Laura Sebastian's Louise, who is the character waiting for her boarder/paramour Mr. Merriwether to return, and also Leslee Young's Nora, her friend and apparition-summoning partner in crime. Young's hilarious facial expressions called to mind Lucille Ball while Sebastian played the perfect "straight man" to Young's shenanigans. I had forgotten exactly how funny this play is, and yet there were also moments that were very touching. The end of the play sees Mr. Merriwether's return, leaving Nora alone as Louise goes off with her love. Nora's own husband has passed away. His apparition comes to visit her and the play ends with an odd discussion of why his multiple infidelities have no bearing on his love for Nora. The final moments in this production showed the lights dimming as Nora and her husband faced the audience, hands inching towards each other, about to touch when the final blackout occurred. Leave it to Williams to end his seemingly happy play with an added scene that questions that positive conclusion. All of these nuances were handled deftly by this production and I will certainly not forget this wonderful show.



(l to r) Vance Barton as Alvaro and Irene Glezos as Serafina in Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo*, directed by Dana Greenfield. Photo credit: Ride Hamilton.

### *The Rose Tattoo*

This play is more proof that Williams often struggled with the plays that had seemingly happy endings. For the majority of Serafina's story, the play does not seem happy or hopeful. She is stuck in the past, remembering the love of her husband and refusing to believe that he was unfaithful to her. Her larger than life story about their love is exemplified by a moment in which she said she saw her husband's rose tattoo on her own chest during the heat of passion, symbolically telling her that she had conceived a child. The victorious ending of Serafina once again conceiving a child after allowing herself to love someone else again is seemingly tacked onto a very dramatic play that has a great deal in common with works such as *Orpheus Descending*. This offering from Moon Lake Productions in New York also had a direct connection to that play in that festival favorites Irene Glezos and Brenda Currin also played together in an excellent production of *Orpheus* several years ago in New Orleans and New York.

Glezos is one of the most virtuosic actors I've ever seen, and her performance as Serafina allowed these talents to be on full display. My comment on the production is one that I rarely have to give, but I believe that director Dana Greenfield would have done well to try to hold Glezos back at moments in order to give the play more of an arc. Again, Glezos is so technically skilled and capable of going to a

heightened emotional place that she was able to stay there for the entirety of this nearly three-hour play in a way that did not give Serafina many places to go. Of course, part of this is in the writing, and this is not to say that there was not nuance in her performance, but I do think that most directors are not used to the problem of having an actor who is too good. I found the production entertaining to be sure, and Glezos had excellent matches in Juliet Brett as her daughter Rosa and Vance Barton as her new love Alvaro in addition to Currin as Assunta/Bessie. The ensemble members Joel DeCandio, Ashley Scott, Joslyn DeFreece, and Christina Stone took on a variety of other characters to fill out the world, and DeFreece especially shone in her role as Miss Yorke, Rosa's schoolteacher. This production had a great deal of heart and imagination, especially in terms of playing up the basis of fables that runs through the piece with elements such as puppets. Yet the production team also had a very difficult challenge of wanting to stage a show that used non-traditional staging in a high school auditorium (the most traditional, and least flexible, stage set-up of all). I very much look forward to the next Irene Glezos and Brenda Currin collaboration, and hope that the others from this cast and production team return to the festival very soon.