

the boxes. As he sees it, just time for someone

playing something. I'm just tired of fighting those battles."

Hummingbird Centre.

proof

her feel unworthy. City of Williams' own sister, even harsher. Diagnosed a manic, she was institutionally. Williams ultimately underwent a lobotomy. Williams always felt he had abandoned his sister, and the most poignant line in the play is the line of benediction: "Blow out your candles, Laura..."

is a fourth character in *The Glass Menagerie*: Jim, the "gentleman" who comes from the outside world. He accidentally breaks off the glass unicorn, the centerpiece of Laura's menagerie, and "just like all the other

this is a play full of symbols, the message is clear. The dreamer's dysfunctional family may be complete and inadequate, but to complete the equation by adding "normal" people to the mix will only hasten the disaster.

Williams used his own family experience as a crucible in which to test all his major plays. Each one is a *de quatre* for an idealist, a dreamer, a madwoman and a de-

Blanche, Stanley, Stella and in *A Streetcar Named Desire* the Princess, Chance, Heaven and Boss Finlay in *Sweet Bird of Paradise*. Williams's dance remains undisturbed, made up of the same affirmations of denial, acceptance and rejection that he first revealed in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Why do we continue to respond empathetically to this play? On one level, it must be because we feel how profoundly this play is rooted in the author's own life. We can still feel the "intense, burning clarity" that critic Stark noted in 1945, at the time of the play's production.

Important, we can see ourselves both as the parents who want their children to realize the dreams they couldn't fulfill and as the children who know that they are unwillingly incapable of realizing their parents' dreams.

Over the 52 years since the play was written, theatrical styles have come and gone. And yet *The Glass Menagerie* remains. There is only one line in the play that it's possible to quarrel with: "Time is the longest distance between two places." Five decades have shown us that the distance between Williams's world and ours is not so short indeed.

David Ouzounian is creative head programming at TVOntario.

DECISIVE MOMENT



Coulter (centre), sister Primrose, and father John.

Coulter's London blitz

One of the many characters actor Clare Coulter has made her own is the privileged Westerner of Wallace Shawn's *The Fever*, whom the audience first meets nauseated in a bathroom somewhere in the developing world. Coulter has taken *The Fever* into living rooms and theatres across Canada, and now she's doing it at the Royal Court Theatre in London. One British critic was prompted to warn audiences "there's more than enough here to drain the colour from your cheeks." It is full circle for Coulter. Years ago, she recalls, her playwright father John Coulter was invited to London to mount a staged reading of his *Sleep My Pretty One* at the Royal Court — and with great enthusiasm he prepared to bring his family along.

"I remember being terrified when my parents announced we were going to London. I was just a little girl and all I knew was that that was where the war was. I couldn't be convinced by my parents that World War II was over. And we arrived, and it was a sight of absolute horror. Block after block of frying pans... bedsteads...

remains of peoples' personal lives lying there in the rubble with barbed wire strung around, for in many cases the ruins were dangerous. It was horrible. We were there to stay, however. And my sister Primrose and I were enrolled in the Hampshire Ballet School, a little tiny school in a church hall run by Mrs. Hampshire, who was very nice. We learned to dance, and we got to wear a lovely uniform. But every afternoon we would begin the walk home. And I would dance my way back to the flat where we were staying, dance and dance in my uniform past this horror of rubble, pretending it just wasn't there.

"I remember that very vividly because, for me, theatre has been a way of keeping the horror of the world at bay. And then you build a way to journey back to your reality. You find a way *not* to avoid the horror. *The Fever* is a searching analysis of the political and economic contrasts between rich and poor. You open the paper each morning, and it becomes your research for that night."

— Julia Bennett