

## Lodestone's "Suddenly Last Summer" Portrays Pathos to Perfection

By Amy Lyons

The love story of a matriarchal Southern belle and her secretly homosexual son is at the heart of "Suddenly Last Summer" a one-act play by Tennessee Williams that is rife with just as much gorgeous metaphor and riveting emotional heft as his more oft-produced works, "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "The Glass Menagerie". As in many of Williams' pitch-perfect studies of family dysfunction, "Suddenly" examines myriad secrets and lies that can slowly destroy even the outwardly prettiest and proudest of families.

Though the play is not paired here with its original companion piece, "Something Unspoken" – the two plays by Williams originally appeared off Broadway in 1958 as a double bill entitled "Garden District" – it stands solidly on its own as a commentary on the destructive nature of self-loathing, denial and scathing jealousy.

Lodestone goes straight to the heart of the matter with its bold production.

The script relies on female actors outfitted with strong psychological shoulders on which to carry the searing story, and Lodestone's leading ladies don't disappoint.

The aging Mrs. Violet Venable (Kim Miyori) is on a quest to silence her niece, Catharine Holly (Elaine Kao), whose lunatic ravings Violet fears will smear the name of her dead son, Sebastian. As Mrs. Venable tries to build her case against Catharine, a case that could lead to a lobotomy for the younger girl, Dr. Cukrowicz (Leonard Wu) hears tales of a happy mother and her poet son, whose adventures around the world were nothing short of perfection. As the stories unfold, we find out that Sebastian replaced his matronly travel companion with his young, sexy cousin on his last world trip. Mom, you see, was no longer an attractive enough piece of female bait for the luring of Sebastian's young, male lovers.

A gaggle of money-hungry relatives shuffles in and out of the picture as we try to figure out which parts of Violet's reports to Dr. Cukrowicz are based in fact. When we finally meet Catharine, more than halfway through the show, we're fearing for her life and wondering just what she and Sebastian were up to during their travels.

All of these threads are perfectly woven by Williams, a master of layered text. Two monologues about nature gone awry bookend the highly poetic script, and tragic characters abound – as Catharine strains against an all but inevitable mental breakdown, Violet icily inhabits in an evil-tinged, out-of-touch fantasy land, where her handsome young son is free of the flaws that destroyed him.

Miyori steals the show with her taut jaw and chilly demeanor. She nails Violet's controlled quest for vengeance, hiding her worst intentions behind flirtatious gestures and a smokescreen of saccharine Southern hospitality. But when the character's true colors begin to peek through the cracks in her crumbling character, Miyori is right there to show us just how ugly this good old girl can get.

Kao likewise shows up with her guts on the outside, ready to wallop us with a Tennessee Williams mad scene that sticks. The closing monologue finds this fragile but fierce actor on her knees in the aisle, finally spilling the whole truth in a monologue that manages to be both an elevated poem and a freakish piece of Edvard Munch-like imagery.

Director Chil Kong hits multiple homeruns here. His ability to elicit nuanced performances from the cast coupled with his clear love of the poetic language add up to a production that will not soon be forgotten.

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