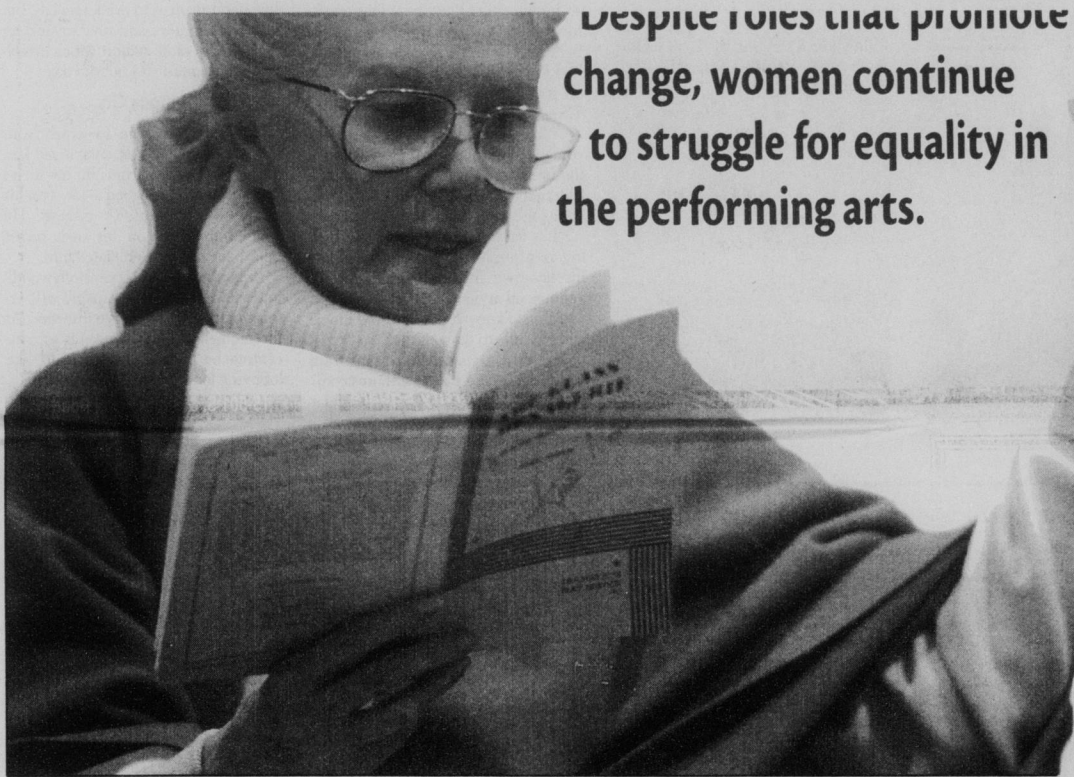


# DIVERSIONS

The Daily Tar Heel



## The Struggle on Stage and behind the scenes



Despite roles that promote change, women continue to struggle for equality in the performing arts.

### Women Aim Toward More Dramatic Voice

By ROBIN CLEMOW  
Arts & Entertainment Editor

In 1660, women took the stage for the first time. The public loved the dramatic addition, especially the men who chose their mistresses from the stage.

More than 300 years later, despite progress, which has led to numerous theaters and festivals that support female dramatists and new female leaders in the arts, women still face challenges in theater and cinema.

Sarah Rose, who will play Laura in PlayMakers Repertory Company's production of "The Glass Menagerie" opening this weekend, said maintaining support for women was one struggle.

Rose said organizations like Women's Project and Productions in New York City, which only produces plays written by women and centered around women's issues, have given women an opportunity to contribute to theater like never before.

"I don't think (women) have had the support to shape the history of theater as they had the ability to, but now the support is there," she said.

But with increasingly conservative politics, Rose said she feared that arts funding would get cut across the board. "I think women will be the first to get hurt from it," she said.

However, women's theater groups and film festivals continue to spring up internationally without political support.

North Carolina recently gained one of these organizations. Three women in Charlotte launched an all-female Shakespeare company called Chickspeare to give women the opportunity to play more roles in classical plays whose casts consist mainly of men.

"When you have an audition for Shakespeare in a typical theater, there is not cross-gender casting," said Anne Lambert, co-producer of Chickspeare.

That means minimal roles for women in Shakespearean theater, a fact that Chickspeare attempts to combat with their shows.

But even with groups like Chickspeare succeeding, UNC dramatic art Professor Bonnie Raphael said women face other struggles in the field.

Although she said roles for women have drastically improved from theater's beginning when they played victims, crazies, witches and whores, there is still a shortage of worthy characters.

Star parts for women over 40 are only beginning to emerge in theater, and television and film are still chock full of roles set aside for the young and beautiful.

"It's about writers writing better roles for women," Raphael said. "It's also about women having the courage to turn roles down if they don't meet certain standards. You've got to see what you can do from within the system."

Kathleen Nolan, who will play Amanda in "The Glass Menagerie," has been fighting for women behind the camera since she hit stardom playing Kate McCoy in the TV series "The Real McCoys" in the late 1950s.

Nolan said theater roles had multiplied greatly in the

20th century, praising this weekend's Tennessee Williams show for its exploration of women.

"Probably the playwright who has contributed more (women's roles) in American theater is Tennessee Williams," she said.

A strong voice in the Screen Actors Guild throughout the women's rights movement, Nolan became a role model for women in the arts when she was elected the first female president of The Screen Actor's Guild in 1975.

But despite her success, she said screen parts for women were limited, especially strong roles for older women like the character she will play this weekend.

"In TV, women over 40 disappear," she said. "It's about catering to the commerce of a young audience."

The focus on appearance in the dramatic arts weighs on the minds of aspiring actresses like UNC senior drama major Michelle Ries.

"I've thought about it before — the pressures, physically, to be so thin and look a certain way," Ries said. "It's not something I've encountered yet, but I'm afraid I might when I get into the real world."

Ries said she agreed with Raphael and Nolan that the pressure was even greater in film and television than in the theater.

"If you watch the Oscars, as opposed to the Tony's, the women who win the Tony's are much more diverse," she said, pointing to the greater ethnic and physical variety of theatrical roles.

Ries also blamed commercial drive, explaining that advertisers want their products set next to a socially attractive image. Beautiful women and athletes top their lists.

Amid these limitations, film and television, like theater, have organizations that help women. The largest of these is Women in Film, a national organization born in Los Angeles in the 1970s.

Nolan, who won one of the organization's acclaimed Crystal Awards for her dedication to women in dramatic arts in 1981, said Women in Film created a network of women and awarded them for making changes on both sides of the camera.

"It was started not only because of the lack of roles for women but also the lack of places for women behind the camera and in production," Nolan said.

Along with the continual need for support and the effort demanded from women to combat the system from within, women in the performing arts also have to face the problem of balancing family duties with a career.

UNC dramatic art Professor Julie Fishell said the demands on performers and directors include the need to be able to follow jobs and companies across the country.

After college, Fishell toured with a number of professional companies, but now with a 6-year-old daughter, she said she's glad to be somewhat settled.

While some male actors also have family responsibilities, many more female actors must sacrifice career for obligations at home.

"The simple fact is, we've had many male guest artists who've come (to UNC) who've had children, and we've had very few women come who've had children," Fishell said.

But despite a threatened support system, a need for better roles, and social limitations on women, both Fishell and Raphael hold high hopes for young female artists like Ries.

"Women have to be able to visualize themselves in leadership positions," Raphael said. And Fishell said many women leave the department of dramatic art with that drive.

"The students need to be ready to go out and make their own opportunities, and many of them are."

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## Play Depicts Familial, Female Struggle

PlayMakers Repertory Company presents Tennessee Williams' play "The Glass Menagerie," its first production of the new millennium.

By CARL JACOBS  
Staff Writer

Lost dreams. Madness. Isolation. Failure. Humor despite it all. These are common traits associated with some of the richest stories in Southern literature, and all are to be found in Tennessee Williams' play "The Glass Menagerie," opening this week at PlayMakers Repertory Company's Paul Green Theatre.

In this play, which launched Williams' career as arguably the South's greatest dramatist, Williams creates an autobiographical portrait of a Southern family that proves both humorous and heart-wrenching.

In "The Glass Menagerie," Tom tells the story of his family life years earlier. Through the flashbacks, a complex play comes to life that echoes Williams' own life experiences. Tom's mother Amanda and sister Laura both represent the women who played pivotal roles in the author's life.

Though the play is told from a male perspective, women are perceptively portrayed. Sarah Rose, who plays Laura, said Williams had talent in depicting women.

"Williams writes women so sensitively with such a heavy, deep understanding," she said. "In some ways I think he understands women better than he understands men."

Much like another of Williams' heroines, Blanche from "A Streetcar Named Desire," Amanda's attempts to hold onto her past wreck havoc on the lives of those around her.

Amanda tries to give her daughter the opportunities that she herself missed out on. But the painfully shy Laura wants only to be left alone

with her collection of glass figurines.

The story exists on many levels. First, it is Tom's story as he tries to reconcile the events that have befallen his family. Then it is Amanda and Laura's story as they try to cope as women in a society that offers them few choices. Finally, it is Williams' own story in which he incorporates personal elements, possibly to exorcise the demons of his past.

"The play is about Tom's coming to terms with his family," director Kent Paul said.

Paul said the play fascinated him, partly because of the elements that are connected to Williams' life. He cited Williams' reluctance to leave the overbearing influence of his mother and the way Williams' sister "haunted" his life as telling pieces of historical information to keep in mind while watching the play.

Stage and television star Kathleen Nolan ("The Real McCoys") plays Amanda, a fading Southern belle whose prospects in life are all but finished. She said Williams' depiction of her character's family sang with lyrical inflection.

"It's poetry," she said. "He is a poet, and that lyricism of language always remains."

Paul said Williams' lyric style, much like the storylines of his theatrical works, began in his home.

"(Williams') mother had a great lyric gift," Paul said. "Whenever (Williams) was around his mother, he stopped talking just to listen."

Later Williams would make this gift his own, incorporating a talent for lyric storytelling into his work.

Like much Southern literature, the play blurs past and present, reality and imagination. Donald Eastman designed the set to allow space for the play's selective and active memory aspects.

"I would think of the set as an assemblage. It's like a piece of sculpture rather than a realistic rendering of the space," Paul said.

Switching from the 1940s present to his memories a decade earlier, Tom demonstrates how

memory lives on. Citing Williams' own demons as an impetus behind the play, Paul added that "... an artist makes a play from material that is haunting him."

These haunting memories prove powerful enough to keep the play on stage more than half a century after it was written. Dealing with such universal topics as the relationships among family members, the work maintains an enduring quality that makes it viable still today.

Tickets, priced from \$9 to \$25, are on sale now. For more information call Playmakers Box Office at 962-7529.

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### Female Performing Art Festivals

#### United States:

California:  
Los Angeles — LA Women's Theatre Festival  
San Francisco — Working Women Festival

Colorado:  
Boulder — Moondance International Film Festival

Illinois:  
Chicago — Women at the Door Playwriting Festival  
Chicago — Women in the Director's Chair

New York:  
New York — New York Women's Film Festival

Rhode Island:  
Providence — Annual Women's Playwriting Festival

Washington:  
Seattle — Mae West Fest  
Seattle — Women in Cinema Festival

Australia:  
Sydney — WOW Festival, Women on Women International Film Festival

Germany:  
Koln — FEMINALE, Biannual International Women's Film Festival

Slovenia:  
City of Women International Festival of Contemporary Arts

Taiwan:  
Tapei — The Women Make Waves Film and Video Festival