

Stage Buzz

What's New in New York City Theatre

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[Review - Five By Tenn \(Turtle Shell Productions & the Terrapin Troupe in association with Off the Leash Productions\)](#)

Stage Buzz Review by Byrne Harrison

Given that Tennessee Williams is one of the best-known American playwrights, it's unusual to see the words "New York premiere" attached to a production of any of his plays. But that's exactly what Turtle Shell Productions has given us - an evening of Williams' one-acts, featuring the New York premieres of *Why Do You Smoke So Much, Lily?* and *Thank You, Kind Spirit*. Although the plays, written by Williams from the ages of 23 to 33, are somewhat uneven, they hint at the greatness to come.

Director John W. Cooper uses one of the plays, *Thank You, Kind Spirit*, as a framing device for the other four pieces. In *Kind Spirit* a faith healer, Mother DuClos (Natalie E. Carter), leads a group of believers toward peace and healing, as long as they're willing to pay. Throughout the play, Mother DuClos becomes aware of the other stories, as though psychically picking them up from the ether. When she does, the action in her play pauses, and the new play begins.

The first of these is the hallucinatory *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen . . .*, a play that drips with desire and frustration, like sweat on humid bayou night. The second and fourth plays, *Hello From Bertha* and *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* deal with a familiar Williams' theme - people at the end of their rope, brought low by alcohol and crushed dreams. *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* is unusual in that it allows the two characters, Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore (Rebecca Street), an early version of Blanche DuBois, and her next-door neighbor, an alcoholic, unaccomplished Writer (Leon Fallon), to live happily in their delusions, if only for an evening. The third short play in the group is *Why Do You Smoke So Much, Lily?*. Featuring a passive-aggressive mother (Susan Capra) and a daughter (Christie Booker) who is reaching the edge of her sanity, it has hints of *The Glass Menagerie* and *Suddenly Last Summer*.

Each of the plays is well-acted, with standout performances given by Natalie E. Carter as Mother DuClos, Rebecca Street as Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore, and Leon Fallon as The Writer.

Production elements in Five by Tenn are especially strong. Set designer Ryan Scott has created a run-down, claustrophobic playing area, which nonetheless is versatile and roomy enough for each of the various plays, despite having the cast of *Thank You, Kind Spirit* stay onstage the entire time. Eric Larson's lighting and Roman Battaglia's sound design complement the set, creating the illusion of a run down apartment on a rainy night somewhere in the Vieux Carre.

While these five plays merely hint at the brilliance that was to come, any Tennessee Williams aficionado would do well to see *Five by Tenn*. Turtle Shell and Off the Leash are to be commended for bringing these diamonds in the rough to light.

Written by Tennessee Williams
Directed by John W. Cooper
Co-Produced by Jeremy Handelman

Stage Managed by TaShawn “Pope” Jackson
Dramaturge - Scott McCrea
Assistant Director - Patrick Mills
Scenic Designer - Ryan Scott
Lighting Designer - Eric Larson
Costume Designer - A. Christina Giannini
Sound Designer - Roman Battaglia
Dialect Coach - Karla Nielson

Featuring Emily Arrington (Little Girl), Kay Bailey (Bertha), Christie Booker (Lily), Susan Capra (Mrs. Yorke), Natalie E. Carter (Mother DuClos), Christina Christman (Lily/Girl), Jovanka Caires (Lena), Elizabeth Clark (Woman/Girl), Nina Covalesky (Woman), T. Michael Culhane (Youth), Barbara Ann Davison (Mrs. Wire), Leon Fallon (The Writer), Chris Ford (Man), Joyce Feurring (Woman in Rear), Daniel Kipler (Man), Grace Manzo (Little Girl), Sylvia Mincewicz (Second Young Woman), Trish Montoya (Middle-Aged Woman), Margaret O’Connor (Goldie), Vincent Oppecker (The Writer), Candice Palladino (First Young Woman), Lennard Sillevs (Young Man), Rebecca Street (Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore)

The Turtle’s Shell Theater (in the Times Square Arts Center)
300 W. 43rd Street

Through March 25th
Mon., Wed.-Sat.: 8 pm
Sun: 3 pm

Tickets: 212-868-4444 or <http://www.smartix.com>

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