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Next Up



ST. LOUIS BLUES
Menagerie's Schneider and Karpel aren't meant to be.

The Glass Menagerie



Steppenwolf Garage (see Resident companies). By Tennessee Williams. Dir. Laley Lippard. With Aaron Roman Weiner, Kathy Scambiaterra, Leah Karpel, Brett Schneider. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

William Boles's set design establishes the mood for the ubiquitous memory play. The wallpaper in the St. Louis apartment is shabby and peeling, the floor layered with stained, faded rugs; outside, factory windows surround the place like fortress walls—the prison

that Tom (Aaron Roman Weiner) longs to escape.

More than in any other *Menagerie* I've seen, Weiner gives the sense of the future narrator stepping back into his memories. Kathy Scambiaterra's Amanda is a frivolous Southern belle whose concern for shy daughter Laura is palpable. The appealing Leah Karpel makes Laura's damage more emotional than physical (no exaggerated limp here). Director Laley Lippard's best work comes in the scene between Laura and her gentleman caller (Brett Schneider, giving Jim an aw-shucks straightforwardness).

Life and Limb



Steppenwolf Garage (see Resident companies). By Keith Reddin. Dir. Emily Campbell. With ensemble cast. 1hr 40mins; one intermission.

A soldier headed off to the Korean War gets a tattoo of his young bride's name on his right arm. He returns from the war missing that limb, setting the tone for Keith Reddin's 1984 satire of American values and consumerism. Franklin (Jürgen Hooper) is determined to give Effie (Grace Rex) the American Dream, but he struggles to find work

and falls into depression. Effie, meanwhile, loses herself in the movies.

After his early scenes promise naturalism, Reddin veers into the surreal when Franklin takes a job working for a sociopathic prosthetic-limbs magnate (a manically upbeat Chris Froseth); later, the playwright takes us to a hell whose denizens knit pot holders and roam grocery stores. Director Emily Campbell keeps a steady hand on Reddin's wild variations in tone, while Hooper turns in a terrific, grounded performance as Franklin, who discovers how much he's willing to compromise for material pleasure.

South of Settling



Steppenwolf Garage (see Resident companies). By Emily Schwend. Dir. Adam Goldstein. With Janet Ulrich Brooks, Nicole Wiesner. 2hrs; one intermission.

Emily Schwend's new play is a rich portrait of the pursuit, if not the attainment, of happiness. In small-town Missouri, school-teacher Kate (Janet Ulrich Brooks) and her husband, Irwin (Keith Kupferer), prepare for a visit from Kate's semi-estranged cousin Amy (Nicole Wiesner) and her new husband,

Randall (Jeff Trainor), who's found a job in the area. Kate is suspicious of the much younger Randall, whom Amy married in a quickie Vegas wedding.

Brooks brings marvelous nuance to the buttoned-up Kate, determined to put up a front of perfect hospitality even as she barely hides her disdain for Randall and her resentment of Amy. Working on themes of loss and loyalty, Schwend skillfully reveals the family history in bits and pieces, building toward a confrontation between the two women that comes as a stunning blow; director Adam Goldstein smartly lets this moment linger. —Kris Vire

PHOTO: MICHAEL BROSSLOW