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Comfort and Faith Healing

by Susan Yung



Photo of Mark Dendy by Johan Elbers

Jane Comfort recently revived *Faith Healing*, a 1993 dance-theater retelling of Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*, at the [Joyce Soho](#) (closed). It's a bit of a departure from her recent work, which has tended to concern a topical issue, or a mash-up of several themes, told with dance, song, text, and visuals. (Although it is clear that "typical" is not a word that can be applied to Comfort on any level.) *Faith Healing* is intimate, quiet, at times thrilling, and stars the incomparable Mark Dendy in the lead role of Amanda.

Dendy originated the role, and is joined by the excellent Heather Christian as her daughter Laura, Sean Donovan as son Tom, and Matthew Hardy as the Gentleman Caller. (More ample evidence that Comfort's performers are consistently accomplished at dance, acting, and singing.) Rather than wearing a wig, Dendy simply poufs up his shortish hair and wears conservative dresses, pumps, and makeup, when he's not in a frumpy pink robe. Costume and makeup is fairly superfluous however, as he perfectly inhabits an old-fashioned, fading Southern belle, akin to Blanche Dubois. Amanda deploys her sugar-coated voice, her trippingly delicate movement, her absolute, overweening eagerness to please or to try to sweettalk those around her into doing her futile bidding.

Laura is crippled and thus considered by her mother to be unmarriageable. Tom is stuck in a boring job, supporting his family and also condemned to live at home. Movies are Tom's primary escape from the numbing grind of daily life. Comfort very effectively interweaves scenes from films in a sort of dream sequence device, including scenes from classics such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *Superman*—the latter including a thrilling "flying" sequence that is no more than Christian and Hardy lying on stools on their stomachs, tilting and dipping. It is enough to recall the film's lengthy greenscreen flight by Superman and Lois. Laura seeks refuge in her own dreamworld, symbolized by swaths of tulle that she wraps around herself, populated by her glass menagerie.

Resourcefulness is one of Comfort's great skills. Folding chairs are covered with saggy slipcovers become a loveseat and lounge. Glass animals are cobbled from plastic wrap. And Laura's perky pink and green number alternates between dowdy Sunday frock and a cover-up for her slinky dream dress of red sequins. Another strength is Comfort's ability to seamlessly shift into elegant, powerful dance phrases that underscore an emotion or narrative line. For another scene, Christian and Hardy don roller skates and quickly glide in circles around the stage, towing us in their wake.

