

Insight

The Sweet Pause of Memory

The musical you will see and hear tonight is a memory play. It is based on a short story called *A Christmas Memory* that first was published in *Mademoiselle* magazine in December 1956. *A Christmas Memory* is Truman Capote's look back at his childhood in Depression-era Alabama and the characters who most influenced him as a young writer.

Re-imagined as a musical, this production of *A Christmas Memory* draws upon a strong tradition of memory plays written for the stage, the most notable of which is Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, which premiered in 1944. Williams' play, like *A Christmas Memory*, also began as a short story narrated by a writer recalling his childhood during the Great Depression.

Memory plays hold endless fascination for us because they provide a captivating glimpse into the human psyche, allowing us to view events both past and present simultaneously through the lenses of our childhood as well as our adult selves. In *A Christmas Memory*, we come to know both Young Buddy and Adult Buddy, often on stage at the same time, thus we magically transcend the boundaries of time and place, where the innocent boy is also the nostalgic man.

Memory plays are particularly poignant this time of year, which likewise is suffused with memories captured in the tantalizing scents of home-cooked meals, the sounds of discarded giftwrap crunching under our slippers, and the sights of cousins tossing footballs or spinning dreidels while friends chat nearby, sipping peppermint hot chocolate in the glow of holiday candles. How easy it is during the holiday season for us to become reacquainted with our childhood selves!

A Christmas Memory also reminds us of life's grand challenges – losing a loved one, seeking to be understood, finding a place for ourselves in the world. Like Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote was a brilliant, sensitive and artistic soul, a gay man living in a world that wasn't ready to accept him for who he was. We know of Capote's lifelong struggle to be loved, thus we see it twice reflected in his alter ego Buddy. It's a hard pill to swallow, but as Anna reflects in the play, "Time runs one direction. All we can do is enjoy the ride." Except for today, here, now, at Christmas, when the clock seems to stop, and we get a chance to go back one more time.

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