Tom Haas
Artistic Director

Indiana Repertory Theatre

and The Acquisition and Restoration Corporation

present

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

by Tennessee Williams

Directed by Paul Moser

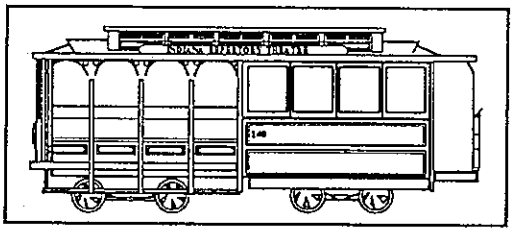
Costume Design
Connie Singer

Set Design
Bill Clarke

Lighting Design
Stuart Duke

Production Stage Manager
Joel Grynheim

Stage Manager
Augie Mericola



"They told me to take a streetcar named 'Desire' and then transfer to one called 'Cemeteries:' "

The Genesis of A Streetcar Named Desire

BY JANET ALLEN

Why do I resist writing about my plays? The truth is that my plays have been the most important element of my life for God knows how many years. But I feel the plays speak for themselves."

Thus wrote Tennessee Williams in his autobiography, titled simply *Memoirs*, published in 1972, eleven years before his death. The book itself reveals little about the actual creative process by which Williams composed his plays, and dwells instead primarily on his relationships and personal life. An examination of the interview material and even the published letters of Williams corroborate this view of a playwright remarkably reluctant, or perhaps unable, to talk about his work, likening it to a "bird that will be startled away as by a hawk's shadow."

Given this extreme reluctance to talk about his work, the effort to piece together a picture of how *A Streetcar Named Desire* developed is something like a jigsaw puzzle nightmare. One of the stories that Williams himself told of the genesis of the play places its first conception as early as 1944: "I saw somebody. . . . I saw Blanche sitting in a chair with the moonlight coming through a window on her. My first idea for the title was 'Blanche's Chair on the Moon.' But I only wrote one scene then. She was waiting for Mitch, and he wasn't showing up. That was as far as I got then: it was December of 1944. I felt *Streetcar* so intensely that it terrified me. I couldn't work for several months I was so terrified. I said, 'I can't cope with it; I can't carry it off.' I didn't go back to it until 1947, when I was in New Orleans, after I had written *Summer and Smoke*. Then I went back to it, and it wrote itself, just like that. I finished it in Key West in the La Concha Hotel. It took me by storm. Blanche was so dynamic, she possessed me."

Another story adds some valuable dimension to the fermenting process which seems to have taken place on this "terrifying" idea between 1944 and 1947 when the play was actually written. In the summer of 1945 Williams retreated to Mexico, in part to recover from a cataract operation, and in part to escape the celebrity status he had achieved practically overnight when *The Glass Menagerie* opened. Not one to find much comfort in success, Williams, now a celebrated 34-year-old playwright, took a portable typewriter and settled at Lake Chapala on the first disposable income he had ever had in his life. Here he began reminiscing about a number of things, including his days in New Orleans as a waiter in the French Quarter. "I lived near the main street of the Quarter. Down this street, running on the same tracks, are two streetcars, one named 'Desire,' and the other named 'Cemeteries.' Their indiscourageable progress up and down Royal Street struck me as having some symbolic bearing of a broad nature on the life in the Vieux Carre—and everywhere else, for that matter." In fact, the play that was to come of the image of these two streetcars is a study of the collision between them, a crash between desire and death.

His extended visit to Mexico seems to have released a flood of memories, not only of the iniquities of his own life, but of his family. These thoughts manifested themselves in autobiographical poetry:

And he remembered the death of his grandmother . . .

In childhood's spectrum of violence, she remained pale . . .

My sister vanished completely—

for love's explosion, defined as early madness,

consumingly shone in her transparent heart for a season

and burned it out, a tissue-paper lantern.

This fragment shares many images with the idea for the play that had so frightened him. The combined effect of the New Orleans setting, the

"Every artist has a basic premise pervading his whole life, and that premise can provide the impulse to everything he creates. For me the dominating premise has been the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstances." ***Tennessee Williams***

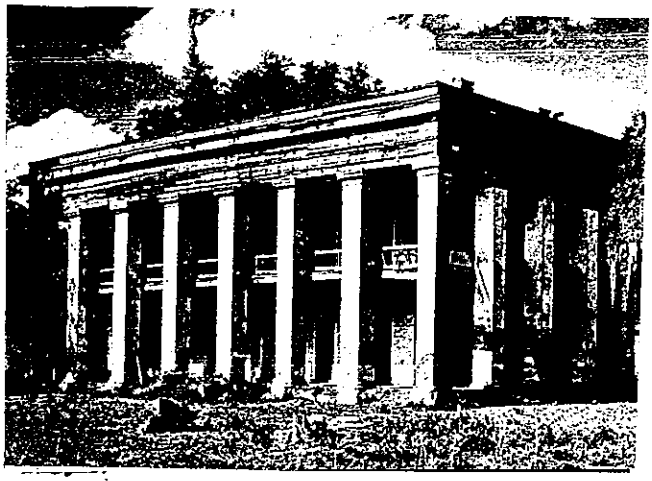
mental picture of Blanche by the window, the recollections of family and the drive for physical satisfaction that was never far from Williams' conscious life took on a fusion of sensuality, nostalgia and violence that was new to his writing. The first indication of this violence was in scenes involving men at a poker table written in Mexico but soon abandoned when no suitable narrative line developed.

Two common threads of Williams' work are apparent in these stories of the genesis of *Streetcar*: first, his habit of beginning work on a play from a central scene or image, and second, the personal identification he felt with his characters.

Occasionally, the identification extends to the level of explicit autobiography, as in *The Glass Menagerie*, where the narrator and central character of the play, named Tom, is admittedly Williams himself, and the domineering mother and painfully shy sister are Williams' own mother and sister. More often though, the level of identification was an implicitly emotional one. "I draw all my characters from myself," Williams once said. "I can't draw a character unless I know it within myself. If I'm not Blanche, I was Blanche when I was writing Blanche. I had to be her, at the time I was writing her to understand her."

Tennessee Williams on the Broadway set of *A Streetcar Named Desire*

One of Williams' early literary mentors strongly supported the use of personal history as direct literary material: Hart Crane, the American poet who had written rather explicitly



The French Quarter of New Orleans, which provides the colorful background for *A Streetcar Named Desire,* was one of Williams' life-long haunts. He explored the city from the shacks along the river to the lovely homes and fountains in the Garden District, but he remained fondest of the old French sector, the Vieux Carre, that has become synonymous with the birth of the blues, the consumption of catfish and bourbon, the wrought iron decoration and shutters, and the death of virtually every social and sexual taboo. Williams once wrote: "I found there the kind of freedom I had always needed, and the shock of it, against the Puritanism of my nature, has given me a subject, a theme, which I have never ceased exploring."

about homosexual love in the 1920's and 30's before committing suicide in 1936, had provided young Williams with a tragic role model. Most fascinating was Crane's celebration of literary concepts from the Romantic era—of employing one's own personal history as a "useable past." It was this aesthetic, this insistence on transmuting the raw material of one's own life into the stuff of poetry and drama, that had stung Williams as perhaps the single greatest challenge to a writer. A fragment of Crane's poem "The Broken Tower" appears as the epigraph to the published editions of *A Streetcar Named Desire:*

And so it was I entered the broken world

To trace the visionary company of love, its voice

An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)

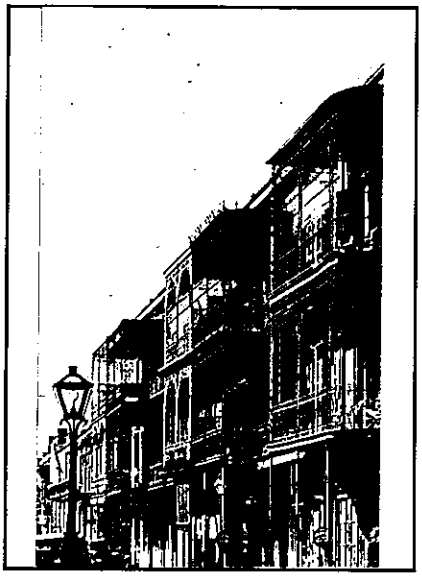
But not for long to hold each desperate voice.

The "I" of the poem could as easily be Blanche as Williams himself.

Elia Kazan, the Broadway and film director of *Streetcar* and many other subsequent Williams productions, takes Williams' sense of identification with Blanche a step further: "Blanche DuBois, the woman *is* Williams. Blanche comes into a house where someone is going to murder her. The interesting part of it is that Blanche DuBois/Williams is *attracted* to the person who's going to murder her. . . . I saw Blanche as Williams, an ambivalent figure who is attracted to the harshness and vulgarity around him at the same time that he fears it, because it threatens his life."

The threat of death lingers around every corner in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in image and reality. During the autumn and winter of 1947, when the bulk of the composition of *Streetcar* took place, Williams was convinced that he was dying, at age 36, of pancreatic cancer. He determined to devote the last of his energies to completing this play. "I wrote furiously on it," reported Williams from the safe remove of 25 years, "For despite the fact that I thought I was dying, or maybe because of it, I had a great passion for work." He took an apartment in New Orleans where he settled down to serious work, and where it was equally possible to pursue seriously a life of the senses, which he did with some abandon, as his intuition told him that his own death was imminent.

Biographer Donald Spoto charts an enlightened connection between



Williams' struggles with death and the manifestations of some of those struggles in *A Streetcar Named Desire:*

He was himself convinced that the clash of desires in him was leading him to a literal death; and although time was to prove him wrong, there was a deeper awareness that with unchecked desires something always dies. He was, he felt in 1946 and 1947, Blanche herself—at the end of the line; and death, and maybe Elysian Fields, lay ahead. This inevitability, he felt, was due to the free play that desire

"I write out of love for the South . . . It once had a way of life that I am just old enough to remember—a culture that had grace. I write out of regret for that . . . I write about the South because I think the war between romanticism and the hostility to it is very sharp there."
Tennessee Williams

had had, up to this time, in his life.

After all the critical and scholarly appreciations have been set down, we are left with the fact that Tennessee Williams brought from himself a play he was convinced was to be his last—that he would never have the energy for another long play—a work whose conflict (of desire and sensitivity against brutality)he associated with death. In his creative struggles with himself and in his domestic struggles [with various long-term relationships], in his desire for security and in his inclination for multiple partners, he met both the protective and the destructive Stanley, and the gentle, needy, spiritual but manipulative sensualist Blanche. And he was convinced that death was the term of his struggle. . . .

Viewers and readers of the play sense that A Streetcar Named Desire dramatizes the eternal clash within everyone. Williams knew it most deeply in himself . . . he was always almost broken by it. In the play that many still consider his masterpiece, he revealed not what all life is like but what all life is in constant danger of becoming—a willing ritual sacrifice of humanity at its gentlest to the fierce demands of carnality. An empty immolation, it leads only to death, or to madness.

Ten years after the success of *Streetcar*, Williams told a reporter: "Streetcar said everything I had to say. It has an epic quality that the others don't have." •

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Tennessee Williams

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Lanier Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi on March 26, 1911. "I changed my name to Tennessee," he once said, "because the Williamses had fought the Indians for Tennessee, and I had discovered that the life of a young writer was going to be similar to the defense of a stockade against a band of savages."

His mother, repressed and genteel, was the daughter of an Episcopalian clergyman; his father, a traveling salesman, was aggressive and violent at home. When Tom was seven, the family moved to St. Louis, where his father became sales manager of a shoe company. Tom was sickly and overprotected by his mother. He sought refuge at the movies or in telling stories to himself; at the age of fourteen he won a prize in a national writing contest, and at seventeen published a gothic story in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. He began studies at the University of Missouri, but left after two years. His father then found him a job in the warehouse of a shoe factory, where he worked for three years, writing at night. This "living death," as he called it, ended in a nervous breakdown. Meanwhile, his beloved sister Rose, who had been suffering from increasing mental imbalance, underwent a prefrontal lobotomy. She has spent most of her life since in sanatoriums.

In 1938, Williams left for New Orleans, the first of many temporary homes. The next seven years were to be lean ones, in which he supported himself on odd jobs in the French Quarter and elsewhere, and grants secured by his agent and mentor, Audrey Wood.

Williams had had plays produced at college and community theatres, and in 1939 he won a Group Theatre prize for a collection of one-act plays. The next year, *Battle of Angels* was produced in Boston, but failed. It would later be rewritten as *Orpheus Descending*, a process which led Williams throughout his career to write and rewrite (and often retitle) twenty full-length dramas, as well as films and shorter works of fiction and drama. He also began at this time several life-long habits for which he was to become infamous: working every day for several hours in the early morning, treating his hypochondria with the consumption of drugs and alcohol, and leading an active, and often publicized homosexual lifestyle.

Williams' first success was a massive one: *The Glass Menagerie* opened on Broadway in 1945 and, based on an unsuccessful screenplay he had been working on in Hollywood, launched Williams' career in meteoric fashion. The play is clearly autobiographical and is called by Williams a "memory play," which suggests something of the non-realistic, imagistic style which Williams and Arthur Miller were to pioneer.

Williams quickly learned that success was in many ways harder to live with than failure and retreated to Mexico where he continued to work on a play then titled *The Poker Night*, which gradually evolved into *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Opening on Broadway in 1947 with Marlon Brando, Jessica Tandy, Karl Malden and Kim Hunter, it won the Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Walter Kerr heralded it as the "finest single work yet created for the American theatre."

For more than a decade thereafter, Williams met this challenge successfully; a new Williams play appeared almost every two years: *Camino Real, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (for which he won his second Pulitzer), *The Rose Tattoo, Summer and Smoke, The Night of the Iguana, Sweet Bird of Youth* and *Suddenly Last Summer*. While not all of these plays were commercial successes, the upward tide did not turn for Williams until the mid-1960's when the pressures of success and his drug-dependent lifestyle resulted in a lengthy sanatorium stay. In the following decade, Williams suffered through continual poor health and critical accusations that his work had grown tiresome and repetitive. He continued to write, but of the 10 new plays produced between 1966 and his death in 1983, only *Small Craft Warnings* (1972) ran for more than a few performances.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

By the late 1970's the hostility of the critics abated, and Williams began to be seen as one of America's most important playwrights. Revivals of his most successful work from the 1940's and 1950's became innumerable. He died on February 25, 1983 by choking on a medicine bottle cap, in what was probably a suicide attempt. At the time he was working on a film treatment of two early stories about his sister. •

An old house near Lee Circle in New Orleans, La.

The French Quarter, New Orleans, La.

Small Houses, Vieux Carre', New Orleans, La. photograph by G.E. Kidder Smith

"STREETCAR'S" UNIQUE SETTING NEW ORLEANS: THE VIEUX CARRE'

"The fetid old swamp we live in, the Vieux Carre'! Every imaginable kind of degeneracy springs up here, not at arm's length, even, but right in our presence!" Line from Tennessee Williams' play, AUTO-DA-FE'.

Founded in 1718 as a trading center for New France, New Orleans has been called both "America's Paris" and "America's Most Interesting City." Originally constructed within the bounds of eight rectilinear blocks by order of the French Governor, Bienville, New Orleans is truly a Vieux Carre' or "old square."

It is within this beautiful decadent city of diversity that Tennessee Williams set his masterpiece, A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE. Richard Leavitt, editor of the book, The World of Tennessee Williams, writes: "New Orleans fascinated Williams. He explored the city from shacks along the river to the lovely homes and fountains in the Garden District. He liked it more than anything he'd seen in Europe. . . . In 1938, the Vieux Carre' became his spiritual home."

The following edited excerpt is from columnist John Lester's book I'll Take New Orleans. Written in 1948, it offers a native's upbeat view of the city Williams loved at around the time A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE was first produced.

The things I like about New Orleans are myriad . . .
I like the small-town warmth of its big-town atmosphere . . .
The way it makes you feel at home . . .
The intense fire under the easy cordiality of New Orleans people, a fire that blazes at the drop of an issue . . .
The way New Orleans turns her own special shade of green after rain . . .
Jackson Square

I like the shining crystal goblets at Corinne Dunbar's. . .
The way Bourbon St. barkers say: "Showtime, boys," with that wink in their voice . . .
Those, cool, green mugs of bitter, brown beer in Kolb's . . .
The smell of magnolias on a warm summer night that somehow seems to be the South's own smell . . .
The grand homes . . .
The chimney-sweeps.

•

I like Count Arnaud's voice, ripe, rich and rounded . . .
The characters, like that lady who named all her chickens after saints . . .
The characters like that bell-hop, whose manners were wonderful, whose grammar was atrocious, who was descended from four of the most prominent families of the old South . . .
French bread.

•

I like the old, old families, deep-rooted in a colorful, glamorous, red-blooded past, and the applaudable loyalty they have for a culture that has been but gone . . .
The way New Orleans people say: "Real darlin' " . . .
The way they say: "Let me go, now" . . .
Pop concerts . . .
Comical Cajunese . . .
Musical Creole French . . .
Implements of the dark art of voodoo, on display in the windows of completely bourgeois drugstores.

•

I like New Orleans' classic names, French, Spanish, Italian . . .
The tree-lined stretches of St. Charles Ave. . . .
The way life is geared so slower.

•

I like the autographed coconut you can get from a Zulu King if you know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody . . .
The strange attraction the Mississippi has for Orleanians who are constantly "going down to it" . . .
The smell of cedar shavings on Royal St. . . .
The smell of crushed camphor leaves in your hands. . .
A Roma sandwich at dusk.
Montalbano's candles throwing thin little fingers of shadow against a big back-drop of bread.

•

I like those Creole beds with their intricate "sunbursts" on top, a losing Creole art . . .
The funny way absinthe has of starting out almost brownish and turning a light, murky green as it's dripped . . .
The shaggy-dog expression of Vince Provenzano, the French Quarter's ugliest copper . . .
Oysters Rockefeller . . .
Shrimp . . .
Crepe suzettes, warmed in a blue flame under dim lights . . .
Pralines . . .
The odd expressions,
like that father's reproof of his child:
"Go by your mother or get the hell home".

•

I like the memories of New Orleans' fabulously checkered past, with its saints that were sinners and sinners that were saints . . .
The museum-like atmosphere of the French Quarter, with its iron lace-work, its balconies . . .
The batture-dwellers who escape at least one of life's two unescapables, taxes. Death no; taxes, yes.

•

I like New Orleans' impoverished rich people, its unpopular popular people . . .
The French Market . . .
The poor-boy sandwiches piled high with tomatoes, lettuce, pickles, meat . . .
Cafe au lait . . .
The marvelous, marble-like designs in spumoni.

•

I like the city's ghosts . . .
The Octoroon girl who walks naked in the moonlight on that Royal and St. Ann mansion rooftop . . .
The mad dentist who haunts St. Peter.

•

I like New Orleans because its a land of dreams . . .
Because it has a subtle, quiet greatness, a beautiful calm like that of one who has
lived and
loved and
laughed and
learned and
yearned and
cried . . .

•

I like it because New Orleans is to America what America is to the world.

•

It's a melting pot melted down.

•

It's a composite of a composite.

•

It's different.

Picture courtesy of the New Orleans Power and Light Co., Inc.

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
A brief synopsis.

Stanley Kowalski, an earthy young brute, lives with his wife, Stella, in a seedy section of New Orleans. An unexpected house guest arrives; she is Blanche Du Bois, Stella's older sister, a faded Southern Belle with pathetic delusions of grandeur. Stanley and Blanche hate each other on sight.

The Kowalski household soon explodes. Stanley breaks open Blanche's trunk and strews her tattered finery around the room, and accuses her of financial trickery of her disposal of the old family plantation, Belle Reve.

Mitch, a poker-playing crony of Stanley's, is attracted to Blanche, and she dares to dream of marrying him. She tells him about the horror of her first marriage, at sixteen, to a homosexual who shot himself after Blanche found him with an older man. Mitch is sympathetic, but all of his sympathy vanishes after Stanley tells him a few sordid truths about Blanche's recent past - before coming to New Orleans, had been living at the notorious Flamingo Hotel, after losing both her plantation and her teaching job.

Mitch cruelly rejects Blanche, in a scene in which he thrusts her aging face under the glare of a naked light bulb. Deranged, Blanche dresses up in an old white satin gown and a rhinestone tiara, and finds herself alone in the house with Stanley; Stella is in the hospital, having a baby. Blanche talks wildly of a Caribbean cruise that she plans to go on with an old admirer. Stanley mocks her, then attacks her.

In the play's final scene, Stella is home from the hospital with her baby, not daring to believe Blanche's story, but desperate to get her sister out of the house as quickly as possible. A doctor and a matron appear to take Blanche away to an asylum, and Blanche goes with them quietly, almost timidly, remarking as she leaves that she "has always been dependent on the kindness of strangers." Stanley is comforting Stella as the curtain falls.

Notes from the Director

C. J. Jung states in his *Transformation of Symbols* that "one might describe the theatre, somewhat unaesthetically, as an institution for working out private complexes in public." Certainly this is an apt description for the plays of Tennessee Williams, a playwright notorious for openly and self-consciously making his sexual "problem" the central theme of much of his work. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, however, goes beyond exploring personal neuroses and attempts to reveal a universal problem at the core of the human condition. To the extent that he succeeds, we might also observe that great drama is a working out of complexes that we all share as a society.

The universal problem presented by Streetcar can be seen clearly in the contrasting statements of Stella and Blanche:

Stella: But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem unimportant.

Blanche: God! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella—my sister—there has been *some* progress since then! Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make *grow*! And *cling* to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . *Don't—don't hang back with the brutes!*

It would be a fundamental mistake in interpretation to see the above speech as dialectical social commentary; rather, when taken in context, Williams does not mean to come down on one side or the other. The two views have to be considered as opposing yet balancing tendencies which we all embrace. It is this duality, this struggle of passions between spirit and flesh, which Williams places at the heart of human experience.

A compelling exegesis of this conflict can be borrowed from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in which he describes two opposing creative principles within human nature: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. In Greek mythology, Apollo was the God of Light, the visual arts, poetry and dreams; Dionysus was the God of Drunkenness, bestiality, music and sexuality. Nietzsche traces the evolution of culture through the tensions between these two opposing forces: the effete Apollonian applying restraint and order to the fertile, yet destructive, Dionysian. Its literary allusions to classical mythology make *Streetcar* prime for a comparative analysis—Blanche becomes the Apollonian, Stanley the Dionysian.

In addition to classical motifs, Williams' theme takes on many forms in a ceaseless kaleidoscope of images and symbols which alternately veil and expose glimpses of a deeper truth. This writing style mimics the image-making processes of the psyche. Williams explains something of this approach in the foreword to his play *Camino Real:*

I can't deny that I use a lot of those things called symbols but being a self-defensive creature, I say that symbols are nothing but the natural speech of drama.

We all have in our conscious and unconscious minds a great vocabulary of images, and I think all human communication is based on these images as are our dreams; and a symbol in a play has only one legitimate purpose which is to say a thing more directly and simply and beautifully than it can be said in words.

Williams employs this technique of layering symbols and images in *Streetcar* in a manner that transcends realism; the characters take on a resonance which borders on expressionism.

One dream image that I find particularly illuminating is that of Blanche as a moth attracted to a flame. This attraction has two sides—much like the Apollonian/Dionysian duality—the flame "is the power which beautifies everything, but, in a different set of circumstances, is quite as likely to destroy everything." In this interpretation, the passion for spirit and flesh are one and the same energy. Jung used the following poem titled "The Moth to the Sun" to encapsule the worshipful yearning felt for the agent of destruction.

I longed for thee when first I crawled to consciousness.
My dreams were all of thee when in the chrysalis I lay.
Oft myriads of my kind beat out their lives
Against some feeble spark once caught from thee.
And one hour more--and my poor life is gone;
Yet my last effort, as my first desire, shall be
But to approach thy glory; then, having gained
One raptured glance, I'll die content,
For I, the source of beauty, warmth, and life
Have in his perfect splendor once beheld!

It is this universal predicament which Williams presents to us. The cry of humanity caught between dreams and reality, light and darkness, death and desire.

Paul Moser

Stella, Blanche, Stanley and Mitch . . .

. . . Four of the most powerfully written characters in American drama. Tennessee Williams brought them together inside one small, hot, volatile space in the dead of a New Orleans summer.

Director Paul Moser brings four formidable acting talents together in the dead of an Indianapolis winter to bring to life the psychologically-stirring moments in a play that "no one comes to with a clean slate," in the words of the actress playing Stella, Susan Wands.

During the first week of rehearsal, the four — Ann Sara Matthews (Blanche DuBois), Burke Moses (Stanley Kowalski), Ben Lemon (Harold Mitchell, "Mitch") and Wands — talked to the *Marquee* about where they are as they approach what is often considered to be the best of all American plays.

From an 'out of body experience' to the role of Blanche Dubois

She's been offered the part before, but Ann Sara Matthews hasn't felt ready to play Blanche DuBois until now.

"This is a pivotal role for me," she says. "The show is so important emotionally that I wanted everything to come together in the right place before I said yes."

What's right now? First, she says, the IRT's reputation is a good one. Second, she has learned some important theatrical lessons in recent, challenging roles. Finally, she trusts director Moser — an important factor in the face of a difficult role.

"When I heard those first lines on the first day of rehearsal, it was like a huge granite wall going up," Matthews says. "I have a great height to scale in taking on this role."

It's a role that has haunted her since childhood. One that she seems almost destined to play. For her first "theatrical experience" — at the age of twelve — she attended a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* mounted in San Francisco, not far from the small town where she grew up.

"I remember, at the end of the play, feeling like I had an out-of-body experience" she said. "I felt as if I was Stella bending over Blanche."

With her slight figure and youthful face, she can be convincing as a child or a mature woman. She played the youngster Estella in a national tour of *Great Expectations* with the Guthrie Theater last year and carried the character from a romping nine-year-old through adulthood. Matthews considers this task one of the most educational in her career.

Her face is vastly expressive, a tool that should serve her well playing a gracious southern belle on the brink of despair. Even outside the rehearsal room in an informal interview, her face slips quickly from laughing, to careful thoughtfulness, even to madness as she demonstrates the technique she used recently to play a mentally ill woman for a television pilot.

Matthews feels young for the role. "I understand now why directors generally have chosen older women for the part of Blanche: First, it's difficult to convince audiences in the 1980's that a woman in her late 20's or early 30's would worry that much about being unmarried. But more importantly, I'm convinced now that it takes 20 years of experience to do it well."

She's short of that by a few years, but laughs and assures herself that "that's where the good director comes in."

Cutting a self-made path to Stanley Kowalski

Burke Moses' acting career started on a whim while waiting tables in Boston, trying to decide on a college major. A few short years later, he is in Indianapolis getting ready to play one of the most sensational leading roles in American drama.

Back in Boston, bored with college, he heard about a casting call for the popular film *Endless Love*. He didn't get the part, but he did get an invitation to audition in New York for the Broadway revival of West Side Story. He didn't get that part either. But, "As I walked into Times Square — even after the audition where my voice cracked on the high 'A' — I said, Hey, this is where I want to be."

Moses has earned his "triple threat" reputation (he sings, he dances, he acts) through such matter-of-fact determination. For example: dancing. He had never had a lesson in his life. At 21 he started; by 25 he was dance captain for a national tour of *Showboat*.

One might actually call Moses a "quadruple threat;" he is a strong television actor as well. He recently completed a nine-month tenure playing Curtis on *Loving*.

He's quite happy to get back to the stage with *Streetcar*. Television acting, for him, is nothing like acting for the stage. And he doesn't want to forget what it's all about. "An actor coming back to the stage from television work might be a bit like a singer starting to vocalize again after a long time; you start to sing and you wonder if your voice is going to be there."

Moses smiles unflinchingly at the thought of playing the role that catapulted Marlon Brando to fame. He's seen the movie five times, but "I'm thankful I haven't seen it lately," he said. "It would be more difficult to make my own choices that way."

Nevertheless, he says, it is inevitable that some of his acting choices will be the same as Brando's."

"When a play is written this well with a character like Stanley, no matter who plays the part, a lot of the choices I make will be the same as the ones Brando made."

It's clear he's cutting his own path. He's already spent a month looking and listening for bits of Stanley in the people he meets and sees; he found a script with Vivian Leigh as Blanche on the cover. Everyone else's scripts picture Marlon Brando. He doesn't want to focus on Brando; he wants to focus on the role.

Moses' most important tool for shaping his own Stanley is himself. With

his more open, sparkling good looks, Moses will provide a fresh departure from Brando's brooding, simmering Stanley.

Uncovering the layers in the traditional Stella

Susan Wands hasn't always liked Tennessee Williams.

"I thought all his women were weak and his men macho," she says.

As a double major in women's studies and theatre at the University of Washington, she learned to approach literature from such a perspective.

But after five years of professional acting, she now appreciates Williams' work for its emotional intensity and its many-layered characters. In fact, she considers *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* two of the best American plays of all time.

"These are intense works," she says. "*Streetcar* is about the destruction of all our ideals as these four characters lives collide."

As she has gotten to know Stella, her character, she has uncovered many layers.

"Stella is a server confused about whom she should serve — her sister Blanche, or her husband Stanley," she says. "She has a lot of guilt about having left her family and Blanche with the failing estate, but at the same time she has this incredibly sensual, nurturing relationship with her husband."

It is that relationship, Wands believes, that, although it does not fit Stella's genteel upbringing, saves Stella from the creeping insanity that stalks Blanche.

Wand's first Tennessee Williams role follows a period in her career that included both the pragmatic work and the artistic highs of an actor's schedule.

She worked nine months in the soap opera *Loving*: "It was good work, and I made some wonderful friends," but it is roles like Marguerite Gautier in *Camille* at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville that are the most satisfying.

She is also a writer. Two of her adaptations of Jane Austen works have been produced, one at Seattle's Cornish Institute and the other at the Hartley House in New York.

Stella, strangely enough, is her eighth role as a pregnant woman. "I guess I just have that fertile, motherly look," she laughs.

Tennessee Williams and the heightened reality of the stage

Stage actors have the unique opportunity to be in a room with hundreds of other people—and to bring those people to the same place emotionally—says Ben Lemon, IRT's Mitch.

"You get to the place where you know that if you say those eight lines just the right way, the whole place is going to breathe and think and feel together," he adds.

As Mitch, Lemon will have very few lines with which to achieve those moments. The character is less forthcoming than a Stanley Kowalski; his actions are ambiguous.

"What's most important about Mitch is what he doesn't say. I will have to project the character from between the lines," Lemon said.

In Lemon's estimation, Mitch lives and works with men who don't care much for traditional values, yet he doesn't live from poker game to poker game as they do. For instance, he struggles between wanting to care for his sick mother and wanting to be free from the responsibility.

For Lemon, being able to land a role in a Williams play is "why I'm not a dentist." Being a writer himself, Lemon particularly savors Williams's poetic language. Unlike many contemporary playwrights whose words "are something we could hear at home, or on the streets," Williams "writes words that are a little elevated; he captures the heightened reality that stage work should be all about."

It's the kind of heightened reality he wishes television could achieve more often. He has worked often in television; he has even played the lead in a CBS Pilot Film called *Jake's Wake*. "On television, you are what you are. There is very little transformation on that medium anymore."

Lemon would like to write more works for the stage, although he believes he needs more "seasoning" first. He has already won the Shubert Foundation Award for Playwriting for his original script, *You Can't Hear the Sea (Iin the City)*. As the son of a *People Magazine* editor, words developed an early importance.

"Words were my father's life," he said. "We played a lot of word games, because those were the only ones he was guaranteed of winning."