

By Jim Lowe

TIMES ARGUS ARTS EDITOR
BURLINGTON

Tennessee Williams' dramas explore the intense passions and frustrations of a disturbed and frequently brutal society, and nowhere is this more evident than in "A Streetcar Named Desire." More than that, the 1947 drama is so psychologically accurate, it frequently has audience members at the edges of their seats.

Vermont Stage's production, which opened this week at the Flynn Center's new small theater, FlynnSpace, takes full advantage of the work's emotional power by creating an intense intimacy with its audience.

"A Streetcar Named Desire," made even more famous by the '50s movie starring Marlon Brando, is one of Williams' efforts portraying hypersensitive and lonely Southern women who, while clutching to life, live in memories of a past that no longer exists. Blanche DuBois is making her last desperate attempt at avoiding the squalor of her real life by returning to her genteel past. Suggesting that she is traveling for the summer, she arrives at her sister's home in the poor New Orleans Latin Quarter.

Blanche's sister Stella has married a Polish-American, Stanley Kowalski, brutal and

(Continued)

attraction to her husband, making her a most attractive character.

The supporting cast was largely fine, too. John Alexander made Mitch, Blanche's suitor, suitably naïve at the beginning,

sexy. From the beginning, Blanche decries Stella's primitive life in "poverty" and with an "ape" of a man, igniting the fuse in Blanche and Stanley's battle of brutal sexuality. Gradually, Stanley and Stella realize that Blanche's gentility covers up a tawdry past of misery, loneliness and desperation, and Stanley is more than happy to even the score by exposing her.

A Streetcar Named Desire

Remaining performances of Vermont Stage's professional production of Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" run through March 24 at the Flynn Center's FlynnSpace, 153 Main St., Burlington. Curtain is at 8 p.m. tonight, Saturday, and Wednesday-Saturday, March 18-24, and 2 p.m. on March 18, 24, and/25. Tickets are \$23; call 863-5966 TTD/TTY.

Blanche's destiny is sealed when, while Stella is at the hospital, Stanley confronts Blanche in one of the ugliest and most poignant scenes in American theater.

Vermont Stage's production, directed by Artistic Director Mark Nash, revels in

becoming effectively hurt and angry when confronted by the truth. Tawnya Fogg and Pavel Wonsowicz were believable and entertaining as the feuding neighbors Eunice and Steve Hubbell.

The production is attractive-

this psychological and sexual battle with a particularly fine cast. Done "in-the-round," with the audience on all four sides of the stage, the action, despite some awkward moments, was virtually in the audience's lap, creating intimacy and adding to the intensity.

At Thursday's performance, Dee Pelletier as Blanche DuBois and Jack Newman as Stanley Kowalski made a particularly effective and contentious pair, with Kathryn Blume as Stella countering with warmth and reality. What made the portrayals most effective was their naturalness of characterization and interaction.

There were, however, moments of lagging interest, and some clumsy blocking. Particularly, the final scene lost some of its effectiveness with its clumsiness; fortunately, the scene is anticlimactic.

Pelletier's Blanche began as sultry and confident, but then started cracking in a way that invited disgust as well as sympathy. Newman's Stanley was clearly macho and brutal, yet his insecurities festered throughout, revealing themselves in tender moments with Stella, making him understandable and somewhat sympathetic. Blume's Stella realistically faced her love for her sister and her intense sexual

ly done, with set by Jeff Modereger, costumes by Melonie Bushey, lighting and design by Mike Lounsbury, and music by Arthur Blume. This is a particularly effective production of some very powerful theater.