

ARTS

From the Aisle Seat

By Dan Wolfe

The black box at the Flynn Center for the Arts - FlynnSpace - has had sightline problems for some of its productions. Vermont Stage Company, who, as one of the current regular users of this space has had occasion to bring plays here such as its fine production of *Midwives* and a music and literature evening with Ethan Bowen have dealt reasonably well with this problem. I was, however, concerned about *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams' perennial play going into this space.

So it was with a great sense of relief that I saw the setting. Less, as we all sometimes remember, is decidedly more. Scaling back a set does not scale back the heart of a play, nor need it impinge on our feelings toward the characters as they descend into the abyss of lies and half-truths. Jeff Modereger and Mark Nash are to be congratulated on calming at least this reviewer's fears on that score. Run out of her own town, dismissed from her job at a local high school, and having finally in one way or another caused the sale of Belle Rive, the plantation that their family owned,

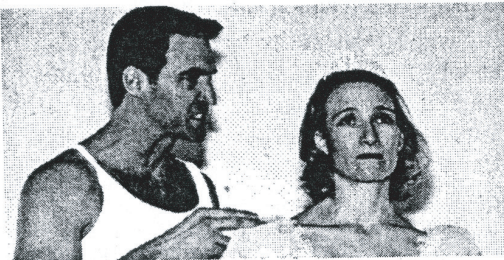
Blanche comes penniless to find her sister Stella (Kathryn Blume) and Stella's husband Stanley (Jack Newman) in New Orleans and to mooch off them.

Stanley is decidedly to Stella's liking, a trade-up in some areas while decidedly a trade down socially, a fact that Blanche cannot quite accept. The fencing between Blanche and Stanley is decidedly sexual, but clouded by Blanche's having run through funds half of which should have been Stanley's under the Napoleonic Code, a fact that gives him at least the satisfaction of using the services of at least one of his many "...friends, who ..." checks into Blanche's story.

As to the actors who peopled these sets and this story, guest artist Dee Pelletier (Blanche) had a marvelously low voice that dripped with Spanish moss and sexual desire. Her Blanche is alcoholic, addled, sexually on the prowl,

but still playing the Southern belle. The one person whom she could land, Mitch, a poker-playing friend of Stanley's (John Alexander), is finally rendered unreachable when Stanley spills the beans about Blanche. As Mitch, Alexander gave a totally credible performance, including his final breakdown. (Some people prefer illusion, always.)

Newman had the hardest possible job: recreating a role that is indelibly written onto the subconscious of every person over a certain age who saw Brando, but there are other ways to strengthen a characterization than memory: Newman



Stanley (Jack Newman) and Blanche (Dee Pelletier) in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

brought a less superficially cordial edge to Stanley, a coldness that only Stella can warm. There was nothing emotionally graceful about his Stanley - he's built, all right, but he's totally impatient of Blanche and her pretenses, so much so that he doesn't preen around her, doesn't want any part of her past life. When he rapes her, it is an act of revenge, a thing of violence and darkness that pays Blanche back for the money and the disruption.

As Stella, Kathryn Blume brings the

softness to the role, but physically misses the athletic body that has done so much combat with Stanley night after night. Whatever else Stanley doesn't want to lose in Stella is that assertion of equality in bed, which is almost there. Tawnya Fogg Eunice) is just the right offset for both Stella and Blanche, a true denizen of the area where they live, able to accept her husband's admitted infidelity because she becomes stronger through it. That she has to comfort Stella in the end and be Stella's strength to enable her to deny Blanche's accusation is only fit. She's the only one on stage that is emotionally strong enough to do so.

Pavel Wonsovicz, James Blanchard, Josh Egan, Kelly Thomas and Walt Levring all showed conviction in their roles.

The production worked under Nash's direction, particularly in that he made us forget the four posts as the drama moved along.

The production runs this weekend, tonight through a Sunday matinee.

The production of *Mefistofele* has a final performance this Saturday at Place des Arts in Montreal ... Next week Centaur Theatre opens their production of *Oliver!* on Thursday evening. ... and Opera North announced their two operas in August will be *Don Giovanni* and *Carmen*. ... and don't miss *Aida* at the Flynn Center next Friday, March 30.

See you at the theater.