

# ORT's 'Streetcar' worth catching

By Jonathan Siegle  
Of the Emerald

Oregon Repertory Theatre's production of Tennessee Williams' emotional "Streetcar Named Desire," directed by David Lunney, is what regional theater should be. It is tight, competent, and thoroughly professional.

Lunney's staging is clean and direct. He places his actors in a simple, effective, representative set, tells them who they are, and lets them carry the show. And they do. The acting is outstanding.

"Streetcar" takes place in the hot, muggy New Orleans summer. It is the story of two sisters, Blanche and Stella, and Stella's husband Stanley Kowalski. The women are the end of a line of Southern aristocracy. The family plantation has been lost, and Blanche moves into Stella's two-room apartment.

Blanche lives in a fantasy world of manners, of ladies and gentlemen, wealthy beautiful people, lost loves, and unhappy memories. Stella lives a happy life on the rough edge of society with Stanley, who readily admits he's a dumb polack.

Every actor keeps a trunk full of parts to dream of doing. "Streetcar" is an ensemble of

such parts. Each of the leads uses well his or her opportunity to play this goody from the trunk. They are both strong and deep.

Elizabeth Remini is Blanche. She is girlishly flirtatious with poor Mitch, the gentlemanly mama's boy who comes courtin' her. She is coolly, ruthlessly sexual when teasing the poor paper boy with her charms. Her accent, posture, and rapid change of moods bring Blanche vividly to life.

She's a queen. She's a tramp. She's a sorrowful neurotic living out an existence she never really had in the first place.

Martha Wehmeier as sister Stella is warm and loving and understanding. She loves Stanley and her sister. She is happy living in a dump with working class people, unashamed of them or her aristocratic heritage. She is having a baby, and looks every bit the joyful expectant mother.

Their scenes together may remind one of the paddle balls we used to play with. There is Stella, solid, firm, friendly, and there is Blanche, bouncing off her with a great deal of force and little harm done. Stella doesn't listen when Blanche gets morbid.

A perfect example occurs when Blanche tells Stella she is married to a madman. "I'm not in anything I want to get out of," Stella tells her. Blanche persists. Stella repeats herself, with a bit more conviction, but without losing control. Blanche can't win.

If there is a weakness among the leads, it is perhaps Ken Hof as Stanley. Oh, he's a polack all right. He's rough and crude, and he cries with conviction after he drunkenly slaps Stella. But Hof never gives us a chance to see any development in Stanley. He doesn't know Blanche is coming, yet he starts off hating her. Stella, loving and gentle, deeply cares for him, but he shows little of why she should. We have only her word for it that he's all she says he is.

What Hof blessedly isn't is Marlon Brando. It is unfortunate when a part in a play is memorably played by a famous actor. Director Lunney does not allow Hof to play Brando. Together they've come up with a Stanley that fits this production, this cast, this actor.

The supporting cast is adequate, except for Ernesto Ravetto as Mitch, who quite nearly steals whatever scene he's in. As Mitch, Ravetto is

humble, honest, and very square. He plays his scenes with quiet restraint, never allowing himself to stumble into caricature. He is temperate. He sincerely loves Blanche, and we believe it.

"Streetcar" is powerful drama, yet there are some very funny moments. Ravetto may have the best line of the show: he tells an empty set after Stanley slaps Stella and everyone rushes out that "Poker should not be played in a house with women."

The set is spare. A few poles to indicate walls, the Kowalski family furniture, and the correct props to go with the characters. The numerous sound cues may be somewhat intrusive in the intimate theater in the old Eugene Hotel, but the lighting is understated and useful.

In the midst of ORT's survival fundraising, producing director Lunney has put together a masterful production. He's chosen one of the finest modern American dramas, given it a powerful cast, and staged it simply in the closeness his theater provides.

It's a winning assembly. Go see it. Take your friends. "Streetcar" runs through Oct. 31 at the Oregon Repertory Theater, 222 Broadway St.



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## Correction

A Wednesday article in the Emerald incorrectly stated that the Wah Chang facility is a nuclear plant in Washington. Teledyne Wah Chang is a raw metals company in Millersburg, near Albany.

The same article also stated that Mark Reis would be speaking about the inefficiency of energy conservation methods. Reis is speaking on the efficiency of conservation methods.

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