

Playmakers' 'Streetcar' ride sensual, compelling, effective

By PATRICIA GREEN
Staff Writer

Now boarding at the Playmakers Theatre — a streetcar bound for a rough but sensually compelling neighborhood. The neighborhood lies in a New Orleans twilight zone, a slice off a block of an American city in the 40's, a neighborhood suspended between the romantic glow of the South of the past and the harsh neon needles of the advancing twentieth century. The Playmakers Repertory Company vehicle that transports players and audience to the nightmarish depths of the American subconscious is Tennessee Williams first Pulitzer Prize winning play. Williams calls this neighborhood "Elysian Fields." He names the streetcar "Desire."

For this production of "A Streetcar Named Desire," the Playmakers' set and lighting designer, Larry Von Werssowetz, has created a nightmarish pit, a filth-gilded cage for the entrapment of an exotic butterfly moth, the firefly of Williams' sad ballad, Blanche DuBois.

This "relatively imperishable creature of the stage" as Williams called Blanche, is played by Ellen Barber. From the moment she alights on stage, Miss Barber pirouettes dangerously close to the edge of melodrama. She almost overdoes the Mississippi accent, the southern belle routine and the old maid hysteria that are all a part of Blanche. Fortunately, there are moments in this production when Barber's stage experience apparently causes her to stop and spin off on a slightly different tack in her characterization. And as a result of her energy and intense immersion in her role, "Streetcar" is Ellen Barber's triumph as much as anyone's.

Blanche DuBois, like the hypnotized moth in Virginia Woolf's poem, must eventually beat herself to death in the flame of raw

passion — the disastrous desire — that is ever irresistible — and fatal — to her. Miss Barber seems to fully comprehend this, although she could perhaps let us know these things about her character with a bit more subtlety. Still, the inner conflict, the stained innocence, the frenetic grace that is Blanche becomes a part of every move, inflection, expression and gesture that Barber's characterization entails. This actress and her director, Bill Ludel, understand Blanche — her sorrow and her sincerity — her hysteria and her final serenity. Together, director and actress succeed in breathing life back into this classic American character.

Perhaps one reason it seems easier to relate to Blanche's dilemmas in this PRC production than in others is the importance given to the ins and outs of her relationship with her sister, the simpler, more down-to-earth Stella. Elaine Bromka plays Stella with easy good humor and a warm, bluesy earthiness that provides a much needed subtlety in the production. Her technique is well-researched and rehearsed; her characterization was well received by the audience. Bromka is obviously a professional who understands the limits of her role, yet will not be upstaged. Her characterization is generally convincing. Although her plantation accent is not always consistent, throughout the production Bromka works hard and contributes much to the professionalism of this production.

Playing opposite Bromka is Michael Medeiros as Stanley Kowalski. Medeiros manages to come across as crude and belligerent, but has difficulty in the few moments that call for Stanley to be vulnerable.

One of the more humane and vulnerable characters in the play is Mitch, played by Vic Polizos, who joins the PRC after performing with Liv Ullman in O'Neill's "Anna



Stanley (Michael Medeiros), Blanche (Ellen Barber), and Stella (Elaine Bromka) in a scene from Playmakers Repertory Company's production of Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire."

Christie." Polizos turns in one of the most convincing performances of the evening, striking a nice balance between an affable, bumbling gentleman caller and a wild-eyed,

trapped city creature. The scenes between Ellen Barber and Vic Polizos take the most arresting and are the most polished moments of this production.

ACLU Freedom Fair tomorrow

"The most valuable basketball ever signed in North Carolina" will go on the auction block Saturday, Sept. 24 at the second annual American Civil Liberties Union Freedom Fair in Chapel Hill.

Autographed after the UNC Alumni Basketball Game Sept. 10, the ball carries the signatures of present Tar Heel team members Phil Ford, Mike O'Koren, Rich Yonakor and others; and former UNC and professional stars Billy Cunningham, Bob McAdoo, Charlie Scott, Larry Brown, Walter Davis, York Larese and others.

The basketball is one of over 100 items and services up for bids at the Saturday carnival, auction and pig-pickin' dinner sponsored by the ACLU at the Wesley Foundation and the Newman Center, 214 and 218 Pittsboro St. in Chapel Hill. The Red Clay Ramblers and the UNC Jugglers will be joined by the Durham Pocket Theater to provide the day's

entertainment. Beginning at 1 p.m., the carnival will feature games, booths, and a mini-"film festival" for children.

Items at the auction at 2 p.m. will include antiques, jewelry, pottery and prints plus "services" ranging from tennis lessons and garden tilling to a day's sail on a cabin cruiser berthed at Wilmington.

The Jugglers will begin their show at 1 p.m., and the Children's Film Festival gets underway at 2. A special presentation of "If You Don't Like My Ocean, Don't Fish In My Sea," will be offered by the Durham Pocket Theatre at 7:30 p.m.

The Red Clay Ramblers will go on at 5 p.m. when the lines form for the pig-pickin', beef pot roast, vegetarian meals, tacos, egg rolls, soft drinks, beer and dessert. Admission to the carnival is \$1 for adults, 50 cents for children; dinners are \$3.50 for adults and \$2 for children.



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