



Contemporary Theatre's 'Streetcar' travels splendidly on the right track

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By **LAWSON TAITTE** / The Dallas Morning News
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You might not have noticed before, but *A Streetcar Named Desire* really is all about desire.

At least that's so in director Rene Moreno's splendid production of the Tennessee Williams classic at Contemporary Theatre of Dallas. Carnal heat radiates between Stanley Kowalski (Clay Yocum) and his wife, Stella (Jessica Wiggers), even between their upstairs neighbors, Steve and Eunice.

And, secretly, between Lydia Mackay's Blanche DuBois and almost every male who walks onto the stage. After Ms. Mackay first flutters into the New Orleans apartment in her old-fashioned white outfit, we see her sizing up her brother-in-law Stanley's physique – and Mr. Yocum turning on a dazzlingly boyish, even friendly, smile for her – until she starts insulting him.

Russell DeGrazier's Mitch grapples with this Blanche in a more openly sexual way than you've seen before, and Andrew W. Cope as the paperboy leaves visibly shaken after Blanche plants a kiss on him.

All the actors turn in exemplary performances, but this show belongs to Ms. Mackay. At Friday's opening, however, we didn't get a chance to hear her most famous line about depending on the kindness of strangers. Just a few minutes before the end of the play, Kyle May (playing the doctor who has come to take Blanche to the asylum) collapsed onstage. The performance was suspended until the EMTs arrived. They pronounced him OK, but the magic that Blanche talks about so eloquently had been dispelled. The show went unfinished, but Mr. May was not expected to miss future performances.

That was especially upsetting because the last of the three long acts had been building so magnificently. You could see Ms. Mackay's Blanche losing her grip on reality as the scenes progressed, from self-delusion and confusion to delusion, period. The bedraggled evening dress she puts on as she awaits her imaginary millionaire drapes her in pathos, and the final confrontation with Mr. Yocum explodes with violence and terror.

Adding to the scene's tension, Tippi Hunter – as the blind flower seller who shouts, "Flores para los muertos!" – prowls perilously around the front margin of the stage. And, throughout, Marco E. Salinas' jazz-soaked sound design fulfills the playwright's instructions to a T and adds to the emotional impact.

Mr. Yocum plays up Stanley vulgarity and brutality. Among many other things, this production of *Streetcar* is a tract against spousal abuse. But Mr. Moreno doesn't let this or any other idea detract from the overall effect. For all its new insights, this is a classic version that goes for tragic grandeur.



MILTON HINNANT/DMN
Lydia Mackay (Blanche DuBois) and Jessica Wiggers (Stella Kowalski) perform in Contemporary Theatre of Dallas' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

PLAN YOUR LIFE Through Aug. 31 at Contemporary Theatre of Dallas. Runs 195 mins. \$27 to \$32. 214-828-0094, www.contemporarytheatreofdallas.com.