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Contemporary Theatre's 'Streetcar' is fresh, powerful

By MARK LOWRY

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DALLAS — You know a play has achieved classic status when, no matter how many times you see it, you discover something new — or at least something in a new director's or actor's interpretation that leaves you with a deep-down feeling that you've just witnessed something powerful, groundbreaking and fresh.

Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* is timeless, of course: As Rene Moreno's staging for Contemporary Theatre of Dallas affirms, it holds up as an aching, painful study of illusions and desires. More than any other version I've seen, CTD's left me near-speechless for hours, still soaking in these characters and their motivations and actions.

Part of the astonishment came from a scary event Friday night: In the final scene, already past the three-hour mark, Kyle May, the actor playing the doctor who carts off Blanche (Lydia Mackay), collapsed onstage. The production was halted (and never finished) while paramedics were called; an audience member rushed forward after the actor playing Stanley, Clay Yocum, asked, "Is there a doctor in the house?" It brought new meaning to one the play's most famous lines, "I've always depended on the kindness of strangers." (May recovered and is continuing in the run.)

Even this event didn't diminish the production, populated with character interpretations you probably haven't seen and won't again, down to the excellent turn by Andrews W. Cope as the young collector Blanche seduces in a brief scene. This trend continues throughout, from Marianne Galloway's brazen upstairs neighbor Eunice to Russell DeGrazier's Mitch, still sensitive but more sexual and definitely more threatening than usual. Jessica Wiggers is more traditional as Stella, the emotionally and physically mistreated wife, but it's still a brilliant performance. Your eyes may be transfixed on her even when Stanley and Blanche are onstage.

Yocum and Mackay both pull off impressive feats. Stanley's sexual magnetism comes more from his charisma than his physicality, but it's there and it's a force. Mackay's Blanche is convincingly delusional, and her emotional descent as she realizes her desires are farther away than ever is devastating.

Randel Wright's scenic design nicely captures all the New Orleans-set areas on CTD's small stage, and Marco Salinas' jazzy sound design is spot on.

A cast of great performances must be credited to Moreno, who brings it all together. His most obvious directorial stamp is seen in the character selling flowers for the dead. Here, it's not a mournful Mexican hawker woman but a voodoo woman (Tippi Hunter) who creeps robotically across the stage, still calling "*flores para los muertos*" when she's offstage. Blanche's hopes might be dead, but the power of Williams' masterwork is immortal.

A Streetcar Named Desire Through Aug. 31

7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday

Contemporary Theatre of Dallas, 5601 Sears St., Dallas

\$27-\$32

214-828-0094; www.contemporarytheatreofdallas.com

Be advised: Adult themes and content

Runtime: Three hours, 20 minutes with two intermissions

Best reason to go: It's a masterpiece always worth seeing, especially in a revival this good.