

Director's Notes  
May 15, 2008

### *A Streetcar Named Desire*

*My great religion is a belief in the blood, the body's superior wisdom to that of the mind. We can go wrong in our minds, but what our blood feels and believes and says is always true.*

- Tennessee Williams, from "Adam and Eve on a Ferry"

Like an engine peculiar unto itself, a play must be taken apart in order to discover how it runs. Each line, each word must first be taken at face value, researched, examined, and then compared with all the rest of the parts in order to see its function in the operation of the whole. So when I work on a play, I begin by taking nothing for granted. I must pretend as though I don't know anything about it.

But with a world-famous play like *Streetcar*, I have to do a lot of pretending. Who hasn't heard Blanche DuBois' famous line, "I have always depended upon the kindness of strangers?" Even those who have never heard of the play have been affected by it. Marlon Brando's magnetizing portrayal of Stanley Kowalski changed acting - and our idea of a powerhouse performance - forever. My goal from the start has been to protect this glorious material from our own inevitable preconceptions of it.

Rather than a genteel and tidy Southern drama, Tennessee Williams has given us a great tragedy on par with any written by the ancient Greeks, or by Shakespeare. With a gift for poetry like no other American writer, he sheds light on the human struggle with prismatic splendor, refracting the sun into corners of the soul we'd rather leave in shadow.

It's easy to overlook, but after taking apart the engine of this play, I found its central question was right there in the title! Among the many things Williams' play teaches us, it's that sexual desire is a life-sustaining force common to us all. To accept it is to survive. But like any great tragedy, the central character is flawed, out of balance. Blanche's inability to accept the truth of her own appetites - and those in the world around her - leads to an unstoppable ride down the rails to destruction.

This idea repeats itself in Williams' work time and again: there's a war between the brain and the body, and the body always wins. And what a tragedy it is to watch a rare moth with glittering wings become permanently charred by the one flame toward which she can't help but fly... desire. I dare you not to be affected by Blanche's journey.

It takes an incredible amount of work to present plays of this scale on stage. What a gift to have a theatre in Dunedin that cares about the great plays of our time. I'm grateful for the opportunity to help do what I can to lead this team of hardworking artists, and I hope you will hear this surprising play for the first time - no matter how many times you've seen it.

Jef Hall-Flavin