

"A Streetcar Named Desire" to open

February 21, 1979

Decadence and dementia are the discomfiting undercurrents running through Tennessee Williams' drama, "A Streetcar Named Desire," which opens at the University of California, San Diego on March 1.

The UC San Diego drama department production will run March 1-4, 7-11 and 14-17 in the UCSD Theatre. Curtain time is 8 p.m. Tickets cost \$4 for general admission and \$3 for student admission, and tickets can be purchased at the UCSD Theatre Ticket Office, 452-4574.

The heroine of the play is Blanche DuBois, a faded belle whose effusive Southern gentility masks a murky past and an inability to adjust to the contemporary world.

The play is set in the crowded New Orleans apartment of Blanche's sister, Stella. Stanley Kowalski, Stella's brutish husband, challenges Blanche's veneer of refinement and good breeding and exposes her tarnished past, forcing Blanche to retreat with her fantasies into a world of madness.

"We are introduced to Blanche at a moment of crisis," said Arthur Wagner, professor of drama at UC San Diego and director of the play. "Blanche has enormous problems that come from a human need to be recognized and stroked. She has a commitment to a life that is no longer viable.

"Stanley is much more in the modern tradition. He has vitality, which is pitted against Blanche's values. We prefer to respond to vitality rather than decadence," Wagner said.

Yet Stanley is not a heroic character, Wagner said. He represents modern values, but his values are not all positive. His lusty, uncomplicated approach to life is crude and primitive when contrasted with Blanche's finer sensibilities.

In the movie version of the play, Marlon Brando played Stanley Kowalski and the adulation commanded by the young Brando was directed also towards Stanley, according to Wagner.

"Stanley became an attractive figure," said Wagner. "He is not attractive, except to Stella. There are certain people in the audience who will side with Stanley, but we must emphasize Blanche's worth."

The play takes place in Stanley and Stella's cluttered French Quarter apartment, a setting which had to be adapted to the UC San Diego Theatre's thrust stage. The two-room apartment originally was conceived for a proscenium theater.

The problem was solved by set designer Jim Sims, who created an arrangement of platforms which gives the impression that the two rooms are separate, though no walls divide the apartment.

Eleven scenes have been divided into three acts with two intermissions for the UC San Diego production.

"It's an enormous play, extensive and very physical," Wagner said. "But the final essence of 'Streetcar...' is that it's a wonderfully poetic play. There is a heightening of language, a concern for real human beings in real human interactions. It works on an emotional level because there is truth in character."

The cast features Jeanne Paulsen as Blanche DuBois; Richard Inglewski as her boyfriend, Mitch; Mark McQuery as Stanley, and Libby Dale as Stella. Ann Fajilan is stage manager, Laurie Winslow is costume designer, David Kriebs is sound designer, Seth Levy is lighting designer and Paul Rickart is technical director.

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