

TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3

7 P.M. • HUMANITIES

QUADRANGLE

LECTURE HALL

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



"I don't want realism. I want magic!" – Blanche DuBois

A *STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* gives us both. Realism: Tennessee Williams's initial inspiration came from a trip he took, as Blanche describes in her opening line: "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at Elysian Fields." Magic: those real location names contained ready-made allegory, allowing Williams to turn itinerary into poetry.

STREETCAR's own journey began about a half-mile from here, with the play's world premiere at the Shubert Theater on October 30, 1947—75 years ago. Directed by Elia Kazan, *STREETCAR* starred Jessica Tandy as Blanche, Kim Hunter, Karl Malden, and a 23-year-old named Marlon Brando. After a three-day tryout run (reviewed favorably in *The New Haven Register* and *The Hartford Courant*) and additional previews in Boston and Philadelphia, the show moved to Broadway on December 3, winning the Pulitzer Prize and running for two years. Brando had already appeared on Broadway, but it was his Stanley Kowalski that electrified audiences and set him on the road to stardom. For the 1951 film, Brando, Hunter, and Malden reprised their stage roles, but Warner Bros. insisted on an established movie star for Blanche, and Vivien Leigh, who in 1939 had become world-famous as Scarlett O'Hara, and who had played Blanche in London in 1949, took over. The British actress thus became the embodiment of arguably the two most prominent Southern women in American literature – and won Oscars for both.

STREETCAR's rawness, violence, and sexuality, which startled theatergoers in 1947, presented daunting challenges for the screen, bound by Hollywood's Production Code. Six months of negotiations in 1950 between Warners and the MPAA (which administered the Code) led to deletion of dialogue, including references to nymphomania and homosexuality; trimming of the climax (which the MPAA had wanted to eliminate entirely!); and a revised ending. Despite these compromises, the powerful Catholic Legion of Decency announced that it would give the film a "C" rating, i.e. condemning it for Catholics. Fearing box office failure, Warners agreed to four minutes of additional cuts—without Kazan's involvement, and supervised by Martin Quigley, a film trade magazine publisher who had co-written the Production Code in 1930. The Legion changed their rating to "B" ("morally objectionable in part") and the film opened on September 18, 1951, its sensationalism helping it to become the fifth biggest commercial success of the year.

The reviews were almost unanimously enthusiastic. *The New York Times*'s influential critic Bosley Crowther wrote that the film "throbs with passion and poignancy. Indeed, through Vivien Leigh's haunting performance...and the mesmerizing moods Mr. Kazan has wreathed with the techniques of the screen, this picture becomes as fine as, if not finer than, the play." The play's steamy claustrophobia carries over to the film, most of which is confined to the superbly designed squalid two-room apartment and immediate environs, presented with closeups and medium shots that afford us little comforting distance from the intense character interactions.

STREETCAR received 12 Oscars nominations and won four (Leigh, Malden, Hunter, and Black-and-White Art Direction-Set Decoration), but Brando lost to Humphrey Bogart for *THE AFRICAN QUEEN*: perhaps his acting style was just too radically new. Interestingly, back in 1947, Brando had been reluctant to play Stanley: "He's the antithesis of me...a man without any sensitivity, without any kind of morality..he was always right, and never afraid. He never wondered, he never doubted...he had the kind of brutal aggressiveness I hate. I detest the man." Kazan, schooled in the Stanislavski approach known in the U.S. as "The Method" and co-founder of the Actors Studio, drew from Brando's depths a performance that, along with his Terry Malloy in Kazan's *ON THE WATERFRONT* (1954), is often cited as having changed the course of acting.

No. 8
SEASON 7

DIRECTED BY **ELIA KAZAN**

SCREENPLAY BY **TENNESSEE WILLIAMS** AND
OSCAR SAUL, BASED ON WILLIAMS'S PLAY

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **HARRY STRADLING**

MUSIC BY **ALEX NORTH**

PRODUCED BY **WARNER BROS.** (1951),
125 MINS.

STARRING **VIVIEN LEIGH, MARLON BRANDO,**
KIM HUNTER, AND KARL MALDEN

DID YOU KNOW: ALEX NORTH'S NEW ORLEANS-APPROPRIATE MUSIC, SAID TO BE THE FIRST JAZZ BACKGROUND SCORE
IN A DRAMATIC FILM, PROMPTED MILES DAVIS TO PROCLAIM, "ALEX NORTH IS THE MAN!"

NEXT UP: FORTY YEARS AFTER IT WAS FIRST RELEASED, JOIN THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE FOR THE RESTORATION PREMIERE OF KATHLEEN COLLINS' LANDMARK FILM **LOSING GROUND**. RESTORED BY THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE AND THE FILM FOUNDATION, WITH FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE HOBSON/LUCAS FAMILY FOUNDATION, THE FILM WILL PREMIERE IN A NEW 35MM PRINT, WITH STAR SERET SCOTT IN PERSON! **FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11 AT 7 PM**