

'Streetcar' ends three week run

By Kelly Sheahan

The Theatre Department wound up its first production, "A Streetcar Named Desire," Sunday afternoon.

"Streetcar," a classic play by Tennessee Williams, focuses on Blanche DuBois, a sensitive, lonely person in conflict with a brutal world.

According to Dr. Donald W. Seay, director of "Streetcar," one of the reasons for choosing an American classic was because the department tries to do different types of work within a four year period so that both the audience and cast members are exposed to a wide variety of plays.

Seay originally chose to do "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," by Tennessee Williams. However, the play was extended on Broadway so the Otterbein Theatre Department lost the rights to perform the play. Seay said the decision to do "Streetcar" was not easy

because it was a very challenging piece of work.

When asked if the play met his expectations, Seay said: "I don't think I've ever been totally satisfied with a production, but I think we've accomplished many things we set out to do. I'm very proud of what the actors and actresses achieved. They did an outstanding job on a difficult piece."

According to senior Carolyn Valentine, who played Stella Kowalski, the play was a very educational experience. She said: "The play was very challenging because I was working from a period I wasn't familiar with. The male-female relationship was very different then than what we're used to now."

Instead of being performed in Cowan Hall, "Streetcar" was performed in the Campus Center Theatre. According to Seay, in Cowan the actors are too removed from the audience, while in the Campus

Center the audience feels more a part of the play.

Also, instead of being run for the typical two weeks, "Streetcar" was performed for three weeks. Seay said one of the reasons for this was to let the theater students learn what it's like to run a show for a longer period of time.

When asked of any difficulties she ran into, Valentine said, "Since the play is so famous, you are fighting against set images of how you see the character."

The overall impression of the play on the students was a positive one.

Freshman Tiffany Neal said: "Some of the time it was hard to understand what they were saying, but overall the play looked very professional. I saw the movie, but liked the play better."

Junior Wendi Clark said: "I was really impressed. It was well directed, and the parts were very well played out."

Otterbein's production of 'Streetcar' hits roadblocks

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Poetry and passion, sensitivity and spirituality. All that made Tennessee Williams one of our finest playwrights. All that, plus the multileveled conflicts woven into his tapestry of tragedy, make *A Streetcar Named Desire* his most exquisite play.

The 1948 Pulitzer Prize winner for drama pits harsh realism against gossamer self-delusion. Brute masculinity against tender femininity. Matter against spirit.

Like many student productions, Otterbein College Theatre's *Streetcar* reminds us of Williams' genius by its strengths as well as its limitations.

The young and talented cast tries hard, but lacks the maturity to scale Williams' achingly beautiful heights — or risk a no-holds-barred descent to his tortured depths.

Williams' sad tale of a fading Southern belle's slow descent into madness generates its electrical sparks from the gap between Stanley Kowalski's "animal force" and Blanche DuBois' genteel sensuality.

During the first two acts at Wednesday's opening, those sparks largely failed to ignite. Perhaps it takes time to adjust to director Don Seay's casting-against-type in the major women's roles.

Ginger Lee McDermott, a passionate May in Otterbein's *Fool for Love* last spring, played Blanche as if she were closer to Grace Kelly than Vivian Leigh. McDermott's icy blond exterior offered little hint of the vulnerability that, ultimately, must give way to utter nakedness.

Something's askew when McDermott's Blanche insists she is not vulnerable — and we believe her.

As for Carolyn Valentine's Stella, she seemed more child than woman. Valentine evokes the tomboy innocence of a young Barbara Bel Geddes; one expects, for Stella, an older, riper, more jaded persona. (Otherwise, how could Stella stay married to Stanley?)

At least the leading men fit their roles. Keith Berkes captures the kindness and weakness of Mitch, the poker-playing buddy who woos Blanche until warned away.

AT A GLANCE

A Streetcar Named Desire. Otterbein College Theatre presents student production of Tennessee Williams' Pulitzer Prize-winning Southern drama. Director is Don Seay.

The Cast:

Blanche DuBoisGinger Lee McDermott
StellaCarolyn Valentine
Stanley KowalskiBill D. Timmins III
MitchKeith Berkes
Eunice HubbellMeg Chamberlain
Steve HubbellMatthew Bartholomew

Student acting leaves something to be desired.

Performances continue at 8 tonight and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday, and through Oct. 10-14 and Oct. 17-21 in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Call 898-1109.

Unlike Players Theatre Columbus' *Streetcar* last year, which reduced Stanley Kowalski to John Belushi, Bill D. Timmins III plays Stella's working-class husband straight.

Stanley's clashes of temperament with Blanche are believable; their contests of will, made credible by Timmins' sweaty machismo.

As a result, by the third act, this *Streetcar* builds up a real head of steam. The undercurrents of anger boil to the surface as Stanley strips away Blanche's "hoity-toity" veneer.

And McDermott, belatedly, comes into her own. Blanche's desperate attempt to preserve some shreds of her past may be futile, but McDermott makes us feel the enormity of Blanche's loss.

One doesn't have to buy the story's superficial premise — that sensitive souls, such as Blanche, who can't stand "a rude remark or a vulgar action," cannot survive in the



Ken Chamberlain/Dispatch

Stanley Kowalski (Bill D. Timmins III) and Blanche DuBois (Ginger Lee McDermott) in Otterbein's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

real world — to appreciate *Streetcar*'s subtle interplay of symbolism and psychodrama.

Otterbein's *Streetcar* may leave something to be desired in the acting department, but nothing on the technical end. Fred Thayer's lighting shifts from Stanley's brooding yellows to Blanche's romantic pinks.

Rob Johnson's French Quarter set, while cluttered, is up to his usual high standards. And his sound design is simply superb, with Dixie-style blues underscoring the Southern Gothic mood.

Material beyond Otterbein 'Streetcar' actors

By Dennis Thompson
SNP Theater Critic

Otterbein College Theatre gives a valiant effort with a difficult work, but its actors are outmanned by the material.

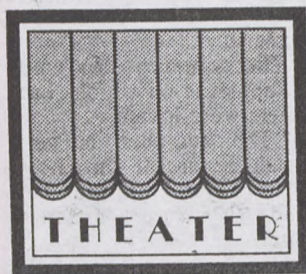
Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a mid-20th century watershed in the American theater. Its combination of psychological drama and steamy sexuality is not as shocking now as when it debuted in 1947, but it is still a piece of powerful emotions. The roles of Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski are two of the most demanding of the 20th century American stage.

BLANCHE, A fading Southern belle, moves in with her sister Stella and finds herself at odds with her brutish brother-in-law, Stanley. The action involves the clashing of their two worlds in the hot New Orleans summer of 1947.

This is not a bad production. It grasps the essence of the piece. But the actors are unable to consistently master both the subtlety and the powerful range of emotions called for in the play.

As Blanche, Ginger McDermott does not plant the early seeds of fragile mental vulnerability. She says the lines that indicate this, but other than an occasional calculated vocal quiver, she appears too much in control throughout the first half. She finishes powerfully, and is especially poignant in her scenes with Mitch as she seeks what may be her last chance at happiness. But the lack of early signs of vulnerability makes Blanche appear to approach the edge too quickly.

BILL TIMMINS' stoic Stanley would benefit from more vocal and physical va-



review

riety. While he does not misstep, he also does not dig deeply beneath the surface. We keep hearing descriptions of Stanley that Timmins does not seem to fill. He appears too well-spoken to be described as an animal, and displays crudity only through volume. In fact, in brief appearances as Steve Hubbell, the upstairs neighbor, Matthew Bartholomew shows a more danger-

ous inclination for explosive fury.

As Stella, Carolyn Valentine occasionally gets swallowed up on stage with a timid voice that adversely affects her stage presence. However, when heard, she shows both her dependency on the magnetic power of Stanley's sexuality and the concern she holds for her sister.

Keith Berkes captures Mitch's groping awkwardness and inhibited sensitivity. Meg Chamberlain contributes a colorful characterization as Eunice Hubbell.

THE PRODUCTION is nicely packaged in Fred Thayer's set. Director Donald Seay has established the framework and pointed his actors in the right direction.

College theatre walks a fine line between education and entertainment. But the

main role of college theatre is to educate and to broaden the horizons of their students.

This is especially true in the case of Otterbein and their actor training program. This play was worth producing for Otterbein if for no other reason than to give their actors an opportunity to play these difficult roles this early in their career. If they fell short, it was mainly due to inexperience.

The outline of a strong production is here. The acting just required deeper shadings.

Otterbein College Theatre's A Streetcar Named Desire will continue tonight through Sunday at the Campus Center in Westerville. Tickets are \$7.75 to \$8.75. For more information call 898-1109.