Written by Mike Schulz
Friday, 29 August 2008 09:01

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Well, it turns out that crossing my fingers and rubbing my lucky rabbit's foot didn't do a damned bit of good, as the Harrison Hilltop Theatre's *A Streetcar Named Desire* closed, after a mere four performances, on August 31. (There was a chance that the show
- originally scheduled to open August 21, but delayed due to scheduling conflicts - would run one or two more times in September, yet
subsequent
scheduling conflicts wound up precluding a second weekend.) Thursday's production was so enjoyable, though, and Kimberly Furness, Eddie Staver III, and Stephanie Burrough were so thrillingly good in it, that I'm more than happy to offer a post-mortem; had director Derek Bertelsen's take on Tennessee Williams' classic run another weekend, it's unimaginable that

any devotee of the art of acting would've even *thought* of missing it.

But allow me to make a few things clear, especially for those who may feel as strongly about this particular Williams piece as I do. (Aside from O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is my favorite American play.) First off, Harrison Hilltop's production didn't feature full blackouts between scenes, and didn't feature a scene-change *crew*, so sequences ended with performers exiting in half-light, occasionally having to move props and make scenic adjustments themselves. Considering the intimate playing area, these were necessary evils. But they were also unfortunate ones, because upon watching Furness' Blanche DuBois collapse after shrieking, "Fire! Fire! Fire!", or Staver's Stanley Kowalski throwing Blanche to the bed with an insinuating "We've had this date with each other from the beginning," you didn't *want* to witness the actors quickly regroup for a costume change or the re-positioning of a set piece. Instead of lingering during the scene shifts, the production's dramatic urgency tended to wane.

And while Bertelsen and production designer Tristan Tapscott did a mostly outstanding job of fitting *Streetcar* to the specifications of their space, the lack of certain production niceties was sometimes detrimental, especially in the famed scene in which Stanley explodes at the poker table and bellows "*Stella!*" to the upstairs window. Without a shower for the over-heated Stanley to be thrown into, the character's transition from drunken monster to apologetic wreck occurred too quickly - despite Staver's best efforts, this sudden turnaround didn't make much sense - and without a staircase for her to walk down, Stella's return to Stanley was similarly expedient. Stanley howled, Stella appeared, and Williams' beautiful, voiceless rush of contrasting emotions was lost. (Also missing from the scene was its *climax*, in which Mitch comforts a disbelieving Blanche.)

So no, this *Streetcar* wasn't perfect. The script, however, is about as close to perfect as theatre gets, and when Williams' rich, glorious language is delivered with the breathtaking passion, grace, and commitment that it was here, complaints turn into mere quibbles.

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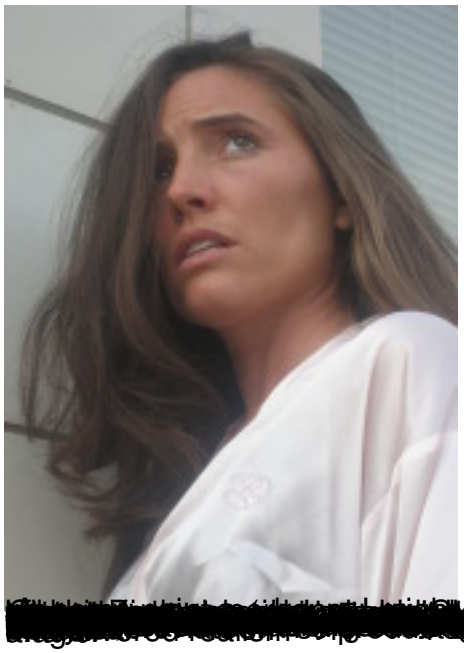

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