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MOVIE REVIEW

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

By Bosley Crowther
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Out of Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire, which gathered up most of the drama prizes that were awarded when it was playing on Broadway, director Elia Kazan and a simply superlative cast have fashioned a motion picture that throbs with passion and poignancy. Indeed, through the haunting performance England's great Vivien Leigh gives in the heartbreaking role of Mr. Williams's deteriorating Southern belle and through the mesmerizing moods Mr. Kazan has wreathed with the techniques of the screen, this picture, now showing at the Warner, becomes as fine, if not finer, than the play. Inner torments are seldom projected with such sensitivity and clarity on the screen.

Of course, the first factor in this triumph is Mr. Williams's play, which embraces, among its many virtues, an essential human conflict in visual terms. The last brave, defiant, hopeless struggle of the lonely and decaying Blanche du Bois to hold on to her faded gentility against the heartless badgering of her roughneck brother-in-law is a tangible cat-and-dog set-to, marked with manifold physical episodes as well as a wealth of fluctuations of verbally fashioned images and moods. And all of these graphic components have been fully preserved in Oscar Saul's script and availed of by Mr. Kazan in his cinematic mounting of same.

Mélees, titanic and degrading, within the filthy New Orleans slum where Blanche comes to live with her sister and her low-born brother-in-law have been staged by the prescient director with such tumultuous energy that the screen fairly throbs with angry violence, before settling sharply into spent and aching quiet. Hate-oozing personal encounters between the lost lady and the brutish man have been filmed with such shrewd manipulation of the close-up that one feels the heat of them. And with lights and the movement of his people and the conjunction of a brilliant musical score with dialogue of real poetic richness, Mr. Kazan has wrought heartache and despair.

In this dramatic illustration, which makes vivid, of course, a great deal more than a fundamental clash of natures between a woman and a man—which transmits, indeed, a comprehension of a whole society's slow decay and the pathos of vain escapism in a crude and dynamic world—we say, in this dramatic illustration, Miss Leigh accomplishes more than a worthy repeat of the performance which Jessica Tandy gave on the stage.

Blessed with a beautifully molded and fluently expressive face, a pair of eyes that can flood with emotion, and a body that moves with spirit and style, Miss Leigh has, indeed, created a new Blanche du Bois on the screen—a woman of even greater fullness, torment, and tragedy. Although Mr. Williams's writing never precisely makes clear the logic of her disintegration before the story begins—why anyone of her breeding would become an undisciplined tramp—Miss Leigh makes implicitly cogent every moment of the lady on the screen.

Her mental confusions, her self-deceptions, the agonies of her lacerated nerves, and her final, unbearable madness, brought on by a brutal act of rape, are clearly conveyed by the actress with a tremendous concentration and economy of power. Likewise, her fumbblings for affections are beautifully and poignantly done. And since Miss Leigh is present in

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virtually every scene or sequence of the film, the demands upon her vitality and her flexibility are great.

No less brilliant, however, within his area is Marlon Brando in the role of the loud, lusty, brawling, brutal, amoral Polish brother-in-law. Mr. Brando created the role in the stage play and he carries over all the energy and the steel-spring characteristics that made him vivid on the stage. But here, where we're so much closer to him, he seems that much more highly charged, his despairs seem that much more pathetic, and his comic moments that much more slyly enjoyed.

Others from the cast of the stage play—Kim Hunter as the torn young sister and wife, Karl Malden as a timid, boorish suitor, Nick Dennis as a pal, and all the rest—fill out the human pattern within a sleazy environment that is so fitly and graphically created that you can almost sense its sweatiness and smells. Alex North's incidental music deserves prominent commendation, too, as do all of the technical aspects of this film which Charles K. Feldman has produced.

But comments cannot do justice to the substance and the artistry of this film. You must see it to appreciate it. And that we strongly urge you to do.

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE (MOVIE)

Directed by Elia Kazan; written by Tennessee Williams and Oscar Saul, based on the play by Mr. Williams; cinematographer, Harry Stradling; edited by David Weisbart; music by Alex North; art designer, Richard Day; produced by Charles K. Feldman; released by Warner Brothers. Black and white. Running time: 125 minutes.

With: Vivien Leigh (Blanche du Bois), Marlon Brando (Stanley Kowalski), Kim Hunter (Stella Kowalski), Karl Malden (Mitch), Rudy Bond (Steve), Nick Dennis (Pablo), and Peg Hillias (Eunice).