



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## **A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE**

### **Bakehouse Theatre Company**

Bakehouse Theatre

Until 7 May 2022

Review by George Jankovic

Here we are, the end of an era. Over fifty years of history have come to a grinding halt in the Bakehouse Theatre's send-off production, Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire". There are countless ways to do this play wrong; such is the challenge for a director, to deftly wield this script's immense explosive power. I am delighted to say that Michael Baldwin's production is a triumph. It doesn't miss a beat, which is doubly impressive when it comes to this titan of the modern theatre.

The Southern belle, Blanche Dubois (Melanie Munt), arrives on her sister Stella's (Justine Ward) doorstep after their father's death. Stella lives in the big city of New Orleans with her husband, Stanley Kowalski (Paul Westbrook), the rough, handsome, working-class type Blanche has only seen in news reels. "Thousands and thousands of years have passed him by" in the evolutionary story, says Blanche. What unfolds is not so much a tragedy as it is a pitiful comedy of manners, a collision of two worlds that were never meant to meet.

Melanie Munt as Blanche is electric, a bundle of nervous energy harbouring secrets from her past. She's delicate and frail, not built for this world. "It's not enough to be soft. You have to be soft and attractive, and I'm fading" she cries to her sister. You can tell things won't be easy for her. Munt signposts this sad fact with nuance and great compassion for the character.

Justine Ward plays Stella with convincing naivete. Marc Clement, a veteran of this stage, deserves credit for his thoughtful and reserved turn as Mitch, Stanley's best bud. There isn't a weak link in the cast. Everyone, right down to the young, prodigious Matthew Adams, demonstrate a deep respect for their craft.

Of course, everyone wants to hear about Stanley, a titan of a role in and of itself. Paul Westbrook is a force of nature. He commands the stage with his presence, marking the terrain like a beast. The famous cry of "Stella!" can make an audience tremble or laugh. Here, it is the blood-curling sound of a wounded animal. Westbrook delivers one of the best stage performances I've seen in a long time.

Andrew Zeuner and David Dyte's set is adapted to the particular challenges of utilising the Bakehouse Theatre's main stage. The Kowalskis' two-room studio apartment is cramped, dirty, yet teeming with life. Walter Barbieri's live piano recital was a lovely touch, and breathed life into the scene transitions, which otherwise could have bogged down the pace.

The Bakehouse will close its doors for the last time after this season of Streetcar. A tragedy that may be, there could be no better homage paid to a venue that has given Adelaide fifty-plus years of stories to remember – get in while you can.