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MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

ARTS CENTRE
MELBOURNE



A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

DIRECTED BY ANNE-LOUISE SARKS

EDUCATION PACK – PART B

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Production photographer Pia Johnson
Rehearsal photographer Joshua Scott

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, create and gather. We pay our respects to all First Nations people, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories. As a Company we remain committed to the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for voice, truth and treaty.

Introduction

Nikki Shiels



Revisit Part A

Download Part A of this resource for information about context, characters and theatre styles. Reflect on your predictions and expectations now that you've seen the production.

Download the pack at mtc.com.au/eduhub

This second instalment of the *A Streetcar Named Desire* Education Pack is designed to help you unpack the performance after watching it on stage. This pack should be used in tandem with Part A and the pre-show resource. The interviews in this pack are intended to help you understand the creative intentions behind the work and give you a more sophisticated understanding of the production. Ultimately, it is your experience of the live production that matters most, and hopefully this resource helps transport you back into your seat at the theatre. In our online Education Hub, you can find analysis questions to consider as you reflect on the production, but always remember to consult official VCAA documents when preparing for VCE assessments and examinations.

Cast and creatives

CAST

Blanche Nikki Shiels
Stella Michelle Lim Davidson
Stanley Mark Leonard Winter
Mitch Steve Mouzakis
Eunice Katherine Tonkin
Steve Gareth Yuen
Pablo Stephen Lopez
Gee Gee/Nurse Gabriella Barbagallo
Young Collector/Doctor Kaya Byrne
Flower Seller Veronia Peña Negrette

CREATIVE TEAM

Director Anne-Louise Sarks
Set & Costume Designer Mel Page
Lighting Designer Niklas Pajanti
Music Stefan Gregory
Fight & Movement Director Nigel Poulton
Intimacy Coordinator Amy Cater
Voice & Dialect Coach Geraldine Cook-Dafner
Assistant Set & Costume Designer Bianca Pardo
Assistant Director Joe Paradise Lui
Stage Manager Pippa Wright
Deputy Stage Manager Lyndie Li Wan Po
Assistant Stage Manager Brittany Stock
Rehearsal Photographer Joshua Scott
Production Photographer Pia Johnson
Marketing Campaign Photographer Jo Duck

A Streetcar Named Desire is presented by special arrangement with The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

Originally Produced by
Irene Selznick, New York, NY
at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre
Opened 3rd December 1947



Read the programme

Read the interactive programme for this production to read about the cast and creative team, and see more photos from the rehearsal room at mtc.com.au/programmes.

Nikki Shiels, Michelle Lim Davidson, Stephen Lopez, Mark Leonard Winter and Steve Mouzakis



Director's note

Anne-Louise Sarks

A Streetcar Named Desire is an extraordinary piece of writing. It is never just one thing. The action is both domestic and epic. The language is both muscular and lyrical. Characters who in some ways are victims can suddenly become bullies – and they are all far from faultless.

This sense of being pulled in different directions could no doubt be felt in the world at the time. Tennessee Williams wrote *Streetcar* in 1945, and it premiered in 1947, just after WWII ended. It was an exciting but strange time. People were reimagining what the world could look like – a new generation was pushing against the status quo. Ideas about relationships, about sex and sexuality, about the place of women, were being tested. For some people that was thrilling, and for others it was terrifying. And perhaps, for some, it was both at once.

To me – and I suspect to many of you – this sounds very familiar. The frictions that arise as those worldviews come into conflict. The fear that becomes a feature of society. And the way that fear manifests as violence.

Blanche DuBois, alive at this time of excitement and fear, embodies these tensions. It is easy to see Blanche as a victim, or perhaps as somebody who brings her misfortunes on herself – but it is just as true, perhaps more true, to say she is heroic. Amidst the cruelty deployed by others as they attempt to crush and destroy her, Blanche fights – to hold her head up, to find and keep a place for herself, sometimes simply to survive. And to be truly seen. The play is, in fact, full of remarkable moments when Blanche stops and tells the truth about herself, asking for the realities of her life and self to be understood.

I did not want to unquestioningly repeat received ideas about Blanche. What if, instead of seeing her as hopelessly melodramatic, a woman close to madness, we understood her actions as a response to some earlier grief or trauma? What if we saw her as both vulnerable and strong? As a survivor? This is the problem with falling back on words like 'crazy' or 'fragile': they can stop us looking properly at the play (and at each other). Words like that too easily become an answer to what's going on, a banal excuse for the Stanleys and the Mitches. I want to provoke questions with every interaction – to bring every scene alive by embracing its complexity. And to make it resonate in the current moment.



Anne-Louise Sarks

Director Anne-Louise Sarks in rehearsal





Michelle Lim Davidson, Nikki Shiels, Katherine Tonkin, Stephen Lopez, Steve Mouzakis, Gareth Yuen and Mark Leonard Winter

Our intention with this production is to honour Williams’s masterpiece – and to make you see it anew. To me, that is the best way to capture the spirit of what was, in 1947, a bold piece of contemporary writing.

Part of Williams’s boldness lay in exploding the naturalism of Arthur Miller, introducing a new theatricality of expressionism, of emotion – a style that lived on the border between the poetic and the real. Our production is set in New Orleans in 1947 – and at the same time, it is set in the theatre. The world on stage has enough detail to ground it in the era – and is minimal enough to allow the work to exist simultaneously across time. We are in communion with the past, and at the same time we are sitting together as an audience in 2024, breathing with the actors, experiencing this classic play in the context of our lives. The real and the theatrical, 1947 and 2024 – all are present.

Setting a play both in 1947 and in our present moment also means acknowledging the individuals on stage, both as actors and characters. All of the artists are exploring story and psychology and truths beyond their own immediate life experience and identity – as actors always do – and all are bringing their full selves to this story and to these characters. In part that means recognising the complexity of race and ethnicity, of gender and of sexuality, both inside the play and beyond the walls of this theatre – just as Williams sought in his own way to grapple with those questions. This production invites you into that complexity, with its tensions and contradictions.

80 years on, the accuracy of Williams’s observations remains stunning. It can be overwhelming, even disturbing, to wrestle with the cruelty and violence he portrays – and to recognise how little has changed.

But there is light, too, amidst the darkness on display: it lies in Williams’s offer of kindness, expressed in the line Blanche leaves us with as she exits.

Perhaps that is something for us to hold as we, too, leave the world of the play.



Setting

Consider Sarkis’s comments about the setting of this production – both in 1947 and 2024. How was this concept demonstrated on stage? What parallels can you make between the two time periods?

Acting skills

Learn more about each actor's performance in these interviews.

NIKKI SHIELS Blanche

How did you first interact with *A Streetcar Named Desire*? And what's it like now to be playing one of the central characters?

I first discovered *A Streetcar Named Desire* in high school. I studied it in drama class and I was immediately struck by how heightened it was as an imaginary world.

Now that I am playing Blanche, I feel like I am swimming deep in this soup of the subliminal world of Tennessee Williams. It's wonderfully poetic and emotional. It's also such a technical task for an actor, playing Blanche. And so I'm currently just piecing the journey emotionally, technically and psychologically.

Can you tell us a little bit about Blanche and specifically the Blanche you are creating?

What I am finding to be true about Blanche, from the text, is that she's incredibly powerful at sweeping other characters into her own reality. That really works on some characters – for example, Stella, her sister. It doesn't work on other characters and that is very confronting for her. Blanche is incredibly heroic in this quest for something more, and the domesticity of the world that she finds herself in, throughout the course of the play, is not enough. She is disturbed by what people are settling for around her. Inside of that she has many complexities and is not perfect, but she is a dreamer, and she's longing for something larger than what currently exists. I think that resonates in 1947 when the play was written. I also think that resonates now as a theatrical provocation, using a work from the past.

Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you are using as you create this show?

Blanche DuBois has a performative element to her character as well as a remarkably rich, yet troubled inner life. She craves connection with others and enters a myriad of code switching and game play to draw these connections. I am trying to keep myself as the actor in a state of openness, play and discovery in rehearsals, so that I am alive to the other actors and the energy they are working from on their characters so I am able to discover these games and relationships organically, rather than manufacture them.



Nikki Shiels

'I am trying to keep myself... in a state of openness, play and discovery...so that I am alive to the other actors and the energy they are working from on their characters.'



Michelle Lim Davidson, Nikki Shiels and Katherine Tonkin

Another rehearsal technique I am using is my own personal script analysis and detailing. Tennessee Williams is meticulous in the structure of his language and drew a lot from his deep love of poetry. The language and the juxtaposition of characters, thoughts and images have a rhetoric as well as poetic and emotional logic to how they are constructed. Closely observing the language and punctuation, and looking for clues as to how the character may be speaking in a given moment, is all hidden in the text. A process of excavation is occurring for me alongside rehearsals so that each day I can make informed choices vocally and emotionally on the floor as we make the play.

Why do you think *A Streetcar Named Desire* is still being performed today, 77 years after it was first staged?

I really think it's a piece of work that has everything – it's perfectly constructed. In three acts, it soars through all the human emotions that you could possibly experience in three hours. No character comes away unscathed. You feel for them all, and you judge them all and the complexities of the world of the play are all butting up against each other so that, audiences can be very surprised and delighted, but at the same time, sitting in the moral dilemma that the play poses.



Acting skills

Consider Shiels's comments about the performative element and inner life of her character. What did you notice in her performance? What techniques did she use to express the inner and outer lives of Blanche?



Rhythm

Shiels discusses the poetry in Tennessee Williams's writing and her own script analysis. Select to short monologues from the play, spoken by different characters. What are the differences in punctuation between the monologues? How does this effect each character's rhythm of speech and action?

Nikki Shiels and Mark Leonard Winter



MICHELLE LIM DAVIDSON

Stella

Tell us about your character in a nutshell. What drives them?

I'm playing Stella Kowalski or Stella DuBois. I think so much of Stella's motivation is based on survival. We hear in the text that she has had to leave Belle Reve. She says to Blanche, 'the best I could do was go on and make my own living' and it's up to us as a production to decide what that means for us, because as actors we feel the backstory. In the backstory of our production, Stella has seen Belle Reeve crumbling. Given that Nikki Shiels is playing Blanche and I'm playing Stella, we look very different from each other physically, so we filled that backstory so that Stella never had the same equality in the family dynamic. Their father passed away and that forced Stella out on her own and that is the beginning of her survival. I feel like she's an outsider in her family. That's apparent in her dominant relationships in the play with Blanche, and with Stanley. She's got to make the best of what she's got, and I think at the beginning of the play, she's really proud of it. She's built something from nothing, and Blanche comes in and starts to unpick her world.

Stella is the only character in the play who thinks actively about other people. She's the only one who can step outside and see the bigger picture. She's constantly in a tug of war between Blanche and Stanley – it's fun to feel that push and pull and discover who wins Stella in each scene.

Do you consciously experiment with or manipulate motion, rhythm, and contrast?

We work with all three in our accent and dialect work. Nikki and I are doing Mississippi accents, and we have to listen to examples of people from 1947 because the accent is slightly different now. One example is that there was never a strong rhotic R sound in that accent, but there is now because of the influence of pop culture. We have to change the rhythm of our natural speech because our Australian rhythm is very different. We emphasise different words.

In terms of contrast, I look for moments for different voices, such as Stella's public and private voices. You manipulate your voice to communicate better with others in different situations. For example, when Stella and Blanche are getting along and being sisters, we have a more relaxed tone and a similar inflection. Siblings often have that vocally.

Once we've technically done the work of learning the accent, then we need to personalise it. It should sound lived-in from the actor. No one wants to hear an accent. We just want to hear someone talking and the skill in that is hours and hours of practice. I put a lot of work into really embodying an accent because when I hit the acting part, when I'm in rehearsal and getting to the intention of the role, I cannot be thinking there's a schwa there or you need to drop the R. It's got to be completely natural.

Does that mean you can't learn the lines before you start the rehearsal process? Do you need to learn them alongside the accent?

For me, I was just very familiar. I didn't lock them into my memory. We did have a pre-rehearsal accent and dialect lesson just to start us off with the basics. We start doing the right vocal exercises to shape your mouth. And for your tongue



Michelle Lim Davidson

'No one wants to hear an accent. We just want to hear someone talking and the skill in that is hours and hours of practice.'



Michelle Lim Davidson



(left) Nikki Shiels and Michelle Lim Davidson;
(right) Mark Leonard Winter and Michelle Lim Davidson

placement, your lip placement. For me, it wasn't as handy, learning the dialogue before I came in because I don't want to learn the wrong bits of the accent because it's hard to unlearn them.

What creative challenges does this play present for you?

There are quite a few creative challenges in the play. One interesting thing about our production is that we are not using Tennessee Williams's very detailed, beautiful stage directions. They were written for a specific production and a specific theatre so they're not really that relevant to us in 2024. While stage directions can be really helpful, having them taken away means that everything has to come organically and creatively from the actors on stage, and it works within our set and our design.

The other challenge for me, personally, playing Stella is that I'm required to go to some high emotional peaks and some very low troughs. All those emotions come from part of me because I'm doing them - I'm acting them. But I try to build them all from the technical foundation of the script. It's my job to do it eight times a week. I think you cannot trust the way you feel as an actor. I firmly believe that acting isn't feeling and by that, I mean you should always go for what you want and the feeling is the by-product. It's a creative challenge to build that emotion in structurally. It's like a skeleton for me and no matter what mood I'm in, no matter how tired I am, I can always hit those marks. It's also about self-preservation working with such challenging material. You want to leave that at the theatre. You can't take it home.

Why students should be studying this today?

Because unfortunately, what Stella and Blanche face as women is still relevant today. It is our collective responsibility as a society to change that and sometimes it is the art or storytelling that can bring awareness or change people's minds. As Korean artist, Nam June Paik says, 'The culture that's going to survive in the future is the culture that you can carry around in your head'.



Acting skills

Consider Lim Davidson's comments about acting and feeling. Do you agree? How would you approach taking on a role like Stella?



Rhythm and contrast

Consider Lim Davidson's discussion of voice and dialect work. What did you notice about the actors' use of rhythm and contrast in their voice work throughout the play?

MARK LEONARD WINTER

Stanley

Tell us about your character in a nutshell. What drives them?

Stanley has returned alive from World War II and I believe he is actively searching for pleasure in his life. Sex, food, alcohol and bowling are his key pursuits. He is working class and is beginning to get a sense that maybe things aren't going to work out the way he hoped. He and Stella are expecting a baby which intensifies the financial pressures on him. Being Polish compounds his sense of frustration as there was a lot of racism and stereotypes directed at Polish people at that time. He is proudly married to Stella and they have a passionate relationship in both positive and negative ways. He has moments of violence towards her despite his affection for her.

The arrival of Blanche upends his life in a severe way. He feels judged by her and feels she thinks he is stupid and that she is better than him. Stanley is full of pride and has a street smart to him. Stanley and Blanche are both quite forceful characters which sends them on an inevitable collision. I think Stanley feels everything he values and his place in the world being deeply threatened, and he fights very hard to protect it – particularly his relationship to Stella. In the end he becomes exactly what Blanche said he was and I'm interested to find out what his 'victory' at the end of the play feels like.

Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

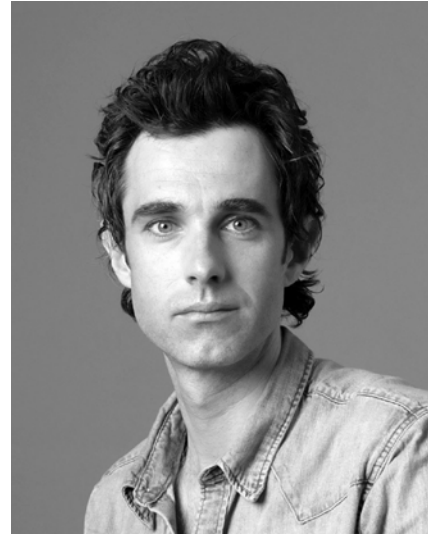
I'm trying very hard to always ask what is Stanley's function in the scenes and the play. Blanche is the lead character so I'm trying to make sure that I fulfil what Stanley is required to do in each scene even if that is unpleasant.

Do you have any pre-show rituals?

I like to get to the theatre early, I generally eat the same thing every day and then I like to warm up slowly and gently and get my voice and body feeling the way I want them to be. It's also a process of letting go of my real life and troubles and focusing on what I need to do that night in the play.

Do you consciously experiment with rhythm in your performance? How so?

Stanley is a very disruptive force in the play. His rhythm is completely at odds with Blanche and Stella, he's brash, loud and unrefined both physically and vocally so I've been trying to be conscious of that as we develop the work.



Mark Leonard Winter

'Everybody has an idea of what Stanley is supposed to be...which is deeply unhelpful when you are trying to find your truth and authenticity in approaching the role.'

Michelle Lim Davidson, Mark Leonard Winter and Nikki Shiels





Michelle Lim Davidson and Mark Leonard Winter

Why do you think we are studying this play today?

It's an American masterpiece. I've never encountered a work that is both poetic and realistic. Ugly, savage and violent yet full of compassion, tenderness and open to the beauty of these flawed, complex and compromised characters.

What creative challenges does this role present for you?

Everybody has an idea of what Stanley is supposed to be. Marlon Brando stamped an authority on the role with his film performance and everything feels in comparison to him which is deeply unhelpful when you are trying to find your truth and authenticity in approaching the role. Also people who have seen the film think it is about Stanley, due to Brando's performance and that couldn't be further from the truth when people experience the play. The other challenge is Stanley's violence, both physical and sexual. These are difficult and unpleasant things to hold and explore. He's a very tricky character to play and has definitely been one of the most challenging roles I've ever played.



Working with text

Winter notes the established notions of this 'American masterpiece' and his character Stanley. Can you list at least three elements of this production – the performances and the design – that reposition the work as a production for now?



Acting skills

Winter says that he is always seeking Stanley's function in the play. How do you understand Stanley's function in specific scenes and the whole play? How did Winter's performance convey this?

STEVE MOUZAKIS

Mitch

Tell us about your character. What drives them?

Mitch is Stanley's friend. They served together in the war and now work at the same plant and are even on a bowling team together. He's not as brash or as 'alpha' as Stanley but they've been through a lot together and are close. So close that he doesn't seem to mind too much that he's often the butt of Stanley's jokes. Mitch's mother is dying, he worries about her and himself, given that he's single and will be 'alone when she goes'. He doesn't seem to be very well educated or considered bright, but he is referred to as being more sensitive than the other men and is comfortable in the company of women.

Mitch is trying hard to better himself by working out and taking care of his appearance. He's trying to make himself more attractive to women. Everyone seems to have partnered up except him. It's why meeting Blanche is so monumental for him. Here is this exciting and extraordinary woman that he's only just met, and they have this instant connection. The poker night is a disaster but for Mitch it's the luckiest night of his life. He's looking for a companion and finds one in Blanche. Their relationship ultimately falls apart due to what he considers to be lies but the connection that's forged between them and the intimate personal stories they share with each other are very real.

How do you embody your character?

Every element that is incorporated during the rehearsal process from the design (the world created) to costuming and of course the accent and dialect work, in this case, in some way helps you to ultimately embody or feel like you're in your character's skin. For me, one of the quickest ways into playing Mitch is his physicality. He actually describes his body at one point when he tells Blanche that he's been working out and going to the gym. He's also pleasantly surprised to hear that she doesn't see him as 'heavy set'. To me this suggested that Mitch is somewhat self-conscious about his body and is possibly discovering this new 'fitter' one that he now has. In any case, this gave me this sense of him not being exactly sure what to do with his body or where to put it which might at times make him look somewhat awkward. With the costume and the shoes or boots in particular I found his stance which gives me the feeling of being heavy set or flat footed. Rooted to a spot like a tree.



Steve Mouzakis;
(below) Nikki Shiels and Steve Mouzakis

'[Mitch is] looking for a companion and finds one in Blanche, their relationship ultimately falls apart due to what he considers to be lies but the connection that's forged between them and the intimate personal stories they share with each other are very real.'



Building relationship

Consider Mouzakis's comments about Blanche and Mitch's relationship. What did you notice in how the actors worked together to build this relationship and then demonstrate its demise?



Describing Mitch

Consider the phrases Mouzakis uses to describe Mitch. Make a list of additional words you could use to describe his character and acting skills.

KATHERINE TONKIN

Eunice

Tell us about your character in a nutshell. What drives them?

Eunice Hubbell lives upstairs from Stella and Stanley with her husband Steve. They own the property, so they are Stella and Stanley's landlords, as well as their friends and neighbours. Eunice is very direct in nature and calls things as she sees them. She is unafraid to voice her opinions or stand up for herself, and, at times, her relationship to Steve is tumultuous. There is violence and volatility between them, but also affection. She is protective of Stella and I think cares for her deeply. On the one hand she's a very caring woman with a great sense of humour who I feel is driven by a strong desire for community and connection, yet on the other hand, she is a very practical woman, driven by the very real needs of survival. Her advice to Stella at the end of the play is ruthlessly pragmatic. She knows there are few choices available to women of their time and class to make it in the world on their own, especially with a baby to care for. It's about making the choice to survive, regardless of the cards you've been dealt; 'No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going'.

How do you embody your character?

As a starting point for Eunice, I've taken up this notion of her being unafraid to take up space. Her voice is loud, direct and to the point, and her physicality is open and relaxed. She bangs doors, yells at Steve, oblivious to the neighbours, calls out to people over the balcony. This is her domain and she will use it as she pleases. She stands up to the men in the play in a way that the other women can't and so for me it was important to give her a vocal quality and physical presence that was grounded and unapologetic.



Katherine Tonkin;
(below) Katherine Tonkin and Michelle Lim
Davidson



'I think it's great to start wearing elements of costume as soon as possible as it absolutely impacts the physical choices you make in rehearsal.'



Steve Mouzakis, Gareth Yuen, Mark Leonard Winter, Michelle Lim Davidson, Nikki Sheils and Katherine Tonkin

How do design elements like set/props/costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

I think it's great to start wearing elements of costume as soon as possible as it absolutely impacts the physical choices you make in rehearsal. For instance, I don't wear skirts or dresses a whole lot in my day-to-day life, so rehearsing in them is incredibly useful. Eunice needs to move and exist in space in a way that's different from me and so shoes and clothing can really support that. I also climb a lot of stairs and have to do some fight choreography in this show so it's important to get a sense of how costume will impact the physical demands of playing Eunice, and then work with the design team to make sure we strike the right balance between design and practicality. Rehearsing on the set has also been invaluable to get a sense of how claustrophobic these spaces are. These people are quite literally living on top of one another and so getting a sense of the pressure cooker created by that has been extremely informative.

Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

One of the things I'm doing presently is collecting a whole lot of images of paintings and photographs of women alone in a room or standing in windows. Some of the images are quite candid, some highly composed, some are abstract, some literal, some contemporary, some from back in the 40's. I'm sharing them with our Director Anne-Louise Sarks and Designer Mel Page to help us gather together a bit of a tonal and gestural palate to build ideas for what might happen in the rooms and windows upstairs throughout the show. I find visual references so helpful. They're a great creative stimulus for unlocking internal worlds and ideas.

Do you consciously experiment with rhythm in your performance? How so?

Aurally I've been immersing myself as much as I can with samples of the New Orleans "Yat" accent, as well as listening to a lot of New Orleans jazz. It's been helping me adjust my own vocal and physical rhythms to be more in line with the world of the play. The rhythms are direct, often syncopated, and with strong tonal inflections. I'll often listen to various eras of New Orleans music while I'm on my way to rehearsals. It's fun to try and bring those rhythms into my body and allow it to infuse my work.



Costume and set

Consider Tonkin's comments about working in costume and on set. How do the costumes and set influence the characters movement?



Acting skills

Describe what you noticed in Tonkin's physicality. How does her character 'take up space'? How this is shown through movement and gesture, in particular?

GARETH YUEN

Steve

Tell us about your character in a nutshell. What drives them?

Steve Hubbell is married to Eunice. They live in the flat above Stella and Stanley. Steve plays poker and is buddies with Stanley. He is driven by a desire to tell farmer and chicken stories.

How do you embody your character?

There are some roles where embodying the character comes easily, other times it can be a struggle. I like to be flexible in my approach to a role. I'm open to approaching it from the outside in (focusing on the external attributes first) or inside out (thinking about the character's psychology and attitudes first). Almost always it begins with a very thorough reading of the script, looking for clues and insights into the character – the ones that are obvious, and the ones that are hidden. I'm always looking for the key that reveals something vital and opens up the character to me.

Voice, movement, facial expression, gestures are all vital aspects of embodying a character. I might initiate my development of the character focusing on one of these, depending on the project and role. Initially it's intentional and may feel self-conscious. I explore these vocal and physical attributes, combined with considering what I know about the psychology and given circumstances of the character. Once I've found something I feel is key to the character, the other aspects often come more organically and with less conscious effort to fully embody the character.

For Steve, I have found the vocal dialect work of the New Orleans accent to be helpful in finding my way into the role. It is an accent that is up front and muscular, yet it has an ease. Steve's New Orleans accent is brash and unashamed. Just as in life, the people you spend time with affect your physicality, so Katherine and I are working on touch and gesture with each other that speaks of the intimacy and shared history of a husband and wife. From a working perspective, in the rehearsal room, this takes care and sensitivity, always being respectful of your acting partner's limits and wishes, and clearly considering and expressing your own. The most important thing with this kind of work is that everyone feels safe. From the confidence of that safety, we can then develop a physicality that reveals the danger and complexity of their relationship. A relationship that is characterised by verbal and physical outbursts and violence, and seemingly swift reconciliations and desire.



Gareth Yuen

'I have found the vocal dialect work of the New Orleans accent ... to be helpful in finding my way into the role. It is an accent that is up front and muscular yet it has an ease.'

Steve Mouzakis, Stephen Lopez, Mark Leonard Winter, Gareth Yuen and Nikki Shiels





Nikki Shiels, Steve Mouzakis, Stephen Lopez,
Mark Leonard Winter and Gareth Yuen

Do you have any pre-show rituals?

I like to be flexible with my craft and preparation, so I'm not completely beholden to any set of pre-show rituals, and I'll vary my pre-show preparation depending on the project. Generally, I like to get on stage, warm up my voice in the space, see how it resonates in different parts of the auditorium. I like to get a feel for the space – the stage can feel different each night – and connect my body to different parts of the stage, with the idea that comfort might open up possibility to new physical expression and discovery in the spur of the moment.

Before any show, the goal is to make sure I'm warm, flexible, agile and ready for whatever might happen – I love live theatre because anything can happen, whether it be on stage with wonderful, unexpected revelations about the story and character or back stage with seemingly disastrous show-wrecking catastrophes, I love the thrill of how we learn, find solutions for, and overcome whatever unfolds to make sure the show goes on – as long as everyone is safe!

I do love warming up with as many of my fellow creators as possible. I totally understand that for every practitioner it's different, and each person must do whatever personal preparation they require (and that sometimes they need time alone). I am however a great believer that any group warm-up you can get involving crew, stage-managers, company staff, cast helps to build a shared energy that makes for a more cohesive spirit on stage.



Analysing text

Yuen says that his character is driven by a desire to tell 'farmer and chicken stories'. Read through the scenes in which Steve tells these stories. How do they serve the script?



Safe and ethical working practises

How does Yuen describe his collaboration with Katherine Tonkin? What did you see in the physicality between Steve and Eunice?

STEPHEN LOPEZ

Pablo

Tell us about the character in a nutshell. What drives him?

Pablo is a factory worker who works with Stanley and Mitch. He is confident and at times outspoken, but ultimately knows his place amongst his friends. Pablo is a regular at the group's poker nights and doesn't miss an opportunity to get one over his friends. Money and bragging rights are a driving force for him.

How do you embody your character?

I've always been interested in discovering how people from time periods other than my own live day to day. Basic human wants and needs haven't changed too much throughout the course of history. So for me it's about discovering what a normal day in the life of my character would look like. What time do I wake up for work? Where do I work? How do I get ready in the morning? Do I shave? With what? What do I wear? Through the discovery of these elements and more, so much of my behaviour becomes authentically informed. Having a physically demanding job as Pablo, I've spent time locating where I may be carrying soreness and pain from my job. We have also worked with Geraldine Cook-Dafner (Voice & Dialect Coach) on specific dialects to bring to life the authentic accents and sounds of the characters from the show.

How do design elements like set/props/costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

Clothing is such a pivotal part of the process for me. What we wear changes our self-perception and behaviour. If you're a lawyer arguing an important case in court, you're going to feel very out of place in a hoodie and matching track suit pants. On the flip side, if you're settling in for a movie night on the couch, wearing your finest dress or suit, this is going to make for a very uncomfortable evening. In period work, there can be generalisations about how people stood, sat and walked differently. But really what they wore was what was affecting their movement. Getting the correct clothes on, as soon as you can, always helps connect you to the true physical identity of your role.



Stephen Lopez

'As performers we really need to treat ourselves in the same way athletes do and make sure we're properly warmed up before every performance for us to be at our very best.'

Mark Leonard Winter and Stephen Lopez





Stephen Lopez, Steve Mouzakis and Gareth Yuen

Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

A rehearsal technique we have been using throughout rehearsals is 'checking in'. As there are some confronting themes and elements that arise in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, fantastically lead by our director Anne-Louise Sarkis, we are constantly checking in with each other to make sure everyone is emotionally and physically alright at all times. Under the guidance of Amy Cater (Intimacy Coordinator) and Nigel Poulton (Fight Director) we are using specific language and techniques that allow us to approach difficult material and situations in a completely safe and specific way that ultimately makes the work so much clearer and easier to do.

Do you have any pre-show rituals?

Pre-show I always do a physical and vocal warm up as well as finding a quiet moment to do some meditation. As performers we really need to treat ourselves in the same way athletes do and make sure we're properly warmed up before every performance for us to be at our very best. Once I'm warmed up and in my character clothes, I love to play music from the particular time period we're in, which helps me step into our world.



Music

A number of the actors, including Lopez, discuss the use of music in character development and their own physical warm ups. Listen to some music from 1940s New Orleans. What do you notice? How can you connect it with what you saw and heard on stage?



Acting skills

Discuss Lopez's comments on embodying a character from a different time period. Make a list of the time and location specific movements and gestures within this production.

GABRIELLA BARBAGALLO

Gee Gee/Nurse

Can you give an example of a rehearsal technique you're using as you create this show?

Research is one of my favourite parts of the rehearsal process to help find the personality and flavour of the location and time period. As the play is set in the years leading up to the American Civil Rights Movement, it was imperative for me to get a good grasp of how Black women survived during a time where segregation was in full force and distant relatives born into slavery weren't so distant. New Orleans has such a specific culture so even though both Gee Gee and the Nurse are smaller characters, understanding who these women represented helps me bring the truth of the text to life.

Do you have any pre-show rituals?

In prep for any show, I like to get a good full body stretch in, some deep rhythmic breathing and some humming, tongue twisters and lip trills to wake up the voice. Right before going onstage, I like to run through the next scene in my mind. Either that or speaking the lines quietly to myself, moving my body physically (a little shake is always good!) and taking some time to think about where my character has come from and where they are going helps me get my head in the game (like Troy Bolton).

What creative challenges does this play present for you?

Gee Gee is a minor role that helps shape the world of the play, primarily through her interactions with Blanche and Eunice. The tricky thing about playing a minor role is finding the truth and purpose in who they are when there is minimal text to draw from. The way I accomplish this is by interrogating real world truths related to the social context of the original text and expanding out from there. I believe Gee Gee speaks to the socio-political context of the early-mid 20th century, representing the history of French and Spanish colonialism in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the systemic racism of the Jim Crow laws. Though these elements are difficult to make apparent on stage with such little time, the knowledge and communication around this in the rehearsal room has helped establish both the character and the world of the play at large.



(above and below) Gabriella Barbagallo

'Gee Gee speaks to the socio-political context of the early-mid 20th century, representing the history of French and Spanish colonialism in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the systemic racism of the Jim Crow laws.'



Historical context

Discuss your own knowledge of the historical events that Barbagallo mentions. How do they play out in the production? How can you connect *A Streetcar Named Desire* to the historical moment in which it was written?



Acting skills

Gee Gee is one of the first characters we see on stage. What do you see in Barbagallo's use of voice, body and gesture? How does her performance inform the mood of the play?

KAYA BYRNE
Young Collector/Doctor

How do design elements like set/props/costumes impact your performance? What helps and how?

For me, acting at its best requires a level of belief in your setting or circumstance that allows you to respond with truth and without inhibition. Set, props and costumes all assist in creating the physical landscape of the world of the play and when believable (either through their authenticity or my imagination), they help me dive into the world and buy into my character's circumstance. I don't like feeling dependent on a prop, but if it's a part of the scene where my character has to try and light a temperamental lighter, I'm helped as an actor when I'm given a temperamental lighter that will only light after some struggle. This prop now gives me, as an actor, the same challenge that my character has and allows me to focus on my relationship to my scene partner, rather than how well I'm pretending to light this thing.

Do you consciously manipulate contrast in your performance? How so?

In all shows I do, I try to maintain a level of curiosity and spontaneity, particularly if it's a long run. It's not always possible to change things up much depending on the kind of show, but I love finding different points of focus in order to keep making new discoveries during a play-run. Sometimes I'll experiment with a different centre (mind, will, heart) to see how it changes my relationship to my scene partner or circumstance. I also like to experiment with changing the direction of my action to see if it unlocks something new (whether I'm front-footed or back-footed, or if I'm expanding or contracting through an action). Above all, I always find the most variation in performance through active listening with my scene partners; every line will always carry a slight nuance that may, in turn, change my impulse when I respond.



Kaya Byrne

'I love finding different points of focus in order to keep making new discoveries during a play-run.'

Kaya Byrne and Nikki Shiels



Props

Considering Byrne's comments about props. Make a list of all the props you can remember from the production. How did the props inform the world of the play for you?



Acting skills

Discuss Lopez's comments about contrast and variation in his performance. Compare these to Lim Davidson's belief that 'acting isn't feeling' on page 10. What similarities and differences are there in their respective approaches?

VERONICA PEÑA NEGRETTE

Flower Seller

Tell us about your character in a nutshell. What drives them?

I am playing the role of Flower Seller; she appears in the play in Act 2, Scene 9, during a climactic moment where Blanche is beginning to lose her grip on her own perceived reality of life in Elysian Fields. Flower Seller is driven by, not only her motivation to sell flowers, but the energy of what has occurred moments before between Mitch and Blanche, and she serves to represent and drive Blanche's mental state, triggering repressed memories of death and shame.

How do you embody your character?

I wanted the Flower Seller to drive the scene, and to do that I had to ensure that my vocal and movement choices made sense in relation to the tone of the moments occurring between Blanche and Mitch, right before my entrance. My focus was on resonance and elongating the vowel sounds in my lines to create an echo quality; I wanted the sound to travel around the entirety of the stage. Flower Seller is an outsider presence in Tennessee Williams's world, I wanted her to almost float across the space, so I focused on gliding movement and a strong posture to create a presence that can be felt by Blanche, that affects her the moment she notices it.

How do design elements like set/props/costume impact your performance? What helps and how?

Elements like set, costume and props impact my performance almost entirely. The simple knowing of what shoes your character wears can immediately impact the way that the character holds themselves and moves through the space. Costume can give immense clarity as to what kind of person you are portraying. For the flower seller, being able to rehearse with the set is incredibly helpful for understanding my characters relationship to the world Anne-Louise has created. It allowed me to get a feel for how she navigates the streets of New Orleans, and her relationship to the Kowalski home.

What is a big idea in this play, in relation to your character?

In my character preparation I have come to the decision that the Flower Seller exists not only in reality but also in an abstract realm where she symbolises death, and more specifically what death represents to Blanche in relation to her past traumas – the passing of her first love Allan, her parents and relatives. The Flower Seller symbolises death and shame, but also new life and the beauty that comes from pain and sorrow.

What creative challenges does this role present for you?

The main creative challenge I have come to face is navigating how Flower Seller fits into the real world of Elysian Fields, as well as the abstract realm of Blanche's psyche. Another challenge is that her lines are in Spanish. From my perspective as the actor, I am aware that many audience members may not understand what I am saying, therefore it is very important to convey my characters motivations through vocal tone and physical embodiment.



(above and below) Veronica Peña Negrette

'The flower seller symbolises death and shame, but also new life and the beauty that comes from pain and sorrow.'



Motion

Consider Peña Negrette's description of her character as the driver of Scene 9. How was movement used in Scene 9 both by Flower Seller and between all characters?



Language

Peña Negrette predicts that many audience members will not understand her lines as they are in Spanish. What is the effect of experiencing a performance in a language other than English? Did it make you focus on other aspects of her performance?



Set and costume design

Learn more about the set and costume design for *A Streetcar Named Desire* in this reflection with Set and Costume Designer Mel Page.

A Streetcar Named Desire is originally set in 1947, in New Orleans mostly in a smallish two-bedroom apartment, where Stanley and Stella live. We are putting a version of that apartment on stage and we have also chosen to include the second storey of the building, which is Eunice and Steve's apartment. In the original play, there's a lot that happens off stage in the stage directions. As part of our set design, we are putting these moments in view of the audience. So, you get a sense of the private world that's happening around the action of the original script.

Something that's been part of our discussion from the beginning is how to make the darkness and intensity of this world witnessed by the other characters – and therefore to suggest that they are complicit. We've reflected that in the set design by having these visible moments, like the neighbours upstairs, that you don't normally see. Also, this two-storey apartment is on a revolve, so we can move into other spaces that you don't normally see, for example, the bathroom. In moments when somebody would normally go off stage, we can revolve and see them experiencing that moment at the same time as we see something else happening on stage. We get a window into these more private moments and understand the layers of characters who are always witnessing alongside the audience.



Mel Page



(above) Michelle Lim Davidson and Mark Leonard Winter;
(below) Michelle Lim Davidson and Nikki Shiels



Michelle Lim Davidson, Mark Leonard Winter, Katherine Tonkin and Nikki Shiels

Even though this production is grounded in 1947, New Orleans, we're also making it more contemporary. We made this decision because Tennessee Williams's language is so specific and grounded in its time, but also everything that's happening in this play is so relevant now. Sadly, the violence that exists within the play is still happening now. We didn't want to make a version of the play that feels like it's from another time – we want to push the audience to engage and that's why we have put a contemporary lens around it. One of the ways that we're doing that is emphasising the theatre of the piece and the fluidity of time in the design. For example, the bed in the apartment is period accurate but it's also very popular today. We have sought out objects that can speak to both times. The set sits in a black void so we're always very aware that we're in the theatre, we're not pretending that we're in 1947. Blanche's line from later in the play "I don't want realism, I want magic" epitomises the world of the play and the version we are making.

This set offers a lot of challenges, especially to our lighting and sound designers. It's a two-storey box, it's revolving, and it has a ceiling so Lighting Designer Niklas Pajanti can't light things from the top, as you would often traditionally do in the theatre. There's also a lot of the practical lighting mentioned in the script. We've worked very closely around how we make the set work for his lighting design. We've worked together on choosing finishes and creating the right feel – for example, he's come along to the paint workshop and we've looked at paints together.

I think the revolve is quite specific in that it needs support from the other design elements, music is vital to support all the transitions. We've been so lucky to have a version of the set that moves in rehearsals so we plot and play with these things all together. The revolve and this interplay between the different design elements is like a dance and will give the work a whole extra layer of choreography. The lighting and sound design really helps to give this contemporary feel, to give a kind of context and soul to what we're trying to achieve.



Revisit Part A

Return to the design images in Part A of this education pack and make connections between those images and what you saw in the final design on stage.



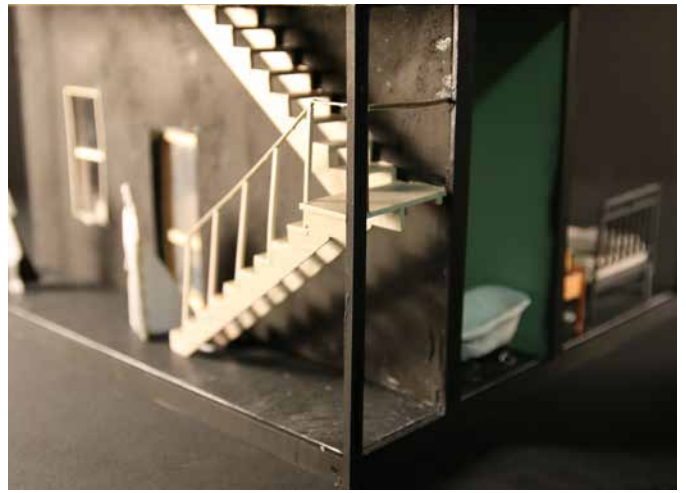
Storyboard

Create a simple version of the set model out of cardboard. Re-read the script and take photos of your model in its position for each scene. Create a storyboard that shows how the set changed throughout the production. Use the photos in this pack to help guide you.



Collaboration

Reflecting on the Set & Costume Designer's discussion of their collaboration with the other designers, make a list of all the moments in the production in which you noticed various design elements working together to achieve the historic and contemporary world of this production.



Set design by Mel Page. Photos: Emily Doyle.



Costume renders by Mel Page

Lighting design

Learn more about the lighting design for *A Streetcar Named Desire* in this Q&A with Lighting Designer Niklas Pajanti.

Can you please share a bit about your role in the production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

I am the lighting designer for the show. My job is multifaceted and collaborative. It includes the following responsibilities:

- Providing visibility so the audience can see the story unfold on stage.
- I work closely with the director to ensure the lighting design aligns with their overall vision of the production.
- I interpret the script to understand the narrative, themes, and mood of the play and how that might relate to lighting states.
- I work with the set designer, costume designer, and sound designer to make sure the overall look and feel of the show, the scenography, is cohesive.
- I also work with a small team of electricians who build all the special effects I may require, lighting crew who install all the lighting fixtures in the theatre, and programmers who programme the lighting console to recall lighting cues at the appropriate time.

Has there been anything unique or new for you working on this production? What are some of the challenges and/or surprises you've had along the way?

The set design is a two-storey house positioned on a revolve. It spins around at certain times, revealing different points of view into the apartments. So the available angles and positions to point lights at the performers are quite limited. This is a fun challenge for me to work on and these kinds of limitations are what will inform the final look or aesthetic design of the show.

How do you work with the director to support her vision for the production? What is your involvement throughout the creative process from rehearsals through to production season?

I sit in rehearsals most days, watching Anne-Louise work with the actors as they decide how to tell the story. I make notes that become my cue sheets; these outline when and how lighting changes occur during the performance and what they might look like. I pay close attention to what Anne-Louise says she wants the show to feel like at any given time, so I can support this through my lighting choices. I'm simultaneously creating a lighting plan in a software programme called Vectorworks. This is a detailed technical drawing that outlines the placement and focus of all the lighting instruments I intend to use to achieve the desired effects and looks throughout the show. I'm making notes on colours and textures I may use in the show and I'm also making notes on programming to put into the lighting console once we're in the theatre venue.

Nikki Shiels



Niklas Pajanti



Lighting analysis

Based on Pajanti's comments above and your memory of the lighting in the performance, write short responses to these questions:

- How did lighting help support transitions between scenes?
- When did lighting manipulate your mood? Describe the lighting in detail.
- Were lighting fixtures deliberately visible or not? Why?
- When was lighting used to focus your attention in one specific area? How and why?
- Do you remember the opening and closing lighting states of the production?



Music

Learn more about the composition and sound design for *A Streetcar Named Desire* through this reflection by Stefan Gregory.

In starting to design any work, knowing the aesthetics and interests of the director is the most important thing. Because I know Director Anne-Louise Sarkis very well and we've worked together before, we didn't talk too much before we started. Most of my conversations were with Set and Costume Designer, Mel Page. We talked a lot about the concept for it as that evolved and her design evolved. I listened in to some of her meetings with Anne-Louise and kept abreast of where we were at.

More often than not, the idea that you come in with on the first day of rehearsal is so different to what you end up with on opening and if you don't let yourself evolve and you insist on being stuck with that first idea you end up with something that's not right for the show. That's not to say the early planning before the show doesn't pay off but you might end up redesigning and recomposing a show many times and each time you get faster at it, because you learn more about the production and then you arrive at an end point.

Coming in to a classic, I had in my mind a lot of the genres associated with the period. A lot of the film music which echoed out of this era. I thought because there's a period aspect to the design, in certain regards, and because the characters are larger than life, there's no escaping these classic characters and these classic situations and these very well-known theatrical scenarios. All that stuff feeds in – so the starting point was very much how do you reference these classic moments and be true to that in an interesting way and in a way which isn't twee?

I started thinking about ways to reference, or to make use of film music from the bygone era and jazz from that era onwards – and the way that jazz and film music is echoed through the ages. I started thinking about that how I can write something which has echoes of that and still feels interesting and the right tone for the piece.



Stefan Gregory;
(below) Michelle Lim Davidson





In the first few weeks of rehearsal, we realised that the music needed to be contemporary to help guide us through the new perspective we wanted to put on this work. It's hard to do that through costume and characterization because the script is so strong with its language. It's challenging to do a Tennessee Williams without accents, for instance.

I've been working on several pieces of music that feel like they belong to the piece and its strong association with time, place and genre but also feel relevant to us now. That's a tricky intersection. I'm taking music which resonates with the time, then re-writing it with instruments that are contemporary and producing it in a contemporary way using electronic production techniques. Currently I'm pursuing six different parallel ideas or threads. Anne-Louise has been in dialogue with me throughout. I keep showing her things and sometimes I'm surprised by her particular direction, which feels radical and dangerous and we'll see how much sticks in the end!

The low level nitty gritty process is that every day I write as many ideas as I can and don't think about them. Then the next day, I come back and listen to them and rework them more and instinctively feel if they're the right thing or not. So, it's basically, listening, generation, listening, generation. I do write in my head a bit. I have a notion but as soon as I start working on the piano or on the computer, they change. The ratio of music to the content which ends up getting used must be several hundred to one in terms of minutes, or even one thousand to one. I make hours of music for a production and then only end up using 10 minutes of it. It's the only way to do it, I think.

One of the biggest things for this production is having a realistic set on a revolve. In my experience, the slow, revolving apartment demands a certain approach to scoring. It works really well when you have a beautiful object – slowly orbiting in space – supported by the score.

Another element is tying the score to Blanche. She is a very strong character and the aim of this production is to show more of her perspective than what would ordinarily be shown. Because of this, the music has to be with her at points. For instance, I'm trying to find a way of using electronic drum beats. If they are too aggressive and masculine sounding, that pulls us out of Blanche's perspective.

I initially thought I'd score this all with brass, using a jazz ensemble. That was a way to reference the period, the harmonic language of the time, but make it contemporary through the style of writing and the way the music is used. There are so many ways to use brass instruments and woodwinds like saxophones, so I thought I'd use a quartet of two saxophones, a trumpet and a trombone and maybe a bass and drums, a real jazz sextet line-up. That was my first instinct. That might still happen but I'm currently pulling back from the jazz instruments. It's a strange process to talk about at this stage.

It's a very strong team and that's really exciting. What I'm seeing in rehearsals already is that no matter what I do, there's going to be incredible performances in this. I have no doubt it will be a great show, I just hope I can find the right thing to support it.



Composition and sound design analysis

Based on Gregory's comments above and your memory of the music and sound in the performance, write short responses to these questions:

- How did music help support transitions between scenes?
- Can you identify moments where music was manipulating mood? Describe the music in detail.
- Make a list of the diegetic sounds you recall from the production.
- How does the music for this production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* connect or disconnect with the sound descriptions in Tennessee Williams's stage directions?

Acting skills – voice

The job of a voice and dialect coach is to support the director in creating the vocal life of the play, work with the cast to ensure the meaning comes across in the language, and ensure each actor has the vocal stamina required for performing the season.

Learn more about voice and dialect coaching for *A Streetcar Named Desire* in this Q&A with Voice and Dialect Coach Geraldine Cook-Dafner.

Can you please share a bit about your role in the production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

My role is Voice and Dialect coach. I help the actors look after their vocal health by providing warmups and ongoing support for the vocal technique required for the production, coaching them with the dialects and analysing the text in individual and group voice sessions and in rehearsal.

How do you work with Anne-Louise to support her vision for the production?

I always have an initial conversation with Director Anne-Louise Sarkis to discuss her vision for the production and how I can support that by providing techniques which will help the cast embody the vocal and dialect characteristics of their characters. I work with Anne-Louise in rehearsal and provide feedback to her and the cast in relation to the performance of the dialect and whether their vocal technique is supporting the vision of the production.

What is your involvement throughout the creative process from rehearsals through to production season?

I attend the first read and listen to the cast, making notes on their interpretation of the dialect and what support I think they will need. I discuss my availability with the Stage Manager who then arranges individual and group voice calls with the cast. I try and work on sections of the play they have just covered or about to cover in rehearsal so we can analyse their vocal needs. Sometimes, I am able to provide feedback if I have just witnessed the scene or the cast member might need something specific they wish to work on. I will then attend all the previews until opening night and provide feedback and, if I can, attend a performance mid-season.



Geraldine Cook-Dafner

Steve Mouzakis, Nikki Shiels, Stephen Lopez, Mark Leonard Winter and Gareth Yuen





Michelle Lim Davidson, Katherine Tonkin, Gabriella Barbagallo, Kaya Byrne, Stephen Lopez, Gareth Yuen, Steve Mouzakis, Nikki Shiels and Mark Leonard Winter

Cultural context and the associated language are key to this play and production. What is your own research process and how much of it do you share with the cast?

I collect as many samples of the dialect as I can and spend some time immersed in these samples before rehearsals commence. Sometimes, cast members will ask to have sessions with me before rehearsals begin. I share as many resources as I think are necessary with the cast. I also research academic articles written about the play which I may only share with the director. I prepare sound samples of the dialect and send out a dialect package to each cast member with a list of sound samples, where sound substitutions need to be made from Australian English to the dialect of the play. I also read reviews of the play if it has been performed before and watch videos of various productions of the play if they are available.

Has there been anything unique or new for you working on this production?

I previously worked on *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams at Melbourne Theatre Company, so I was aware of how rigorous the cast must be with their vocal work. It is a very well written play and demands attention to detail in terms of its themes and vocal demands. For example, Tennessee Williams's punctuation can help an actor find the character's speaking rhythm and how they code switch from one character to another.

What are some of the challenges and/or surprises you've had along the way?

When you start to work on a play like this, you have to ensure that the actors are 'show fit'. This means they need to be able to sustain speaking for three hours, eight shows a week. Some of the dialogue is very heightened: the cast are speaking above their normal speaking range. It is a bit like running a marathon. When you prepare for a marathon, you make sure you warm up your muscles and practice the route, so your muscles get used to the journey. It is no different for an actor, except they have to do it eight times a week for at least six weeks. Whilst this is not a surprise, it is always a challenge during rehearsal.

There is also a dialect challenge with *A Streetcar Named Desire*. There are two dialects spoken in the play. One is Mississippi, spoken by Blanche and Stella, and the other is Yat, spoken by all the other characters. Yat is a distinct dialect of New Orleans. The cast need to be careful they don't pick up each other's rhythms and sounds.

The other challenge is that we have to believe these characters speak in a conversational tone with each other but the actors need to be heard in the theatre, so they have to appear relaxed.

Safe and ethical working practices



Mark Leonard Winter and Michelle Lim Davidson

Melbourne Theatre Company is committed to providing a safe and accessible work environment for all our staff, crew, cast and creatives. The responsibility to ensure a safe and ethical work environment is a whole company approach. Learn more about our policies and commitments that shape the way we work at mtc.com.au/company-documents

To create a safe and ethical work environment, the *A Streetcar Named Desire* team includes a variety of specialist roles such as Intimacy Coordinator and Fight Director. These roles work with team to ensure the cast are maintaining safe practices during the developing and presenting theatre stages of the theatre production process.

INTIMACY COORDINATOR

Intimacy coordinators (ICs) work with actors to develop language and movement around how they use their bodies in relation to each other and the space. They also consider the cohesion, motion, and rhythm of a production to coordinate all the intimate moments such as kissing, touching and close contact between actors.

FIGHT DIRECTOR

Fight directors work with the director to choreograph the composition and structure of movement, gesture and stylisation in fight scenes. They often consider the variation, contrast, motion, rhythm and emphasis of scenes to develop safe ways to portray moments of conflict through choreographed fight scenes.

Intimacy Coordinator – Amy Cater

As Intimacy Coordinator, I am responsible for the safety and sustainability of the actors working on this piece and the content that they are exposed to during the work. Creatively, I work on relationship building to cover any pairings of individuals who have scenes to do with intimacy, nudity, simulated sex or violence with sexual undertones or hyper-exposure, which covers scenes where cast are taken into an elevated psychological state.

A unique part about this production are the technical elements of the set – we have a double storey set and have only had access to the bottom part for most of rehearsals and will not have access to some spaces until we're in the theatre. It is also on a revolve, which of course informs the blocking and choreography on a stage that is moving. We make offers and choices and then have to revisit them and adjust slightly to accommodate those technical elements. This is challenging but makes the conversation very alive throughout rehearsal. We're having to be very nimble about what story we're trying to tell between these couples and pairings, knowing that we have to create one or two (and sometimes more) different options. These options are dependent on where the stage will be facing, what the audience will be visually observing and what the audience might be hearing but not visually witnessing.

This is the second time Anne-Louise and I have worked on a production together. We did *Bernhart/Hamlet* as well. We had some good pre-production chats about the themes and how we were planning to tell the stories – whether it was on stage visually or if it was implied. It's all about the build-up to a moment of domestic violence and sexual violence. We found that the build-up in the tension, heading towards this crescendo moment, was often where we wanted to sit rather than playing out once we got there. So we're using the revolve and lighting in a particular ways so that we know what's about to happen but something changes our view in that moment.

At times, I will work with the cast either one-on-one or in pairs and then bring things to Director Anne-Louise Sarks to observe, give feedback and tweak. At other times, we will be in the space together side-by-side, feeding off each other and working with this kind of shorthand language. We are also very collaborative with the cast because they are inside the moment and viscerally



Amy Cater;
(below) Nikki Shiels and Steve Mouzakis





Mark Leonard Winter and Michelle Lim Davidson

feeling that experience. As an Intimacy Coordinator, I ask a lot of questions in the moment. I know where I'm heading but it means that answers are coming from the actors' instincts and then I can help shape moments based on what I'm seeing from the outside and what I know we need to be portraying for the audience. In collaboration with the actors, I make offers and mould the choreography and the pace in the detailing of things. I give feedback on how long to hold and sit in moments and gestures.

Because Anne-Louise has got her eyes over the entire performance, I can be more of a deep-dive person on the intimacy and relationships. I might pick up details that she may be too full-scope to notice, for example 'remember we wanted to set this intention' or 'I think we dropped a beat here'. I'm tracking to make sure things that were set up in closed-room rehearsals, where we have much more time to hash things out, don't get dropped within a run of the show.

In terms of the lifespan of the production:

- Before rehearsals, I talk with Anne-Louise; I have one-on-one meetings with all of the cast around anything useful for me to know and talking about each of their characters; and I have paired sessions with each of the couples to start familiarising them with each other so that the chemistry is believable and the histories of those couples are believable.
- I'll pop in and out of rehearsals based on scheduling and when they get to particular scenes, they often mark things out for the bigger intimacy moments and then I'll come in and help fill in the gaps.
- As we get to full runs, I'm doing more broader emotional feedback and adjustments based on what we had decided early about the intentions of those moments.
- When we get into the theatre, it's making sure that they have processes of when to practice intimate moments or not. We have a really great language with stage managers where they are constantly checking in with the cast around whether we're doing things to full intensity or not.
- When we start getting into dress runs and previews, I'm just feeling the nuance of the moment, the skeleton that we've built. By this stage, we've developed something really layered and rich. I will watch a run or two through the season to see if it is still holding then give notes and feedback.

Fight Director – Nigel Poulton

Can you please share a bit about your role in the production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

My role is to help realise the artistic vision of the production, particularly as it relates to the fights and moments of violence that are contained within the script. A big part of that process is working very closely with the actors and Director Anne-Louise Sarks to develop a physical language that we think is best suited for this vision.

Has there been anything unique or new for you working on this production? What are some of the challenges and/or surprises you've had along the way?

I think every production is unique, but this one has been particularly interesting as we explore the moments of conflict and violence on the floor; they keep changing as we work on them. I think it's because we've been exploring the work in a really organic way, and so the tangents that the floor work has taken have been quite fascinating.

How do you work with the director to support her vision for the production? What is your involvement throughout the creative process from rehearsals through to production season?

Anne-Louise is a director who invites collaboration and respects the voices of all participants in the process. She's also very interested in what expertise you bring to the room, and respects that. My involvement has been a continual one since week one – gently shaping the physical language of the production and developing trust and confidence in the actors to be able to explore the work at a deep level. The work will become more locked-in as we move towards performance. We will start to see a consistency that makes sure actions are dramatically appropriate, safe and repeatable night after night.



Nigel Poulton;
(below) Steve Mouzakis, Stephen Lopez, Mark Leonard Winter, Gareth Yuen and Nikki Shiels



Learn more



Analysis questions

Explore a range of analysis questions in our interactive post-show resource. Recall key moments from the production with prompts about what happened on stage.

Explore the resource at mtc.com.au/eduhub



Onstage gallery

See more images from the Melbourne Theatre Company production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in our online gallery.

View the gallery at mtc.com.au/eduhub



Script notes

Learn from Actor Nikki Shiels and Director Anne-Louise Sarks about using *A Streetcar Named Desire*'s script to bring the play to the stage.

Watch the video at mtc.com.au/eduhub