

Document Citation

Title	A streetcar named desire
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Kazan, Elia (1909-2003), Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey
Film Subjects	A Streetcar named desire, Kazan, Elia, 1951

THE FILMS OF VIVIEN LEIGH

Saturday December 19

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

CAST Blanche Dubois Vivien Leigh Stanley Kowalski Marlon Brando
Stella Kowalski * Hunter Mitch Karl Malden Steve Rudy Bond
Pablo Nick Dennis Eunice Peg Hillias Doctor Richard Garrick.
Matron Anne Dere

CREDITS Produced by Charles K Feldman Directed by Elia Kazan
Screenplay by Tennessee Williams from his own play adaptation by
Oscar Saul Musical director Ray Heindorf Art Direction
Richard Day Photography Harry Stradling Editor David
Weisbart

Release Date September 20 1951
Running time 125 minutes

The following is excerpted from Kazan on Kazan by Michel Ciment

Question A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE IS YOUR ONLY EXPERIENCE OF MAKING
A FILM FROM A STAGE PLAY

Response First, I must say that I had a very great resistance to doing it. It's very hard to become involved in something a second time. I did it for an extremely personal reason which is that I feel closer to Williams personally than to any other playwright I've worked with. Possibly it's the nature of his talent: it's so vulnerable, so naked, it's more naked than anyone else's. I wanted to protect him, to look after him. Not that he's a weak man: he's an extremely strong man, very strong minded. But when he asked me repeatedly to make the film of STREETCAR, I finally said I'd do it. I thought, well, that's a stage play. I think it's the best play I've ever done. It ranks with O'Neill's best plays, as the best America has ever had. I must try to find visual equivalents for the verbal poetry that it has. I engaged a screenwriter and we began to 'open it up,' from the point of view of where the events occurred to work backwards into Blanche's past. We had scenes from before the start of the present play, designed to show the circumstances under which Blanche left her home community. We tried to show that she was sort of a refugee in the New Orleans scene. We worked fairly hard for four or five months. Then I read this script and I thought, well, we've done a pretty good job on it. Then I put it away and got involved in doing some other things: casting. I remember that I reread it a week later and I thought it was awful: it had lost the best qualities of Williams' work. Even as story-telling it was bad because the strength of STREETCAR is its compression. Then I suddenly made a very radical decision, right or wrong. I suddenly decided, I'm going to just shoot the play. And I'll even put most of it in the apartment. Most of it happens in Williams' imagination. I'm not going to pretend it takes place actually on the streets of present day New Orleans. There is a streetcar named Daisy Rae 'desire' but it has more symbolic reality than actual reality, and I said, 'I'm not going to show her in the streetcar named Desire, that would be nothing more than a visual joke, whereas if

if she talks about it, it comes out fragrant, weighted with her emotions. So I photographed my production of his masterpiece-- and I do think it's a masterpiece-- almost precisely as he had written it for the stage.

Once I decided on that, I started to work on the mise en scene and the decor. I said to Richard Day who was my art director 'This community is a very damp community very hot, like New York was last week-- and the walls perspire. I want to see actual water coming out of the walls. I want to see the walls crumble. I want the walls themselves to be rotten, and I want the environment to be a picturisation of decay.

The other big decision I had to make was who to put in the film. In those days I didn't have casting or cutting rights--these came later with ON THE WATERFRONT because Spiegel was in a bad position. From then on I've always had those rights but I didn't have them then so it was a matter of discussion between the producer, a guy named Charlie Feldman, a nice agreeable but not very strong man, and myself. I urged that we use the original cast, and he would not go for it. Finally, after much hassling, we came to an agreement that we would have one movie star in it. Brando was not a star in those days, his first picture had not come out yet--a picture with Kramer, about paraplegics. Feldman wanted Vivien Leigh, and finally I agreed with the understanding that I could have all the rest of the cast I had had in New York, which was in the spirit of sticking as much as possible to the original stage production.

The main problem I had with that production was that Vivien Leigh--whom I was very fond of. I think of her quite tenderly--had played the part in England, under the direction of her husband, Laurence Olivier. He is a fine theatre artist, but still what he saw in the play was something an Englishman would see from a distance, and was not what I saw in the play. She kept telling me the first week, 'When Larry and I did it in London and I had to keep saying, 'But you aren't doing it with Larry now, you're doing it with me.' It took several weeks to break her down. So in my opinion the first two or three reels of the picture are not too good. Then somewhere around the second or third reel, she and I got together, got an understanding and she became enthusiastic about what I was saying to her. And we became very close and I really loved her. I think the last half of STREETCAR was excellent, and I was really awfully glad she got an Oscar. I think she deserved it.

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