

One on the Aisle



'Streetcar' Now Points a Moral

By Richard L. Coe

"A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE" seems to have been faithfully filmed and on the Warner, Metropolitan and Ambassador screens you will find Tennessee Williams' shocking tale absorbing and unique film material.

I say "seems to have been faithfully filmed," because, despite the obvious care in its production, the transition is not completely successful. The basic reason for this is that where once the playwright was content to observe, the film now moralizes. This subtle and at the end evident shift in viewpoint takes the initiative from the observer. What initially was at least an attempt at art now smacks of a tract.

Further, the very faithfulness of the transcription militates against the film medium. As if to avoid criticism that the play has not been faithfully adapted, Director Elia Kazan virtually films his stage original. His camera moves—there are long shots and close-ups—but the effect is static, as though he were directing you, during the play, to observe now this, now that.

And while his is an immensely powerful, believable and complete portrait, the accent is too much on Marlon Brando's animalistic Stanley Kowalski. So total is Brando's mastery of this part

that the story becomes more a study of him than of the compassionate picture Williams drew of the tortured Blanche.

This centering of Brando is both the fault of the director and the failing of Vivien Leigh, the Blanche. Miss Leigh begins at too high a pitch, marring her final collapse and allowing insufficient contrast with Brando's Stanley. While some of her individual scenes are superb, they are not the varied chain which might have made Blanche a rounded portrait.

Engrossing Story

For all these flaws, the rich characters and engrossing yarn remain. We meet Blanche as she comes from the bus station in search of her sister's and brother-in-law's apartment in New Orleans' French quarter. This howling, throbbing area is not Blanche's idea of a fitting abode for those who once lived at Belle Reve. Nor is Stanley the gentleman of her by now important dream world.

His instincts latch on to the secrets of Blanche's past, her shock at the suicide of her young, sensitive husband, her efforts to find through numberless men surcease from her loneliness and her final expulsion from her teaching job and hometown as undesirable. Ultimately he destroys her one remaining chance for refuge, her

alliance with his friend Mitch, and Blanche is led away, a shattered soul whimpering that classic line, "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

An added scene reassures audiences that Stanley's physical world is deplorable. We are assured that his wife will never go back to him. After enduring so much of the very centralness of Stanley, making the most of it, as it were, this righteous indignation replaces compassion with the effect of cynicism for what has gone before.

Williams' detached point that life can be like this—that the brute can destroy the sensitive. But that both have the right to live—is thereby demolished, quickly, fatally. This was the essence of his gradually developed, melodramatic drama and to add a moralistic corollary makes it something else, a different reflection of life.

Nonetheless, "A Streetcar Named Desire" accomplishes penetrating observances of highly individual people and many of its moments will stir your soul.

MONDAY night the Trans-Lux will be afloat with celebrities for a top-rank invitational showing of "A Place in the Sun," the George Stevens version of Dreiser's "An American Tragedy" . . . This is being sponsored by Crusade for Freedom, for which Mrs. Fred M. Vinson is the area's executive chairman; busy Drew Pearson will be master of ceremonies for the evening and outside the theater the USAF Drum and Bugle Corps and the 1100th Ceremonial Squadron will be on parade.

TONIGHT: Spike Jones, Helen Grayco and the City Slickers will present their 1952 Musical Depreciation Revue at the National Guard Armory at 8:30.



Heartbreak in New Orleans

Marlon Brando, as Stanley Kowalski, seizes some cherished love letters of her dead husband from Vivien Leigh, as Blanche Du Bois, in the screen version of Tennessee Williams' play, "A Streetcar Named Desire," which opened yesterday at the Warner, Metropolitan and Ambassador theaters.