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A spectacular Cat dances at WHAT



Written by John Watters



MICHAEL & SUZ KARCHMER PHOTO

UNTO THE NEXT GENERATION – Dixie (Lucy Blood) hands her Uncle Buck (Steven DeMarco) his crutch as Maggie the Cat (Madeleine Lambert) looks on skeptically.

You'll cotton to Dullea's Big Daddy

There is nothing small about Tennessee Williams' epic masterpiece *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, now at the Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater's Julie Harris Stage. The leviathan three-act centered on the lives of the Pollitt family headed by Big Daddy, owner of a vast plantation in the Mississippi Delta, stretches on and on like his 87,000 acres of cotton as we bear witness to the inner machinations of the family gathered to celebrate its patriarch's 65th birthday.

Acknowledged to be Williams' personal favorite of his prodigious body of work, the play has achieved great success since its debut on Broadway in 1955, when it won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The original cast included Burl Ives as Big Daddy, Mildred Dunnock as Big Mama, Ben Gazzara as their alcoholic son Brick, and Barbara Bel Geddes as his wife Margaret, also known as Maggie the Cat. A 1958 film version recast Ives, and featured Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor as Brick and Maggie.

Among those gathered to celebrate the birthday of Big Daddy's, who has just been found free of the cancer he thought he had, is Brick, a former star athlete who is now a sportscaster, hobbled on crutches after a drunken escapade trying to run hurdles on his high school track the night before. Also home is Brick's brother Gooper, an attorney who has eyes on the family plantation. Big Mama tries in vain to hold the family together as the evening unfolds.

Director Elizabeth Falk gives a masterful touch to the Williams play. She has invented a short prologue, which gives us a glimpse into the past of the plantation's previous owners past. Aided by a top-notch cast, Falk is keeps the production riveting regardless of its immense script heavy on Williams's powerful prose.

Keir Dullea plays Big Daddy. The actor caught his first big break when he was cast as the protagonist in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This is not Dullea's first association with the play. In 1974 he played the part of Brick in a Broadway revival that featured Fred Gwynne as Big Daddy, and he has dedicated the Wellfleet performance to him.

As the all-powerful Big Daddy, Dullea is magnificent. Dressed in white suit and smoking a large cigar, he revels in dodging his death sentence from cancer. As long as he's alive, he will be the one determining the future of his plantation.

As Big Mama, Mia Dillon (Dullea's wife in real life) is wonderful as the wife and mother of a family teetering on dysfunction. Her role is not as large as Big Daddy's, Brick's or Maggie's, but she steadfastly holds her own with the material she is given.

Playing the part of Brick, Steven DeMarco is a powerhouse as he contends with the tumultuous relationship he has with his wife. The entire first act is taken up with their argument that Brick is closer to his college buddy, Skip, than to Maggie. In the end, Brick's love of the bottle takes precedence over all his relationships.

Madeleine Lambert plays the pivotal role of Maggie the Cat. She is painted as the weak link in the family since she has not been able to produce an heir to the family fortune, mostly because her husband is estranged. Nevertheless, she refuses to give up on her broken husband and is determined to deliver the child she is

expected to produce. Lambert's performance is mesmerizing as she goes toe to toe with Brick.

Clifford Blake and Amie Lytle are perfectly cast as Gooper and his wife Mae. Their conniving ulterior motives of snatching the plantation from Brick are convincingly played out in their performances.

Rounding out the onstage cast are locals Dennis Cunningham as Dr. Stanley Baugh and Bob Costa as Rev. Clarence Tooker, and Lucy Blood as Dixie, one of Gooper and Mae's children. They all handle their parts extremely well.

John R. Malinowski's set is a grand representation of a second-floor bedroom of a Southern mansion.

Those who have never seen the play should take advantage of the WHAT show, which is well cast and exquisitely done. After the Wellfleet run ends Sept. 22nd, the production will move to Provincetown to be part of the Tennessee Williams Festival for four performances at the Town Hall.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is at the Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater's Julie Harris Stage on Route 6 Thursday through Monday at 8 p.m. through Sept 22. For tickets or information call the box office at 508-349-9428 or go to www.WHAT.org/

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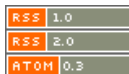
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