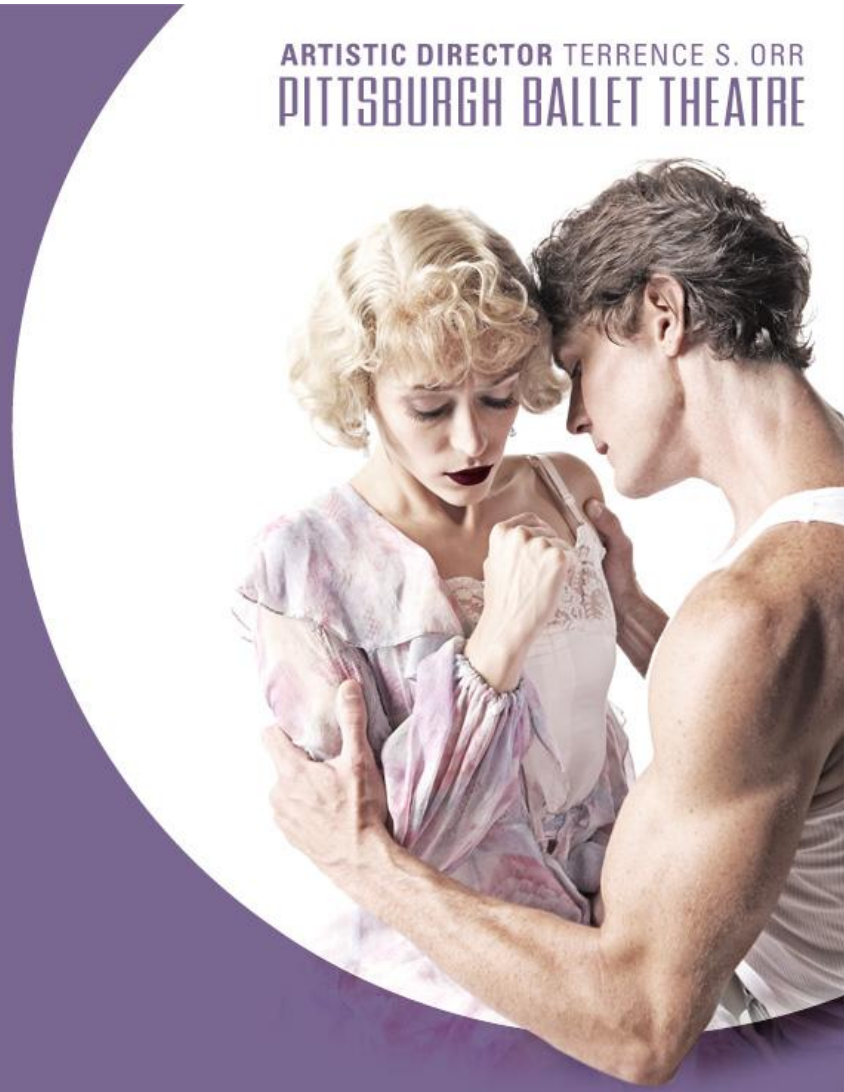


AUDIENCE PRODUCTION GUIDE

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TERRENCE S. ORR
PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE



**A STREETCAR
NAMED DESIRE**

Audience Production Guide for
Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre's
**A Streetcar Named
Desire**

March 9-11, 2012
The Benedum Center for Performing Arts

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A Streetcar Named Desire

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre is thrilled to be the first American ballet company to perform and stage John Neumeier's ballet, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Neumeier's ballet, an interpretation of the famous American play of the same name by playwright Tennessee Williams, premiered in 1983 at the Stuttgart Ballet and featured Marcia Haydée and Richard Cragun. In German, the ballet is called *Endstation Sehnsucht*.

The Benedum Center for Performing Arts



The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts is the crown jewel of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and the Cultural District in downtown Pittsburgh. It was renovated in 1987 and is on the national register of Historic Landmarks. The 2800 seat theatre used to be the Stanley Theater, still visible on the lighted marquees outside. It has the third largest stage in the United States measuring 144 feet wide by 78 feet deep. The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Pittsburgh Opera, and Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera all use the Benedum for their performances.

Learn more about the Benedum Center:

<http://trustarts.org/visit/facilities/benedum/benedum-center-history>

Investigate the Stanley Theatre's role in music history here in Pittsburgh:

<http://www.wyep.org/music/ppp/page12.php>

The Foundation: Williams' Play

Synopsis of *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Blanche DuBois arrives unannounced in the French Quarter of New Orleans on the title streetcar to visit her sister, Stella Kowalski. Having spent her life in the small Southern town of Laurel, Mississippi, she is shocked by the sights and sounds of the French Quarter. She acquires the help of the Kowalski's neighbor, Eunice, to let her into their apartment to seek refuge. Blanche familiarizes herself with her new surroundings—including where the liquor is kept—until her sister arrives. Stella embraces her sister, happy to have her near. Shortly after this warm welcome, however, Blanche begins to criticize her sister's home for its lack of accommodations. But, as she explains to Stella, her nerves are too frazzled from teaching and the loss of Belle Reve, their family estate, to withstand being alone anymore. To mask her loneliness, Blanche then turns the tables on Stella, and blames her for losing the family estate through her desertion of it and Blanche. Upset by the accusation, Stella begins to cry and runs to the bathroom.

Stella's husband, Stanley, and his friends return from bowling. Stanley, upon meeting his sister-in-law for the first time, begins to probe into Blanche's past, including her former marriage. He relentlessly pursues the subject to the point of making her ill. Blanche tries to maintain a facade of "Old South" gentility and superiority, but the sexual tension between Stanley and her is immediately palpable.

The following day, more of Blanche's history is uncovered. Stella breaks the news to Stanley about Belle Reve as nonchalantly as she can, but he still becomes upset over the loss of the valuable property that he, through his marriage to Stella, feels is partly his under the "Napoleonic Code." At his first opportunity, he questions Blanche about the estate and demands the papers of the sales. Stanley digs into her luggage to find the papers and stumbles upon poems written by Blanche's former husband which send Blanche into an emotional frenzy. She places the blame for the lost estate on her forefather's sexual indiscretions. Stanley attempts to explain the Napoleonic Code to Blanche, but in doing so, reveals Stella's pregnancy to Blanche.

That night, Stanley stays at home with his friends to play poker. Stella and Blanche return from their dinner and a movie. Stella tries to break up the late-night game but is met with a sharp smack to her thigh from her husband. Blanche is introduced to Stanley's friends. One of them, Mitch, seems superior to and more sensitive than the others, and Blanche is immediately taken with him. As the ladies wind down from their evening and turn on their radio, Stanley becomes irate. During a poker argument, Mitch seeks some fresh air out on the porch and is joined by Blanche. The two begin to open up about their pasts, only to be interrupted by Stanley, who throws the radio out the window. In the process, he hits Stella, who tries to stop him, and Blanche takes her upstairs to the neighbor's apartment. The men silence Stanley's tirade and shock him back to reality with a cold shower. Emerging from the bathroom soaking wet, he bellows out for his wife who eventually returns. Blanche sits out on the steps and shares a late night cigarette with her new, kind friend, Mitch.

The following morning, Blanche expresses her disgust to Stella. She is appalled that Stella returned to him, but is equally as disgusted by Stanley and his brutish, animalistic actions. Blanche begins to plot an escape for the women, despite Stella arguing for Stanley's remorse and their love for one another. Unbeknownst to the two women, Stanley returns and overhears a good majority of his sister-in-law's views of him. As he enters, he doesn't say anything, but confidently embraces his wife in full view of Blanche.

Later, Blanche is dressing for a date with Mitch and trying to relax by having some drinks. With Stella, Blanche opens up that she is worried rumors may be going around about her. Blanche hints that she engaged in some unsavory behavior at a hotel back home, only to become emotional about the stability and support Stella provides her. She then admits that she wants Mitch because she is tired of struggling with the world alone. Stella assures her that the pair would begin a relationship, but cautions her against having too much alcohol. Stella and Stanley leave to go bowling. Shortly before Mitch arrives, a young paper boy drops by. Blanche flirts with the boy, who reminds her of her young husband, and finally kisses him as he leaves.

Mitch arrives and they leave for their date. When they return, Blanche describes to Mitch how poorly Stanley has treated her. She reveals her past to Mitch, including how she was once married to a young man who was having an affair with an older man. She tells Mitch how her husband committed suicide after Blanche told him of her disgust at the affair. Mitch reaffirms Blanche's hopes by saying how much they need one another.

A few months later, Stella is preparing to celebrate Blanche's birthday by baking a cake while Blanche soaks in the bathtub to relax her nerves. Stanley comes home with news of the real reason Blanche visited them: she was asked to leave Laurel due to her wild and promiscuous behavior in Laurel. Furthermore, he reveals, she had an affair with one of her students and was fired by the superintendent. Stanley discloses that he has told Mitch about Blanche's past and that he won't be joining them for Blanche's birthday dinner. He also firmly tells Stella that Blanche will be on the Greyhound out of New Orleans the following week. Stella defends her sister repeatedly and tries to convince Stanley to let her stay with them. When Blanche emerges from the bathroom, she immediately senses something is wrong. Later, during the dinner, Blanche is stunned that her new suitor has failed to make an appearance. Stanley gives Blanche her birthday present—a one-way ticket back to Laurel. Blanche, extremely upset by the news, rushes to the bathroom. Stanley tries to placate his wife, who was also upset by his behavior, but it is too late—she goes into labor. He carries Stella off to the hospital.

Later that same night, Mitch arrives at the apartment. Both he and Blanche have been drinking quite heavily. Mitch confronts Blanche about her history. She tries to deny it, but then confesses to everything. She reminds him how much they need one another, but Mitch is far too hurt by her deceit. He does try to get her to sleep with him, but after she demands marriage from him in return, Mitch destroys Blanche's last thread of confidence by telling her she is not good enough for him. She screams "Fire!" in order to get him to leave. Devastated, she crumbles to the floor.

Stanley returns from the hospital that night to find Blanche dressed in a faded evening gown and rhinestone tiara and reeking of whiskey. He tells her that the baby won't be born until the next day. Blanche lies and tells him she has received a telegram from a

former boyfriend to join him on a cruise, a lie which Stanley quickly uncovers. He confronts her about this lie and all the others. Frightened and desperate, Blanche attempts to escape the apartment. Stanley decides to show Blanche exactly where he thinks her place is. He carries her off into the bedroom and rapes her.

A few weeks later and the men are playing poker again while Stella is packing Blanche's suitcase. Stella refuses to believe Blanche's story that Stanley raped her, but for Blanche, the rape is the final blow to her psyche. She has slipped into insanity. A doctor and nurse from an insane asylum arrive to take Blanche away. Initially frightened by the nurse, Blanche attempts to run. But in her incapacitated mental state, she thinks the Doctor is her former boyfriend arriving to take her on a cruise. She willingly follows him, having "always depended upon the kindness of strangers." Stella cries in despair while Stanley finishes his poker game.

Listen to the NPR story about actresses preparing for the role of Blanche:
www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=87859194

Playwright Tennessee Williams



Tennessee Williams

(Source: www.olemiss.edu)

Born Thomas Lanier Williams III on March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, Tennessee Williams' life seemed almost destined to become the stuff of which stories are made of. His mother was the daughter of a minister and brought up with Southern manners. He had an older sister, Rose, and a younger brother, Dakin. His father was a traveling businessman until the family moved to St. Louis when Tennessee was 7 years old. The move was tough on all the family members, but particularly for Tennessee. He was immediately hired at the local shoe factory, was teased incessantly by classmates for his Southern accent, and overall found St. Louis to be a dirty, polluted city. His father turned to alcohol, his parents started fighting, and his sister began to withdraw from the world. To deal with the depressing new situation, Tennessee turned to writing. While he began writing poetry at the age of 12 and won his first prize (\$5) for a short story at the age of 16, it was many years until he earned a living from writing. He held many menial jobs in-between while continuing to write on the side, but eventually graduated from the University of Iowa's theatre program and became a screenwriter for MGM. During this time, he completed his breakthrough hit, *The Glass Menagerie*. After *Menagerie* transferred to Broadway in 1945 and played for two years, he followed up with his most well-known play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947. This play won 2 Pulitzer Prizes and catapulted Williams to superstar status. *Streetcar* was later immortalized in film by director Elia Kazan and launched the career of actor Marlon Brando. Other notable works of his catalog—70 plays, two novels, two books of poetry, 15 screen-plays, an autobiography, and numerous essays—include *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Summer and Smoke*, *The Night of the Iguana*, and *The Rose Tattoo*. His personal life remained as tumultuous as his early childhood. After *The Night at the Iguana* ran on Broadway in 1961, he struggled for critical acclaim. He battled for many years with drug and alcohol addiction, was haunted by his sister's Rose turn towards insanity, and was

devastated when his long-term partner, Frank Merlo, passed away in 1963. Although Williams continued to write up to 8 hours a day every day until he died, he never matched his earlier successes. He died in in 1983 at the age of 71 in a hotel room in New York City from choking on a pill bottle.

Investigate the history and cultural legacy of Tennessee Williams:

http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/w/tennessee_williams/index.html

Discover the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, including a Stanley and Stella shouting contest held in Jackson Square:

<http://www.tennesseewilliams.net/>

Blanche's Mental Health

Each individual event marring Blanche's life at the beginning of the play—her husband's suicide, the loss of her family estate, the deaths of numerous family members—is enough to undo anyone, but piled on top of one another, the stress becomes too much for Blanche to take. Understandably, Blanche exhibits many traits of depression from these life events, including agitation and irritability; difficulty concentrating; and trouble sleeping (as seen in the many late night scenes). Her depression is punctuated by her increasing dependence on alcohol, which Williams points out numerous times in the play.



Vivien Leigh as Blanche in 1951 film.

There may be another medical explanation, however, for Blanche's fall to insanity. Many psychologists have noted that Blanche exhibits many characteristics of "Histrionic Personality Disorder" (formerly known as Hysteria). This disorder is a member of the Cluster B "dramatic and erratic" personality disorders. According to the DSM-IV (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, 4th Edition, published by the American Psychiatric Association), to be diagnosed with this condition, a patient has to exhibit at least five of the following characteristics:

- Being uncomfortable when not the center of attention
- Inappropriately acting in a sexually seductive or provocative way
- Displaying rapidly shifting, superficial, and shallow emotions
- Constantly using one's physical appearance to gain attention
- Speaking without detail in an impressionistic way
- Demonstrating an overly dramatic and theatrical expression while speaking
- Being overly suggestible and easily swayed by others' opinions
- Believing relationships are more intimate than they actually are

Treatments for depression include medication and psychotherapy. For more severe cases, Electroconvulsive Therapy, Vagus Nerve Stimulation, or Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation may be recommended. The treatment for Histrionic Personality Disorder is first recognition of impact of the disorder on everyday life and the patient's relationships. Therapy is generally recommended for identifying behavior modifications and skill-building, and medication may be used to treat accompanying disorders, such as depression or anxiety.

Read more about Histrionic Personality Disorder and other Cluster B personality disorders: http://www.communitycounselingservices.org/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=564

Discover family members' experiences with personality disorders, including an analysis of the film: <http://outofthefog.net/Movies/AStreetcarNamedDesire.html>

Learn where to go for help if you or a loved one exhibits symptoms of either of these mental disorders. Local resources in Pittsburgh include:

- Allegheny County Department of Human Services
 - [Free, confidential, online mental health screening](#)
 - re:solve Crisis Network 24-hour line: 1-888-YOU-CAN (1-888-796-8226)
 - Non-emergency DHS referral line: 1-412-350-4456
- [Mercy Behavioral Health](#): 24-hour crisis line: 1-877-637-2924

Neumeier's Ballet

Choreography John Neumeier

Staged by John Neumeier and Tamas Detrich

Music First Act: Prokofiev's "Visions Fugitives" Op. 22; Second Act: Schnittke's First Symphony

Costume, Set, and Lighting Design John Neumeier

World Premiere December 3, 1983, Stuttgart Ballet

In the Repertory Stuttgart Ballet, Hamburg Ballet, The Norwegian National Ballet, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre

Synopsis of the Ballet

I – BELLE REVE

Asylum

Blanche DuBois, haunted by madness and memories:

Men

Her Wedding at Belle Reve

Her husband Allan Gray

The tragic end of their wedding day

Belle Reve falls into decay

Flamingo Hotel

II – NEW ORLEANS

End of the line

Blanche remembers the visit to her sister Stella, in New Orleans:

Stella changed

Conflict with Stella's husband Stanley

A rescue attempt with Stanley's friend Mitch

Blanche's past is laid open by Stanley

Flight – to where?

Rape

Stepping out of reality Asylum

Source: John Neumeier's New Orleans diary, 1983

<http://www.hamburgballett.de/e/rep/endstation.htm>

Choreographer John Neumeier

Since 1973 John Neumeier has been Artistic Director and Chief Choreographer of The Hamburg Ballet. He was born in 1942 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A., where he also received his first dance training. He went on to study ballet both in Copenhagen and at the Royal Ballet School in London. He acquired a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Theater Studies from Marquette University, Wisconsin, where he created his first choreographic works. In 1963 he was "discovered" in London by Marcia Haydée and Ray Barra, leading John Cranko to engage him at the Stuttgart Ballet, where he progressed to solo dancer. In 1969 Ulrich Erfurth appointed Neumeier as Director of Ballet in Frankfurt, where he soon caused a sensation. This was largely due to his new interpretations of such well-known ballets as "The Nutcracker", "Romeo and Julia" and "Daphnis and Chloe". In 1973 August Everding brought him to Hamburg. Under Neumeier's direction The Hamburg Ballet became one of the leading ballet companies in the German dance scene and soon received international recognition. In 1978 Neumeier founded The School of The Hamburg Ballet. In the autumn of 1989 the school, together with the company, moved into its own "Balletzentrum" (ballet center) provided by the city of Hamburg. Its facilities include nine studios and a boarding school for over thirty students. Today more than 80% of the company's dancers are graduates from the school.



John Neumeier
www.hamburgballet.de

As a choreographer, Neumeier has continually focused on the preservation of ballet tradition, while giving his works a modern dramatic framework. His commitment to this end has manifested itself particularly in his revised versions of the classical "Story Ballets". For his new works he has created his own narrative forms, resulting in ballets such as: "The Saga of King Arthur"; a series of Shakespeare ballets, including "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "Hamlet", "Othello", "As You Like It" and "VIVALDI or What You Will"; the Literature Ballets created for Marcia Haydée: "Lady of the Camellias" and "A Streetcar Named Desire", and his adaptation of Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" to a commissioned score by Alfred Schnittke and Homer's epic poem "Odyssey" which had its world premiere in Athens in November 1995. John Neumeier has received particular acclaim throughout the world for his choreographies on symphonies by Gustav Mahler; to Bach's "Saint Matthew Passion" and "Christmas Oratorio", Mozart's "Requiem" and Handel's "Messiah". John Neumeier has always been fascinated by Vaslaw Nijinsky, this famous dancer and choreographer inspired him to create three biographical ballets: "Vaslaw" (1979), "Nijinsky" (2000) and "Le Pavillon d'Armide" (2009).

In 1975, in only his second season in Hamburg, Neumeier brought The Hamburg Ballet Festival into being – a climax and end to each season: they culminate in the annual "Nijinsky-Gala" which is always dedicated to a dance-specific or ballet-historical theme. In summer of 2004 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the company under the Artistic Direction of John Neumeier, the Ballet Festival saw a retrospective comprising the most

important works from the company's repertoire. The Hamburg Ballet has given numerous guest performances in Europe, Russia, North and South America and Asia.

Neumeier has worked as guest choreographer with many companies, including The Royal Ballet in London, The Vienna, Munich and Dresden State Operas, The Ballet of the German Opera in Berlin, The Stuttgart Ballet (for which he has created several works), The Royal Danish Ballet, The Royal Swedish Ballet, The Finnish National Ballet, Le Ballet du XXème Siècle in Brussels, The Ballet of the Paris Opera, The Tokyo Ballet, The American Ballet Theatre in New York, The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, The Ballet of the Mariinsky Theater and the San Francisco Ballet among others.

Source: excerpted from <http://www.hamburgballett.de/e/neumeier.htm>

Learn more about John Neumeier and the Hamburg Ballet:

<http://www.hamburgballett.de/e/index.htm>

Read a 2003 interview with John Neumeier:

http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_03/jun03/interview_neumeier.htm

Watch the Hamburg Ballet trailer for *Streetcar*:

http://www.hamburgballett.de/video/endstation_e.html

Visit Hamburg Ballet's YouTube page to watch more videos of the company:

http://www.hamburgballett.de/video/endstation_e.html

Original Production Information

World Premiere: Stuttgart Ballet, Stuttgart, December 3, 1983

Original Cast

<i>Blanche DuBois</i>	Marcia Haydée
<i>Stanley Kowalski</i>	Richard Cragun
<i>Stella, Blanche's Sister</i>	Lisi Grether
<i>Harold Mitchell (Mitch)</i>	Vladimir Klos
<i>Allan Gray</i>	Johannes Kritzinger
<i>Allan's Friend</i>	Paul Chalmer
<i>A Soldier</i>	Randy Diamond
<i>Kiefaber</i>	Christian Fallanga
<i>Shaw</i>	Stephen Greenston

Source: <http://www.hamburgballett.de/e/rep/endstation.htm>

Music: Prokofiev and Schnittke



Prokofiev with cellist Mstislav Rostropovich.
C. 1950 (Copyrighted by [Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd.](#))

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) is revered as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century. He attended the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1904-1914. He composed music in numerous genres, completing seven symphonies, five piano concertos, and numerous concertos for a wide variety of instruments, including piano, violin, and cello. Prokofiev is now widely known for his two ballets, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella* (1944). He also wrote music for opera and for children,

including a symphonic rendition of *Peter and the Wolf*, which used a narrator to tell the story and introduce symphonic instruments to children. Prokofiev had the following to say about his musical style:

"We want a simpler and more melodic style for music, a simple, less complicated emotional state, and dissonance again relegated to its proper place as one element of music...I think we have gone as far as we are likely to go in the direction of size, or dissonance, or complexity of music. Music, in other words, has definitely reached and passed the greatest degree of discord and complexity that can be attained in practice. I want nothing better, more flexible or more complete than the sonata form, which contains everything necessary for my structural purposes."

(from an interview with critic Olin Downes, *New York Times*, 1930)

Prokofiev's *Visions Fugitives*, Op. 22 was composed between 1915-17 and was premiered by Prokofiev in St. Petersburg on April 15, 1918. This piece for piano has 20 short, colorful movements, has many moments of dissonance among its more tonal and rhythmic sections. In many ways, it is marked as quite unlike many of other of Prokofiev's own compositions. It is based on a line from a poem by Konstanin Balmont: *In every fugitive vision I see worlds, full of the changing play of rainbow hues.*

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998), a Russian composer, was virtually unknown to most Western audiences until 1980. He wrote in a wide range of genres and styles and became one of the most influential composers of the last decades of the 20th century. Schnittke created a new style of music which has been called "polystylism." Polystylism is characterized by the juxtaposition of multiple layers of music styles from the past and the present. Schnittke once wrote, "The goal of my life is to unify serious music and light music, even if I break my neck in doing so." Schnittke also wrote "aleatoric music" in which some element of the composition is left to chance, or determination of the performer/conductor.



Alfred Schnittke

(Source: Alfred Schnittke Archives,
<http://www.gold.ac.uk/crm/schnittke-archive/>)

His style, often called brash, inventive, and atonal, is also “heavenly harmonious” wrote James R. Oestreich in a NY Times 2005 article. During his lifetime, Schnittke composed 9 symphonies, 3 operas, 6 concerti grossi, 4 violin concertos, 2 cello concertos, concertos for piano and a triple concerto for violin, viola and cello, as well as 4 string quartets and many other chamber music, ballet scores, choral and vocal works. In 1985, Schnittke suffered a series of strokes and ill health, though he continued composing until 1994. Interestingly, many critics consider the last 10 years of Schnittke’s composition life as the most influential of all his output.

John Neumeier uses Schnittke’s First Symphony in Act II of *Streetcar*. This composition, created between 1969 and 1974, is recognized as one of the most extreme explorations of aleatoric music. Its chaotic elements reflect how Blanche’s life falls apart in the ballet. In the original score Schnittke includes choreography for the musicians themselves, who are scripted to leave and re-enter the stage at various points marked in the score. Schnittke would later collaborate with Neumeier on the ballet *Peer Gynt*, based on Henrik Ibsen’s play, in 1988.

Learn more about Prokofiev’s life and compositions:

<http://www.prokofiev.org/index.cfm>

Listen to excerpts of Prokofiev’s *Visions Fugitives* from a variety of recordings:

<http://www.classicalarchives.com/work/44483.html#tvf=tracks&tv=music>

Investigate the cultural legacy Prokofiev and his contemporaries had on Schnittke:

<http://www.siue.edu/~aho/musov/review/schnitrev.html>

Listen to excerpts of Schnittke’s *First Symphony*:

<http://www.classicalarchives.com/work/443420.html>

Neumeier’s Notes on the Ballet

To be read before the performance

While working on the "Kameliendame" [*Lady of the Camellias*] a friend of mine made the spontaneous suggestion that for my next Stuttgart project I create the role of Blanche DuBois for Marcia Haydée. The idea of transforming "A Streetcar Named Desire" into a ballet was, in fact, never far from my mind. Every one of Tennessee Williams' works seems a possible inspiration for a new ballet in view of their essentially poetic quality.

For me "A Streetcar Named Desire" is one of the greatest works of American literature. What I find so interesting, so fascinating, about the play is that special southern atmosphere and the particular problems it deals with—specific problems of the Southern American states. "Streetcar" is a subject (and was a film) that I've been familiar with since my youth and that has formed a very important part of my own literary as well as theatrical education. A multitude of characters from Tennessee Williams' works are familiar to me. I know them well and at one point even considered creating a

ballet based not just on "A Streetcar Named Desire" but on a collection of plays by Tennessee Williams. A "Tennessee Williams project"—a ballet which I would have called "The End Of The Line", in which characters from his various plays appear, meeting within a fine network of relationships linking them all to one another. But several European friends of mine warned that these figures aren't sufficiently well known outside of America to be recognized. Nonetheless, the content, the message and the inner life of all his plays can and should be understood on a universal human level. The inner life is far deeper than its "American" exterior. But precisely this exterior, his world, is unmistakably American and for that reason I couldn't imagine a stage designer who wasn't American creating the sets and costumes for this piece. Interestingly enough, the two composers I selected are Russians—but again, their music corresponds to the inner life of the piece.

As soon as the idea of the "Streetcar" ballet was born, I couldn't wait to visit New Orleans to start researching the specific atmosphere and sketching out the visual images of the new ballet. That's not to say that I imagined a realistic reconstruction of New Orleans for the stage. Quite the opposite; the story must be told essentially through movement. But it's important for me to have stood on those streetcar tracks in New Orleans, which for Blanche DuBois represented the end of the line...

My ballet is not a word for word translation of Tennessee Williams' play. "A Streetcar Named Desire" was the source of my inspiration but as a choreographer I use a completely different medium of expression. I must realize this story using visual, physical movement images. Elia Kazan's production notes regarding Blanche explain that: "We can only understand her behaviour when we come to recognize the role that her past plays in her present behaviour." Agreeing completely, I have no option but to change Tennessee Williams' chronological structure for my ballet. It is impossible to dance "the past". In ballet the past must become visible present, which is why I start where the play ends and allow Blanche once again to show us her journey, through memories and madness, to the end of her own line.

Source: <http://www.hamburgballett.de/e/rep/endstation.htm>

Essay: Lost and Found in Translation

By Alyssa Herzog Melby, Director of Education and Community Engagement, PBT

When a work of art is translated from one language to another or one genre to another, we often ask ourselves, "What's been lost in translation?" But if the work of art was worth the trouble to translate, more often than not it has a depth and richness that makes it able to transcend categorization. In these instances, just as much can be found in the translation. This is certainly the case with John Neumeier's ballet of Tennessee William's stage play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

In 1947 Tennessee Williams brought to the American stage his new play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (see page 5 for a full synopsis). It premiered at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway and ran for a little over two years. The play went on to critical acclaim, including winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1948. The play was famously turned into a movie starring Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando in 1951 and directed by one of Williams' closest collaborators, Elia Kazan.

Captivated by how “the play is that special southern [American] atmosphere and the particular problems it deals with,”* John Neumeier translated this complex story to ballet in 1983 for the Stuttgart Ballet. In this process, Neumeier let go of some of the more familiar aspects of the play, including the poker games, the heavy influence of alcohol on the characters’ behavior, and the chronological structure of the play. Instead, by delving into this classic story in a new way, he discovers a wide range of emotional context and depth for the characters. Neumeier’s ballet views Williams’ story through Blanche’s psyche: the ballet begins and ends in the insane asylum—a circular narrative not unlike Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*. Neumeier constructs the ballet as one long exploration of Blanche’s memory, and as we know, memory has a tendency to work in strange ways. He gives the audience the back story of Belle Reve in the entire first act of the ballet, which by contrast Williams’ only reveals bit by bit throughout the course of play. And although the second act at the Kowalski’s apartment in New Orleans follows sequentially from the first, both acts are interspersed with literal shots of memory as a gun is fired again and again, a reminder of Blanche’s husband’s suicide and a psychologically devastating moment in her past. Of the ballet’s structure, Neumeier explains, “It is impossible to dance “the past”. In ballet the past must become visible present, which is why I start where the play ends and allow Blanche once again to show us her journey, through memories and madness, to the end of her own line.”

Neumeier also explicitly answers some of the questions Williams poses. The homosexual love affair of Blanche’s husband receives a lengthy treatment in the ballet in a beautifully conflicted *pas de deux* that goes back and forth between the men’s desire for one another. In the play, Blanche hints at the deaths she has endured recently at Belle Reve. Neumeier takes this one small detail and expands upon it, creating “people in black” that fall down, one by one, around Blanche, further heightening Blanche’s turbulent state. And while Williams keeps the rape offstage, Neumeier’s artistic depiction of the incident is one of the most chilling and explicitly-staged dramatizations that Neumeier tackles in the ballet.

“Every one of Tennessee Williams’ works seems a possible inspiration for a new ballet in view of their essentially poetic quality,” Neumeier says. Williams wrote in a style called poetic realism. Williams followed his contemporaries in portraying people and situations as they might happen in real life, but he retained theatrical elements by heavily incorporating symbolism of everyday objects to heighten the circumstances of his characters’ lives. Some examples of these symbols in the play include the paper lantern, the idea of “the streetcar named Desire,” the names of the characters and places (Belle Reve means “beautiful dream”), and the blue piano that provides the aural backdrop of the play. Neumeier builds upon the play’s symbolism by adding a few key elements to the ballet that take on symbolic properties. The bed becomes both a place of desire, a sacrificial altar during the rape scene, and the prison of the insane asylum. Blanche’s suitcase holds the memories that she tries so hard to retain, and the wedding veil she pulls out of it represents the thin mask she wears to protect herself from her reality. Belle Reve crumbles before our eyes in Act 1 as Blanche slowly loses her grip on her home and everything it stands for. Neumeier even choreographs movement ripe with symbolic intentions. The blatant machismo emanating from Blanche’s lovers and Stanley becomes solidified in a wide *grande plie* in second position. This grounded *grande plie* becomes juxtaposed against the ethereal floating quality that characterizes

Blanche's movements. And through this juxtaposition Neumeier molds his characters into archetypes of humanity.

Blanche says it best in the play: "I don't want realism, I want magic!" Neumeier hasn't lost any of the magic Williams' gives us in the play. Instead, in his ballet, we find not only magic but ways in which these characters and their story continue to illuminate parts of the human experience, even the gritty and raw elements that might be difficult to acknowledge. Challenging and provoking, there is indeed much to be found in this translation.

*All quotations from John Neumeier's notes "To be read before performance" found on page 14 of this resource guide.

Other Adaptations of *A Streetcar Named Desire*

John Neumeier joins a long line of artists who have found inspiration in Tennessee Williams' play. These adaptations have consisted of film, opera, and other ballets. Some of these versions and their unique characteristics are listed below.

Film and TV

(1951) Directed by Elia Kazan. Starring Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh. Produced and distributed by Warner Bros. Co.

(1984) Made for TV. Directed by John Erman. Starring Ann-Margret and Treat Williams.

(1995) Made for TV. Directed by Glenn Jordan. Starring Alec Baldwin, Jessica Lange, John Goodman, and Diane Lane.

Ballet

(1952) Choreography by Valerie Bettis. Music by Alex North. Premiered at Slavenska-Franklin Ballet (Montreal).

This 40-minute ballet features many different dance styles and utilizes dream sequences and blackouts for an almost cinematic "short take" quality. At the end of the ballet, Blanche does not exit with the Doctor but with the figure of Death instead. Neither the rape scene nor the homosexual love affair are depicted onstage. Many companies have performed her version of the story, most notably the Dance Theatre of Harlem under the direction of Arther Mitchell in 1981.

(2000) Choreography by Mark Diamond. Musical Selections by Bernard Herman, Benny Golson, William Christopher Handy, Marty Paich, Darius Milhaud, Cole Porter, Franz Waxman, Igor Stravinsky, Frederic Chopin, Carl Davis, John Williams, Russ Gardia, and David Mills. Set by Alun Jones. Premiered at North Carolina Dance Theatre.

This 70-minute, 2-act ballet begins with Blanche leaving her childhood home, Belle Reve. She is driven by her "demons," four haunting, cloaked figures. Flashbacks are used to convey information from Blanche's past, but ghosts from her past, such as Blanche's dead husband, continue to haunt her throughout. The music is mixture of classical and contemporary, and styles are married to certain characters throughout the ballet, such as Stanley being represented by brash modern music. Diamond retained the poker game, and the rape is suggested by a group "jitterbug" scene that begins and ends with striking poses of Blanche and Stanley.

(2001) Choreography by Didy Veldman. Music by Philip Feeney. Premiered at Northern Ballet Theatre (UK).

The score consists of old blues songs and the set uses mobile screens to represent both Stanley and Stella's New Orleans apartment and distorted carnival mirrors. The action adheres closely to the play's narrative sequence, but does use flashback and some psychedelic sequences to portray Blanche's fall to insanity.

(2006) Choreography by John Alleyne. Music by Tobin Stokes. Story adapted by John Murrell. Premiered at Ballet BC (British Columbia)

This 95-minute, 2-act ballet is set to a score of original, gritty jazz music. This version uses flashbacks, but also brings the memories to the present through the creation of a new character, "Young Blanche." The audience sees Young Blanche, Allan, and his friend interact with the older Blanche, oftentimes passing a gun between them in eerie foreshadowing (or is it remembrance?) of Allan's suicide.

(2006) Choreography by Ralf Rossa. Premiered at Bühnen Halle Theater (Germany).

(2008) Choreography by Karen Russo Burke. Music by William Sokol. Premiered at Dayton Ballet.

(2009) Choreography by Ralf Dörnen. Premiered at Theater Vorpommern (Greifswald, Germany)

(2012) Choreography by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa. Music by Peter Salem. To premiere at Scottish Ballet.

Opera

(1995) Composed by Andre Previn (former Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Music Director). Libretto by Philip Littell. Starring Renee Fleming and Rod Gilfry. Premiered at San Francisco Opera in 1998.

This project, initially turned down by Stephen Sondheim and Leonard Bernstein, is Previn's first opera. The libretto is in English and pulls every word from the text of the original play. Although condensed, the opera still takes three and a half hours to perform. Blanche, who is onstage for all nine scenes, is clearly made the central character of this version. The opera has received mixed reviews.

Read about non-traditional theatre productions of *Streetcar*:

<http://www.turgingsomedrama.com/streetcar/>

Watch the trailer for the 1951 film: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIW32IKJoM0>

Review • Reflect • Respond

How the Critics Responded

Critical response to Neumeier's ballet *A Streetcar Named Desire* attests to the story's ability to ignite fierce emotion in the viewer. Furthermore, the reception of Neumeier and his works are quite different in Europe than here in the United States. Read excerpts of reviews on *Streetcar* and Neumeier's choreography below or click on the links to read the full review. After seeing the ballet, what are your thoughts? Attend our post-performance discussion, *Afterthoughts*, to be held after each performance of *Streetcar* and share your reaction, or join the conversation on our Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/pghballet>).

On the ballet, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

"*A Streetcar Named Desire* (or *Endstation Sehnsucht* in German), is a complicated ballet because it is very dense - different actions take place at the same time, different symbols are used through the whole ballet. Blanche's story is not always told chronologically, sometimes the future is anticipated or characters from the past move through the present...every movement has a meaning, there are no superfluous steps or scenes - no corps de ballet dancing where the action stops, no long love pas de deux, no pure dance. Neumeier's ballet is a masterpiece of narration by movement, very similar to what Matthew Bourne is doing in "Play without words", but more compact and concentrated, and on a higher choreographic level. Neumeier's dramatic gift (and he is one of the best narrators in ballet I know) finds a seamless, direct transformation into choreography: for once the choreographer Neumeier is equal to the brilliant narrator Neumeier."

~Angela Reinhardt in *Ballet.co Magazine* (2004)

Read the full review at: http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_04/jan04/ar_rev_stuttgart_0104.htm

"In his ballet *A Streetcar Named Desire* John Neumeier used all his talents. Since drama is Neumeier's special gift, he naturally looks for dramatic material and with his movement language creates poetic and prose images, sometimes from the standard vocabulary but more often from his own imagination. This makes kinetic demands on his audience many of whom probably need or want recognizable steps now that we have seen so much ballet. But for anyone who reads movement in life and on the stage, his talent is quite remarkable and revealing."

~Sybil Shearer in an article, "John Neumeier in Amerika"

Read the full article at: <http://www.hamburgballett.de/e/shearer.htm>

"Neumeier states that his two-act work is "after" Tennessee Williams....Neumeier, while using classical steps as a basic vocabulary, is involved here in dance as well as theater. If Haydee rises to toe point, it is not for a virtuoso divertissement, but to make a piercing, expunging gesture. She dances like the obsessed being she portrays - racing one moment with romantic hopes and false confidence, wilting into fearsome nightmares the next....The first act curtain leads the way to the climactic violence of her meeting with Stanley Kowalski. It is New Orleans. If the first act had its share of horror, it was a romantic image, seen through convulsed vision. The second act was the

confrontation of her fantasies with brutal realities.... The two [Stanley and Blanche] are bound to clash. Despite his friend Mitch's attraction to Blanche, Stanley can only crush her - she is fake, defective and has come to no good as a prostitute. Stanley's rape scene, suspended over and around her on the edges of the bed, are agonizingly powerful in Richard Cragun's very explicit performance. He is bent on the sexual undoing of this unwholesome creature now in his own house...If there is a major flaw in this brilliantly conceived piece, it is the tediousness of too many sexual encounters - lusty men waltzing about or entwining with the mad Blanche - and Mitch's scene, essential as it absolutely is, could well be trimmed down." ~Ann Holmes review "Famed Stuttgart Ballet gains momentum with 'Streetcar'" in the Houston Chronicle (6 Jun 1986)
Read the full review at: http://www.chron.com/CDA/archives/archive.mpl/1986_245686/famed-stuttgart-ballet-gains-momentum-with-streetc.html

The following reviews are available in German:

<http://www.musik-in-dresden.de/2009/11/18/john-neumeiers-endstation-sehnsucht-hamburg-ballett>
<http://magazin.klassik.com/konzerte/reviews.cfm?task=review&PID=3048>

On Neumeier's Choreography

"It's a question of diet. If you are used to a certain diet, it's sometimes a shock just to be eating rice and sushi. But after a time, if you begin to realize what it's like, then you enjoy it more...I think the Americans particularly are very stuck in what they like to see, and it's a very rigid diet. And if you are not part of that diet, then it's a shock for them. But I believe, since I am an American, that this is a question of acquiring a taste for something, because I think that my works are certainly much more complex than the general works in America. And I think that this complexity will take a little more time to understand and to be open to. But we've [Hamburg Ballet] always had very good experience in our tours to America."

~Neumeier on his work's reception in America in an interview with Kevin Ng in *Ballet.co Magazine*

Read the full interview at: http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_03/jun03/interview_neumeier.htm

"I look for a dancer who is not interested only in technical perfection,' says Neumeier, 'but a dancer who can use that technical perfection to go beyond that to be able to express something. Basically what I want to see onstage are human beings dancing.'"

~ from "Intimate Stories" by Jocelyn Anderson in *Pointe Magazine*

Read the full article at: <http://www.jocanderson.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/neumeier2.pdf>

"Neumeier's movement idiom can be described as late 20th century, neoclassical expressionism. The use of academic positions, jumps and turns are passionately combined with influences from jazz and modern dance. Swinging legs, flexed feet, contracting hips and spines betray a transition phase in the history of Western, academic theatrical dance. Part of a process in which the body of the ballet dancer will eventually loosen the straitjacket that the rules of classical ballet's geometrical system prescribed." ~Gerard Mosterd in "John Neumeier in the Netherlands"

Read the full interview at: <http://www.danspubliek.nl/interview%20JN%20english.htm>

Discussion Questions

1. Since 2000, there have been seven new ballet adaptations of *Streetcar*. How has *A Streetcar Named Desire* continued to capture audiences' attention for 65 years? Are the themes universal or does the story capture a specific moment in time? Why do you think there has been an increased interest in the story since 2000?
2. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of each character in *Streetcar*? Describe.
3. In his essay, "The Timeless World of the Play," Williams stresses: "So successfully have we disguised from ourselves the intensity of our own feelings, the sensitivity of our own hearts, that plays in the tragic tradition have begun to seem untrue." How are the characters' actions in *Streetcar* believable or not? Do you think our society has become desensitized to tragedy and why?
4. In an interview with Harry Rasky, Williams described Blanche as a "strong weak person." Would you agree or disagree with this statement? What about her character supports or challenges this statement?
5. When Mitch confronts Blanche about her past in Scene Nine of the play, she says "I want—magic!...I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth, I tell what *ought* to be the truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!" Given her situation, do you think what Blanche says is justifiable? Is she being honest or manipulative and why?
6. When viewing Blanche's character in the play, film or ballet, how do you think she does or does not warrant the diagnosis of depression and/or Histrionic Personality Disorder?
7. In the ballet, how has Neumeier choreographically depicted each character? Describe their movements. How has Neumeier depicted ideas of gender and sex through his choreography?
8. Describe how Neumeier tells the story through his ballet (choreography, choreographic devices, set, costume, lights, music). How are these elements effective at producing a cohesive narration?

(Some questions adapted from The Guthrie Theatre's 2010 play guide for *A Streetcar Named Desire*; http://www.guthrietheater.org/plays_events/plays/2009/streetcar_named_desire)