



## **'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' excels with explosive cast in full, shocking version**



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

Forget what you know about Tennessee Williams' landmark play "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," and book tickets now for the KC Rep production that opened Friday, Sept. 13.

As good as the movie with Elizabeth Taylor, Paul Newman, and Burl Ives was, the steamy movie pales beside the KC Rep live version. This local version with two guest actors presents the raw, explosive, steamy, sultry play as true to any Tennessee Williams play one will ever see.



Kansas City Repertory Theatre

KANSAS CITY REPERTORY THEATRE

Williams plays always feature a hot, humid climate, a strong female lead, very unique characters, and lots of sexual content and innuendo. “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” contains all of those elements. In this play the interaction of six actors rivets the audience with fresh characterizations developed within the concept of the individual actors and director Lisa Rothe.

“Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” allowed Williams to mix Cancer, avarice, homosexuality, alcoholism, wealth, terminal illness, family favoritism, sexual desire, isolation, loneliness, guilt, jealousy, and inheritance into a pot-boiler of a play. Many of those topics never made their way into a Broadway play. The original production ran for Williams’ dialogue brings an earthy, realism to his characters and the actors then add their own flourishes to make each character unique and memorable.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

Even though the movie is well known, that version scrubbed

most of the controversy from the original Tennessee Williams play. What was allowed in movies at that time veers far from Williams original piece. Taylor, Newman and Ives could portray the characters, but the content was sanitized for the time.

In the KC Rep production, Vanessa Severo leads a dynamite cast as Maggie the Cat, the sexually frustrated wife of Brick Pollitt, a famous local sports hero and current sports announcer. Brick, portrayed by Nathan Darrow, suffers guilt after the suicide of his best friend; and, as a result turned to alcohol to kill his pain and suffering. The sexual frustration between them creates a main point of the story. Both actors own their characters and force the audience to believe they are those characters.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

For both actors, “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” represents a “bucket-list” possibility to check off. Brilliantly played and freshly developed, they bring a new shine to their characters. Severo is funny in the opening and builds to a sexual temptress ready for her conquest. Darrow, starts more non-committal and builds to a raging drunk when confronted by Big Daddy in Act II.

Merle Moores as Big Mama and , Paul Vincent O’Connor as Big Daddy show the pride of wealth and foretell the future of Maggie and Brick. Moores creates a Big Mama never seen before

in this version and just dominates the stage with her appearances. Moores gives an over-the-top performance to a role that could fade if not for her adaptation. Her love for Big Daddy remains unquestioned, even after he explodes with a spew of hatred and disgust toward her. Her love and devotion matches his disgust.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

As for Big Daddy, he reveals a loveless marriage but conforms to society standards to build his plantation, wealth and status. Paul Vincent O'Connor makes this patriarch even bigger and bolder with his understanding of the flow of Tennessee Williams' dialogue. His vulgarity is mentioned early, but "Crap" seems hardly vulgar. But stand back for O'Connor to let fly the stronger vocabulary as the tension mounts. O'Connor's scenes with Moores and Darrow are overwhelmingly strong and crusty. What a beautiful performance.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

Also integral to the plot is the jealous big brother of Brick, Gooper and his wife Mae come to celebrate Big Daddy's 65th birthday with their children. But, their visit entails a plan to steal Big Daddy's plantation and money and cut the favored son out of his portion. Gooper and Mae deliver sound, strong characters as the persons no one wants in his or her life. Their characters do not appear a lot in scenes, but their purpose in the plot fuels a lot of the action. For this, Amy Elizabeth Attaway makes Mae a very laughable character that the audience reviles from her first lines. She's mean; she's arrogant; she hides her malice under thin veneer. Darren Kennedy presents a weak, slimy character determined to get more than his share of any inheritance. It's not until Act III that Kennedy's character is fully revealed. Kennedy plays him like a two-bit hustler and his jealousy shows and dislike of his father and brother shows. Both are dark characters but this pair of actors make Gooper and Mae integral pieces of the play's plot. Both are wonderful in their portrayal.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

In the scenes between Attaway and Severo, the audience can feel the fire and distaste for each other. Mae raised among wealth and Maggie raised among poverty appear amiable but their aversion to each shows mostly when Mae continues to remind Maggie of Maggie's humble life before her marriage to Brick.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

Act II focuses mostly on the relationship between Big Daddy and Brick. The scene provides a roller-coaster thrill ride as Darrow and O'Connor throw strikes at each other. Both confront lies, disappointment, disgust, broken dreams, and unfulfilled love. The rough and angry act contains an undertone of love and tenderness but on a secluded level. The revelations in this long scene are super important to the play powerful message.





Don Ipock. / KC Rep

Take note. This production is worthy of national recognition and would succeed on Broadway, London's West End, or a Los Angeles run. The show is quality piled on quality. Interesting, compelling, thought-provoking, rough, sublime, exhausting, shocking—it's all there. This is Tennessee Williams at his finest. This production could and should sell out every performance.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

For a person who has seen and appreciates Tennessee Williams' works, do not miss this one. For someone who has never experienced Tennessee Williams' work, do not miss this one. The show contains more adult content which high school age and up would understand. Younger than high school probably would not grasp the story, the dynamics, or follow the plot.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

The creative, led by Lisa Rothe, director is; Lee Savage, scenic design; Theresa Squire, costume design; Cecilia Durbin, lighting design; Lindsay James sound design; Amy O'Connor assistant director; Megan Culley, associate sound design; Scott Stackhouse, dialect coach; John Wilson, fight coordinator; Allison Hanks, hair/wig design; Kim Martin-Cotten, casting; Mary R. Honour, production stage manager; Rachel M. Dyer, assistant stage manager.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

The Reps creative team is again to be commended for excellent work. All the technical aspects are sharp and well conceived from the costumes, to lights, set design, hair and makeup. Everything in this production works well. Sound could be slightly increased in the opening act when Maggie has so many words to deliver in a rapid-fire manner. At times some words were lost in the delivery, so a bit more volume would solve that.





Don Ipock. / KC Rep

The “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” is: Damron Russel Armstrong as Reverend Tooker, Amy Elizabeth Attaway as Mae, Louisa Bartlett as Dixie, Danny Cox as Doctor Baugh, Nathan Darrow as Brick, Darren Kennedy as Gooper, Lainey McManamy as Trixie, Merle Moores as Big Mama, Paul Vincent O’Connor as Big Daddy, Vanessa Severo as Maggie, Benjamin Stoker as Buster, Iris Woosley as Soockey.



Don Ipock. / KC Rep

As the Rep opens its new season, they welcome newly named Artistic Director, Stuart Carden.

“Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” continues at the KC Rep through Sept. 29. For tickets, contact the KC Rep Box Office or go to the [KC Rep website](#) for more information, including dates, times, prices, group rates, and more.



KC Rep Artistic Director Stuart Carden

Tags: “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” review, Kansas City Rep, UMKC, Kansas City Theatre, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment