



**CAT  
ON A  
HOT  
TIN  
ROOF**

BY  
TENNESSEE  
WILLIAMS

**LEARNING  
PACK**

Recommended for  
Year 10-13



E-T

LIVERPOOL  
everyman  
& PLAYHOUSE  
theatres

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# HOW TO APPROACH THIS RESOURCE – THINK LIKE A THEATRE MAKER

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Theatre is collaborative, creative, it involves problem solving and applying our imaginations.

*Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* was created over 60 years ago and has stood the test of time, if we ask ourselves why it still matters today, what do we discover?

By making the play, you get an inside perspective, and we want to share that with you to enhance your experience of the story, whether this is to help you with Drama, Theatre Studies, English Literature or your own sense of personal development, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* allows us to think creatively about ourselves and others.

However, It can only really do this if we ask the **first question**:

- Why is this play valuable to us right now?

The first question leads to many more:

- Why did the author create it?
- What was happening at the time?
- Why is it still relevant (or not)?
- What have the characters got to say about being human?
- What is happening for us, in the place that we live or globally, that resonates in the play?

All of these questions lead us toward the creative quest; how are we going to take the text and make it a living, breathing, sensory, experiential event?

We want you to experience the journey that we are on, we want you to **think like a theatre-maker**. Taking different perspectives from writer, director, designer and actor, we will ask you questions that will help to build the layers that make the play matter.

We don't have the answers – we want you to discover things for yourself, through the same exploratory approach that we have used in rehearsals. In this Education Pack, we are going to share some of the ideas and exercises that have helped us shape this production, as well as insights from members of our company.

Most importantly, try to think like a theatre-maker; create, problem solve, imagine, sense, explore and do.



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Photography: Marc Brenner

# THE PLAYWRIGHT – THINKING LIKE TENNESSEE WILLIAMS – THE STAGE INSIDE ME

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1911-1983

*'I conceived things visually, in sound, colour and movement. Suddenly I found I had a stage inside me: actors appeared out of nowhere... and the stage took over.'*

## Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams is considered to be a biographically inspired writer, drawing on his own life to create characters for his plays. He started writing plays in his early 20s when he had seen a handful of professional productions and had never been backstage at a theatre before this point in his life. The theatre became an outlet for his imagination, and his family and early experiences formed a vital part of the plays that he created.

## DISCUSS

- What do you think *'the stage inside me'* means?
- If you were a playwright, what stories would you want to tell?
- Have you ever been backstage at a theatre?

Tennessee changed his name from Tom after early success winning a prize in a literary contest when he was 16. The journey to write his first successful play, *The Glass Menagerie*, and to become one of the most influential American playwrights of our time took another 19 years (taking on a job in a shoe warehouse and being sacked by the movie studio MGM along the way).

## YOUR OWN PATH

Think about a job that you would love to do in the future, imagine yourself doing it (and being brilliant at it). Write a letter or e-mail to yourself about why this particular pathway would make you happy, why it matters to you and what you might need to do to achieve it.

Keep it safe and in ten years – time, open it.

A key part of Tennessee's life was the upheaval that he faced through his father's job as a travelling salesman. This meant that he moved homes without wanting to, or that his father was often absent and his mother was fiercely protective of her children and disillusioned with the life of financial insecurity that she had married into. The South that Tennessee writes about in his plays is not necessarily idyllic but holds a sense of nostalgia having been forced to move from Mississippi to St Louis.

Tennessee spent much of his childhood with his grandparents. His grandfather was a Reverend who is said to have hidden his homosexuality and was blackmailed as a result. Tennessee often said that he felt like a ghost, growing up between two households haunted by secrets and façades. In *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, there are plenty of examples of how people who are very close can still deceive one another, for example, Gooper and Mae lie about Big Daddy's cancer, Maggie and Brick pretend to share a bed, and we hear different accounts of what happened to Skipper.

If you place Tennessee between his siblings, you get the spectrum of what motivated him to write. His brother, Dakin, represented the social climbing corporate America that he loathed and his sister, Rose, lived with the mental illness that represented the fragility and struggle Tennessee empathised with and captured in his plays.

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Tennessee lived through a time and in a place where mental health was stigmatised, where sexuality was oppressed through legislation, and racial prejudice was only really beginning to be challenged. Tennessee often writes about loneliness; he was in a committed relationship with Frank Merlo for over 15 years, and was deeply affected by his death to cancer in 1963, intensifying his complex misuse of alcohol and drugs.

Tennessee's death through a tragic accident 20 years later, alone in a hotel room, is often described as symbolic of his legacy, but his life can be more closely examined through his *'truth speakers'* such as Maggie the cat, who you will find in his plays. He wrote around 40 full length plays and over 70 One Act plays in his lifetime.

## DEBATE – THEATRE AND TRUTH

Truth is often described as being in accordance with what is factual, believed or experienced. As an exercise, debate the relationship between theatre and truth.

You can do this in pairs, or in two groups. Each person or group takes on one of the following arguments:

1. Theatre can never be truthful, it is just a lot of pretending.
2. Theatre is always truthful, it reflects real experiences and ideas.

Think about how you can support your argument and question the opposition.

What do you conclude from the debate?



**WATCH**



Watch members of our Cat on a Hot Tin Roof company describe Tennessee Williams' iconic drama in one minute.



# TIMELINE – THE JOURNEY TO CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

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## DISCUSS

Looking at the events of Tennessee Williams' life, and the 60 years that the play *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* has been performed for, why do you think it is still being experienced by audiences today?

**1911 26 March:** Thomas 'Tom' Lanier Williams born in Columbus, Mississippi, son of Cornelius Coffin Williams, a travelling shoe salesman, and Edwina Dakin, a clergyman's daughter.

**1911 – 1918** Tom, along with his mother Edwina and sister Rose, lives with his grandparents in Mississippi while their father Cornelius works away. His brother Dakin is born in 1918 and the family move to St Louis, living in cramped conditions.

**1927** Tom publishes his first piece *Can a Good Wife be a Good Sport?*, and changes his name to Tennessee.

**1929** Begins his studies at the University of Missouri.

**1932** Tennessee's Father withdraws him from university and gets him a job at the International Shoe Company factory. Tennessee continues writing at night.

**1935** Suffers nervous breakdown. With support from his grandparents, Tennessee resumes his education, initially at Washington University.

**1937** Moves to the University of Iowa to study playwriting. During this time his sister Rose, who had long suffered from psychological problems, is subjected to a pre-frontal lobotomy. This challenges her ability to communicate and she is in and out of institutions for the remainder of her life.

**1939** *A Field of Blue Children*, is his first work to be published under his new name, Tennessee. Four of his one-act plays win a \$100 prize in New York Group Theatre's American play contest.

**1940** *Battle of Angels* is staged by Theatre Guild, New York. It is later rewritten as *Orpheus Descending* and filmed in 1959 as *The Fugitive Kind*.

**1943** Works as a scriptwriter for MGM.

**1944** First major success with *The Glass Menagerie*, initially staged in Chicago and a year later on Broadway, where it runs for 561 performances and wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle award.

**1947** *A Streetcar Named Desire* receives the New York Drama Critics' Circle award and a Pulitzer Prize.

**1948** *Summer and Smoke* opens and Tennessee begins a relationship with Frank Merlo.

**1949** Laurence Olivier directs Vivien Leigh as Blanche in the London production of *Streetcar*.

**1950** Tennessee's first novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone*, is published. *The Glass Menagerie* is filmed by Irving Rapper.

**1951** *The Rose Tattoo* opens in New York and wins a Tony award. Film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, directed by Elia Kazan, is released starring Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski and Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois.

**1953** *Camino Real* opens.

**1955** *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opens and runs for 694 performances, winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle award and another Pulitzer Prize.

**1956** *Baby Doll* is released on film, provoking outrage due to its child-bride themes.

**1957** *Orpheus Descending* opens.

**1958** *Garden District*, a double bill of *Something Unspoken* and *Suddenly, Last Summer*, opens off-Broadway and later in London. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, directed by Peter Hall with the author's original text, opens at the Comedy Theatre, London. The play is also released as a film and premieres in the UK at a private members club due to censorship.

**1959** *Sweet Bird of Youth* opens and is also released as a film three years later.

**1960** *Period of Adjustment* opens and *The Glass Menagerie* is released on film.

**1961** *The Night of the Iguana* wins the 1962 New York Drama Critics' Circle award.

**1963** Frank Merlo dies of lung cancer in the same year *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More* opens. By this time Tennessee is already heavily dependent on alcohol and drugs. Frank's death exacerbates this and whilst he continues to write, his career goes into decline.

**1964** *The Night of the Iguana* is released as a film, starring Richard Burton, Deborah Kerr and Ava Gardner.

**1967** *The Two-Character Play* opens at the Hampstead Theatre, London.

**1968** *Seven Descents of Myrtle* opens. *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More* is released under the title *Boom!*, with Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and Noel Coward.

**1969** *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* opens and following the advice of his brother Dakin, Tennessee enters a hospital for his drink and drugs problems. Despite suffering two heart attacks, Tennessee emerges with his dependences curbed, if not completely cured.

**1970** Tennessee appears on the David Frost Show and publicly speaks about his homosexuality for the first time.

**1972** *Small Craft Warnings* sees Tennessee's first success in New York since *The Night of the Iguana*.

**1973** *Out Cry* opens.

**1975** Williams publishes *Moise and the World of Reason*, a novel, as well as his memoirs. *The Red Devil Battery Sign* is staged in Boston.

**1977** *Vieux Carre* closes after five performances in New York. After several rewrites, it opens in England at Nottingham Playhouse, before transferring to the West End for a successful run.

**1979** *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* opens.

**1980** *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* opens.

Williams receives the Medal of Freedom from President Jimmy Carter. His mother Edwina dies aged 95.

**1981** *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* opens off Broadway.

**1982** *A House Not Meant to Stand* (the last of his plays to be published professionally while he was alive) opens in Chicago.

**1983** On the night of **24/25 February**, Tennessee Williams awakes in New York's Elysée Palace Hotel and reaches for a sleeping pill. Tennessee accidentally puts the top of an eye drop bottle into his mouth instead and he chokes to death. Some nights later, the marquees over 20 Broadway theatres are darkened in his memory. Among many tributes, fellow playwright Arthur Miller said: 'He chose a hard life that requires the skin of an alligator and the heart of a poet.'

**1998** Howard Davies stages a production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the first production in Britain for 30 years, it transfers to Broadway.

**2001** Anthony Page directs Brendan Fraser in the role of Brick at the Lyric Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue.

**2009** The first ever all-black production, featuring Adrian Lester and James Earl Jones, transfers to London's Novello Theatre after a sold out run on Broadway.

**2013** Scarlett Johansson stars as Maggie in Rob Ashford's Broadway production.

**2018** Young Vic production features Sienna Miller and Jack O'Connell as Maggie and Brick. The production is streamed through NT Live to cinemas across the country.

**2021** Winner of the 2019 RTST Sir Peter Hall Director award Anthony Almeida directs *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at Curve and on tour.

# WHY TELL A STORY THROUGH THEATRE?

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Without an open platform to express the reality of what happens to our humanity when intolerance and political dominance reigns, Tennessee used the theatre. It is often said that his plays weren't politically motivated but emotionally driven. He said that *'a play on the stage, is really and truly there – whether the audience understands it or not'*.

Sometimes we don't understand something because we haven't experienced it and it might not seem important to us. Other times we can empathise with others by imagining what it must be like to be in a situation that we have never been in. It can also sometimes seem that the play is telling the story of our own lives, when we don't need to imagine because the situation and characters feel real to us.

Remember what we said at the start?

Theatre allows us to apply our imaginations. It is the place where we can sit side by side, experiencing the same story, knowing and not knowing how it must feel to be a person other than ourselves. The power of theatre lies in the ability to recognise and speak openly about our differences, and to regard this with tolerance and respect through our common humanity. It is a live event, where each night is slightly different as the company and audience experience the story together.

Tennessee Williams doesn't tell us what we should think or feel about the characters in his plays. He realised that *'goodness'* is a complicated idea. The actor Elizabeth Ashley, who Tennessee greatly admired in her portrayal of Maggie in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* said that he *'went into taboos of the heart and let us know that we don't have to carve out of our souls, the innocence and the madness – the things society wants us to amputate. He saw life whole – not just the skin on the hand, but the bones and the blood in the veins underneath.'*

As you experience *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* on stage, or work through this resource, remember the life of the author who represents the reality where it is not always permissible or possible to speak our truth, or to value our own experience of living when others judge us or limit what we are able to be and do.

However, by finding the *'stage inside you'*, just like Tennessee Williams, your imagination and empathy for others could be powerful tools for a more tolerant and inclusive world. And thinking like a theatre-maker, is a very good start.

## REFLECTION EXERCISE

Think of a happy memory that is unique to you, a moment in time. Don't think for too long, whatever comes into your thoughts, trust it.

- Can you describe that moment? Who is there? Where are you? What can you see, smell, touch, hear, feel?
- Imagine that moment is the opening scene of a play, and you are the author, what could others learn from it?
- Why is it important for you to share it?
- What advice would you give to the actors, director and designer as they try to recreate your moment in time for an audience?

# THE WORLD OF THE PLAY – THEMES AND CONTEXT

The play explores multiple ideas; family relationships, sexual identity, racial oppression, fertility, drug and alcohol dependency, are among some of the discussion points. Through our experience of making the play matter to people now, we have identified two umbrella themes that capture the essence of the play and are as relevant now as they were in 1950's America; love and mental health.

## LOVE

*Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* was written during the 1950's in America, which was ruled by Republican President General Dwight D. 'Ike' Eisenhower, and Vice President Richard Nixon. It was a time of sexual repression, where conservative ideals dictated family values and gay people were forced to go underground. In this homophobic America, people could be sacked from their jobs, forced into hospitals or arrested for being gay – which was seen as a threat to national security. In America in 1955, being gay was a political crime.

Setting the play on a plantation also connects to love. They were often places associated with epic romance stories like *Gone with the Wind*, however Tennessee Williams brings out the darker side of an environment that depends on the labour of black people who had been enslaved against their will and denied equal human rights in order to make a profit for the white plantation owners. The year that the play was first produced was when Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Segregation between white and black people was a reality at the time that the play was written.

The play explores how love between two people is natural, complicated and painful. Love is found in the play in many different forms, from physical love to psychological love, from family love to friendship.

### LOVE

How would you describe the nature of love between:

- Big Daddy and Big Mama: .....
- Brick and Gooper: .....
- Maggie and Brick:.....
- Brick and Skipper:.....
- Straw and Ochello:.....
- Mae and her Children: .....
- Big Daddy and Brick: .....

## MENTAL HEALTH

The Cold War against Communism shrouded the time that *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* was written with patriotism, paranoia and insecurity. 'McCarthyism' was the notorious witch hunt led by Joseph McCarthy that sought to identify and punish communists and communist sympathisers from within America and dominated artistic endeavours. A committee had been established to weed out 'un-American activities' and Tennessee Williams was aware that any artist who spoke out against this would be descended upon like a 'ton of bricks'. *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* was written after decades of whisper campaigns, where lives were ruined on hearsay rather than evidence. Tennessee Williams was under surveillance by the FBI because of his sexuality and his profile as a playwright.

From personal experience, Tennessee Williams knew the impact that struggling with mental health without support and understanding could have on an individual and a family. His own sister, Rose, was diagnosed with Schizophrenia and was made to have a lobotomy, which severs connections between the pre-frontal cortex in the brain as a way of surgically treating mental illness. The operation wasn't a success and altered Rose's ability to communicate. Rose was put into an institution and hidden from the world. This made Tennessee very unhappy, he made it his priority to ensure her care after his death as they had a very special relationship.



## MENTAL HEALTH

Imagine you are the director of the play, what advice would you give to the actors and designers to help them to understand what Tennessee Williams is saying about mental health in the play and what this means for us today?

- What does Tennessee Williams say about mental health through the play:
- What does the play say about Mental Health for us today in a contemporary context?



**LISTEN**



Listen to our Podcast to hear interviews with Siena Kelly and Oliver Johnstone speaking about their roles and the show.

Directors have different ways to approach their role and their process. They lead an overarching vision of how they see the play and the world it is in. They collaborate with the creative team (lighting designer, movement director, sound designer, assistant director, costume designer and set designer) and the stage management team to realise this world on stage. They utilise everyone's creative skills and ideas into a cohesive vision for the production. They work with a casting director to choose the right actors to reflect their vision to present the play. They then run the rehearsals and through discussion, collaboration and running exercises, facilitate the actors bringing the play to life.

## PREPARATION EXERCISE

Imagine you are directing this play.

- Create a mood board of images and colours to share with the design team. Maybe you imagine the play with lots of colour and light or maybe it's dark and monochrome. What is the aesthetic and style?
- Create a playlist of music which helps your design team and actors feel the world of the play. Maybe there are songs which reflect the period or maybe they reflect the emotions of certain scenes. What helps you imagine this world?

## THE PLAY – FACTS AND EVENTS

The director and creative team need to know the play inside out. Knowing the story and who the characters are is more actively explored through:

### The Event – What is happening

and

### The Facts – The undeniable truth of each moment

What makes plays a brilliant challenge is that what is really happening isn't always the most obvious thing, we have to dig a bit deeper. We are not always told the facts, we have to work them out for ourselves and sometimes characters are deceptive, unaware, or only aware of their own sense of truth (as people often are in life).

We are going to share the facts and events which make up the story. Remember that we may not all agree on the facts and the events, because we all bring a different perspective to the play, based on what we understand and what we don't understand.

An exercise that has helped us to get to the core of the action is to take out the stage directions and cut out some references that feel old fashioned or alien to us now. This has helped us to get to the heart of what is really happening in the play.



## ACT ONE

**Look at the facts and events for Act One, and consider what is happening for Maggie and Brick in this Act. Don't describe this in terms of the facts and events that we know are true from the outside, but try to get into their hearts and minds. What are they really thinking and feeling?**

**What do they really want?**

### FACTS

- It is an evening in summer, in the plantation home in the Mississippi Delta.
- Maggie and Brick don't have children.
- Brick's friend Skipper has died.
- Brick has injured his ankle attempting to do hurdles at 3am that morning, he used to be an athlete. He needs to use a crutch.
- Brick drinks alcohol frequently.
- It is Brick's father Big Daddy's 65th birthday today. Maggie thinks that he has cancer.
- Brick's brother Gooper and his wife Mae, are staying with their five children.

### EVENTS

- Maggie has had to change her clothes because a child threw a hot buttered biscuit at her.
- Brick showers.
- Throughout the Act, Maggie attempts to get Brick to talk to her, to make love to her, to connect with her.
- Brick refuses to engage with Maggie. Maggie tells Brick that she is lonely.
- Maggie likens herself to a cat who lays down on a tin roof, determined to stay there no matter how hot it gets.
- Maggie reveals that not having children makes her victim to criticism, she is worried that she and Brick will be cut out from any inheritance because they are childless and because Brick drinks. Maggie reveals that Big Daddy, Brick's father, has terminal cancer.
- Maggie and Brick are interrupted twice, by Mae and by Big Mama. Both times, Maggie is criticised. Maggie teases Mae that she has given her children dogs' names. Big Mama says that Big Daddy doesn't have cancer, but Maggie tells Brick that this isn't true.
- Maggie tries to make Brick make love to her, he refuses and instead suggests that she should get a lover.
- Maggie locks the door to get privacy.
- Maggie tries to get Brick to sign a birthday card for his father. He refuses. Brick reminds Maggie of the conditions of their marriage that she agreed to.
- Maggie talks about Skipper, she reveals that she made love to Brick's friend so that she could feel closer to him. Skipper died from drinking too much alcohol.
- Maggie suggests that Skipper had an unconscious desire for Brick, and recalls how her telling Skipper to stop loving her husband provoked him to drink.
- Brick strikes Maggie with his crutch.
- They are interrupted a final time by Dixie their niece, who taunts Maggie for not having children. Brick says that he can't stand Maggie, which is why he can't have children with her.



## ACT ONE REFLECTION

At the end of the act they are about to celebrate Big Daddy's Birthday in their bedroom, the rest of the family enter.

What is (really) happening for Maggie?

In Act One Maggie thinks.....

In Act One Maggie feels.....

In Act One Maggie wants.....

Think about what is in the way? What are the obstacles that Maggie faces and how does she try to overcome them?

What is (really) happening for Brick?

In Act One Brick thinks.....

In Act One Brick feels.....

In Act One Brick wants.....

Think about what is in the way? What are the obstacles that Brick faces and how does he try to overcome them?

## ACT TWO

**This act mainly focuses on the relationship between Big Daddy and Brick, take a look at the facts and events and consider what is under the surface, what isn't being said?**

### FACTS

- Big Daddy owns 28,000 acres of land, and has an estate worth 10 million.
- Big Daddy was employed to manage the plantation before going on to own it.
- Brick used to be a Sports Announcer.
- Brick and Skipper toured together and shared rooms.

### EVENTS

- As the party commences, everyone except Brick participates in the celebrations.
- Big Daddy silences the hi-fi that Maggie puts on as a prank and Big Mama engages in '*horseplay*', making Reverend Tooker sit on her lap.
- Big Daddy tells Big Mama to stop.
- Servants bring in champagne and birthday cake and Mae presents her children to sing a song that they have rehearsed for Big Daddy.
- Big Daddy wants to speak to Brick about how he injured himself, Brick tries not to engage.
- Mae and Maggie bicker about who bought Brick's gift for Big Daddy. Big Daddy stops this, leading to an uncomfortable silence.
- Big Daddy continues to question what Brick has done to his ankle, while fireworks take the focus of the other party goers.
- Big Mama tries to deflect these questions, but is told by Big Daddy that she is no longer in charge and that he is the boss again now that he doesn't have cancer.
- Big Daddy calls Brick to speak to him again, Maggie delivers Brick to Big Daddy.
- Maggie kisses Brick and he wipes this away.
- Big Daddy reveals that Gooper and Mae listen in on Brick's conversations with Maggie and report back to Big Mama.
- Big Daddy says that Brick should leave Maggie and accuses him of having a '*drink problem*'.
- Big Daddy shares his philosophy that money can't buy you a life, Brick asks for silence.
- Big Daddy continues, revealing that Big Mama makes him sick and that he is going to get a woman. He wants to know why Brick drinks.

- Brick describes *'the click'*, the feeling of peace that he gets when he has drunk enough alcohol. He admits that he is an alcoholic and attempts to end the conversation and leave.
- Big Daddy prevents this by taking Brick's crutch.
- Big Mama interrupts and Big Daddy threatens to hit her, she leaves.
- Brick agrees to talk if Big Daddy gives him a drink. He reveals that he drinks because of his disgust and the effect of living with lies, which he calls *'mendacity'*.
- Big Daddy admits that he only cares about Brick and making a success of the plantation, which he took over from the owners who he suggests were a gay couple.
- Big Daddy suggests that Brick started drinking when Skipper died and wants to know about the nature of their relationship.
- Brick goes into a rage and smashes a glass, he falls and Big Daddy tries to help him up.
- Brick rejects how casually Big Daddy talks about sexual relationships between men, by saying that it is *'unnatural'* and tries to put the record straight about his relationship with Skipper, and tells Big Daddy that Skipper slept with Maggie to prove that he wasn't gay, which is what drove him to drink more.
- Big Daddy suspects there is more to the story, and Brick reveals that Skipper declared his love for him on the phone and Brick hung up. This was the last time that they spoke.
- Big Daddy chastises Brick for not facing this with Skipper, Brick tells Big Daddy that everyone is lying to him about not having cancer, and that he is dying.
- Brick tells Big Daddy to leave the plantation to Mae and Gooper.
- Big Daddy leaves, slapping a child as he exits.

## ACT TWO REFLECTION

- If Big Daddy could say exactly what he wanted do, without societal and family pressures, what would he say to Brick?
- What would Brick say to Big Daddy, if he didn't have to conceal anything?

Try answering these questions through improvisation in pairs or by writing a letter to one character from the other character's perspective.

## ACT THREE

**This act focuses on the lie that Big Daddy doesn't have cancer, Big Mama is told the truth that Big Daddy discovers at the End of Act Two. As you look through the events and facts, what images and colours can you see? What can you hear?**

### FACTS

- Big Daddy had his tests at Ochsner clinic.
- Gooper is a corporate lawyer.

### EVENTS

- Big Daddy leaves, calling everyone a liar.
- Maggie enters along with the others, Mae asks Reverend Tooker to stay, to be there when Doc Baugh gives the truth of Big Daddy's cancer to Big Mama, she tries to determine whether Big Daddy has gone to bed.
- Brick goes out to the gallery.
- Gooper and Mae gather everyone and Big Mama to tell her the truth, this *'family conference'* unnerves Big Mama. She calls for Brick, who Maggie goes to fetch.
- Big Mama justifies Brick's drinking as a reaction to the death of his friend. Brick arrives and pours himself a drink as the others watch on.
- Everyone surrounds Big Mama, Doc Baugh tells Big Mama that Big Daddy has incurable cancer.
- Big Mama calls for her *'only son'* Brick to tell her which upsets Mae, but he has gone outside.

- Reverend Tooker leaves.
- Big Mama refuses to believe that it is true. Gooper tries to reason with her.
- Maggie and Mae bicker as Maggie tries to support Big Mama.
- Big Mama asks Maggie to work with them to straighten Brick out to be able to take over the plantation.
- Mae and Gooper state their claim over the estate, undermining Brick's ability to do so. Maggie defends Brick and calls Mae and Gooper out.
- Brick enters and announces that there is a storm coming. Mae and Gooper ridicule Brick and are told to hush by Big Mama.
- Gooper presents Big Mama with a Trusteeship for the estate, as Maggie protests.
- Big Mama puts a stop to the plan, calling Brick for comfort, and tells him that Big Daddy's fondest dream is for Brick to have a child.
- Big Daddy enters, and asks about the storm (inside and out). He tells a joke about an elephant's erection to take control of the space. Big Mama hides herself so as not to reveal the truth.
- Big Daddy says that he can smell '*mendacity*' and asks Brick to back him in this.
- Maggie announces that she is going to have a baby as a present for Big Daddy on his birthday.
- Big Daddy calls for his lawyer to come in the morning to hand over his estate, before heading to the roof to view his empire. He allows Big Mama to accompany him.
- Mae contests the pregnancy, before Gooper asks her to leave.
- Brick and Maggie are alone, she tells him that tonight they will make the lie true, Brick is ambivalent. Maggie tells Brick that she loves him, which Brick deflects.

### **ACT THREE REFLECTION**

Using the example below, describe what is happening beyond the text, in the space. You can also create this physically.

Example: Big Mama calls for her '*only son*' Brick.

What does Big Mama (really) want in this event?

(Think beyond just calling for Brick. By calling for Brick, how is Big Mama asserting her authority, what is she doing to Gooper and Mae?).

What image can you see?

What can you hear?

Describe the atmosphere and energy of the space.

As a director, position the characters in this scene. Who is closest to Big Mama? Who is furthest away?

How are they holding their bodies? What do the other characters think in this event?

Reposition the characters. How does this change the scene? Where is your eye drawn to onstage?

Is this where the focus should be? Who has the most status?

Try a few different ways of using the space to see which is the most effective to communicate the essence of the scene.





## **ANTHONY ALMEIDA – DIRECTOR**

### **What's your process preparing for a show?**

Research wise: reading all Tennessee Williams' letters, diaries, autobiographies. Getting to know the mind and soul behind the words on the page.

The preparation process differs for every play: each story is asking to be related to differently. But the core of the process is always one of discovering how I relate and connect with the material in an honest, total way. Staging a play is an act of interpretation; becoming aware of my responses and questions about the material generates lots of pathways I can then explore

### **What do you enjoy most about being a director?**

I enjoy the adventure and collaboration – not knowing what might happen in rehearsals is exciting.

### **What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be a director or work in theatre?**

Learn what directing is from popular culture and wider life. What makes one artist's cover of a song better than another's? Who do you think are the greatest football coaches of today, why? How do the most exciting photographers compose their images?

### **Why is this show relevant for audiences now?**

The story looks at urgent questions of how to love, and be loved. It's a story about the messiness of being alive – and that's always going to be relevant. Coming out of the pandemic and lockdowns over the past 18 months, the aspects of mental health and wellbeing feel especially resonant. This has been a time of ever-increasing loneliness, stress and anxiety – and *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* examines how to begin recovery from such states.

### **Do you have any exercises or activities you do as part of your process?**

Read the play from each character's point of view: how is the play allowing everyone to be the protagonist of the story. Find out where characters disagree on the same event: that's where the drama is.

## **JENNIFER LANE BAKER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

### **What's your process preparing for a show?**

Before working on any show, I like to make sure I know the play in as much detail as I possibly can. This involves reading the play several times. To make this process more exciting, I give myself different tasks to complete/look out for each time I read the play, so that I'm always noticing something new. My job involves supporting the director in delivering their vision of the play, so it's important for me to get to know the director and understand their concept and the version that we will be creating.

### **What have been the challenges? What have you discovered?**

Everything about this production has been a series of discoveries, as we've been working hard to be as true to the spirit of the play as possible without getting bogged down in old, preconceived opinions of Tennessee Williams' work. It's been a very investigative process.

### **Can you describe an interesting moment in rehearsals, or during preparation or in collaborating with other members of the creative team that helped the play in some way?**

It's been really exciting in rehearsals seeing the actors make brand new discoveries about the characters and the scenes each day in rehearsals, whether that's through exercises that we have done as a company, working with the set for the first time, or having the young company (who play Mae and Gooper's five children) in the room with us. All the small, individual discoveries made in rehearsals come together to form a rich, exciting and detailed tapestry of performances.

### **How did you become an assistant director and what do you enjoy most?**

There's no one way to become a director or an assistant director. I grew up doing as many school plays as I could, and when I was in 6th form I first had a go at directing. I continued directing plays at university, alongside my degree, and once I graduated I trained further – I did the MFA Theatre Directing course at Birkbeck, which is how I ended up working at Curve. As an assistant, I love getting to work on a variety of shows with different responsibilities and getting to learn from an amazing range of creatives.

### **What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an Assistant Director?**

See as much art as you can, in any form. Theatre, film, TV, books, art galleries, music... even things like *Love Island* count. You can be inspired by anything, and it's only by engaging with as much art as you can that you will start to work out who you are as an artist.

### **Do you have any exercises or activities you do as part of your process?**

These are some of the exercises I do when reading through a play, to get to know it better and to allow my brain to discover new things about it.

- **CHARACTERS.** Make lists of everything a character says about themselves, everything anybody else says about them, everything they say about others, and every fact we know to be true about them.
- **SECTIONS.** Dividing the play into sections, based on what you need from it. I find it helpful to do this in three ways.
  1. Sectioning the play into large chunks, which can be used for scheduling and rehearsal calls.
  2. Splitting the play into smaller sections each time a character enters or exits – this can be used both for scheduling and for getting a general sense of the rhythm and geography of the play.
  3. Beats – beginning a new section each time the characters' tactics or objectives change. This helps me to start considering how the characters are trying to affect one another throughout the play.

## **GEMMA PAYNE – MOVEMENT DIRECTOR**

### **Did you do any research? What's your process for preparing for a show?**

The creative team had weekly meetings once a week for four weeks leading up to the rehearsal period. This was a useful experience having the opportunity to flesh through ideas, problem solve, and share references without the concern of having all the answers. It was great on a practical level preparing to be creative in the room, but also, very grounding having some time to build a rapport and to start to gather an understanding of each person's style when working with a brand new creative team.

I presented Anthony with snippets of research footage that I felt could be relative to the text, Anthony's vision and Rosie's set design. This ranged from Sia's *Elastic Heart* video, animals, claustrophobic reference photos, clips of Elvis's final performances. Also, I looked at different videos of animals' physicality that could be matched to specific characters in the play inspired by clues in the text to use for a task session.

### **What have been the challenges? What have you discovered?**

A challenge and a new way of working for me has been working in sessions, rather than consistently being present in the rehearsal process. We've explored multiple versions of most sections in the play. It's fascinating to investigate in this way but has its challenges when you might not have been in for a few days and therefore haven't seen the journey for the actors to get to where the scene has ended up. Often I've been playing catch-up very quickly, and still feeding in ideas and suggestions. However, it can also be useful when very fresh eyes come back into the room to help provoke further discussion or support in problem solving.

### **Can you describe an interesting moment in rehearsals, or during preparation or in collaborating with other members of the creative team that helped the play in some way?**

I found seeing Joshua's first lighting design reference incredibly useful and the colours offered in these photos, even down to the subtlety of someone's shade of lipstick colour sparked new ideas and took me down a new route researching when sourcing music to bring to the rehearsal space to support explorative physical tasks. I then came across an image in a music video that I offered up to Anthony, which went full circle back to Joshua. At times it may not lead you in exactly the right direction but it's important to explore multiple avenues. That is something I will take away from me on this production.

### **How did you become a Movement Director and what do you enjoy most?**

Originally I trained in ballet and contemporary dance, and performed and toured in a wide range of genres and companies. It led me to be an associate choreographer to a West End female choreographer in theatre, opera, dance, TV, film and commercial work. My work during this period had so much variety. I also am very interested in making my own narrative, dance-theatre work. I really just immerse myself into whatever I'm involved with at the time. On a personal level I'm fascinated in working on dance for the camera and would love to make a narrative dance film. As a performer, I loved working commercially in contemporary dance and that has definitely spilled over creatively now in this role, an area that I get a real buzz from is with the creative performance of music artists – you can't replace having a live audience in front of any genre of work.





# LISTEN



Listen to our Podcast to hear Anthony Almeida speak about his creative process.



The play is set in the bed-sitting room of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta. Tennessee Williams gives some notes to the designer about the set:

- The room must evoke some ghosts. It is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon.
- The set is the background for a play that deals with human extremities of emotion, and it needs that softness behind it.
- The set should be far less realistic than I have implied in this description of it.
- The designer should take as many pains to give the actors room to move about freely (to show their restlessness, their passion for breaking out) as if it were a set for a ballet.

These instructions open up the endless possibilities of how the set should look and feel, and in order to begin the design journey, the director and designer work together to build the world of the play, making connections between when it was created for the first time and the time that it is currently being produced in.

## DESIGN CHALLENGE

Generate ideas, design the set for *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* for an audience today. Consider:

- The advice that the author gives
- The themes that the play explores
- The time that the play was written in AND the time it is being performed in (now)
- Practicalities of what you might need for the actors to show the story

What are the textures and materials that you would use:

What props and furniture are essential:

What colours can you see:

Where will the audience be placed? All around the action (in the round), at one end of the action (proscenium arch), in the action (promenade), on three sides of the action (thrust) or either side of the action (traverse).

Where are the exits and entrances:

Describe/draw your set, find images and photographs that have inspired you and create a mood board.

## JOSHUA GADSBY – LIGHTING DESIGNER

### **Tell us about your design/creative concept for the show. What do you want to communicate to the audience through your work?**

Reading the play I was struck by the sense of the emotional distance between all of the characters – despite how physically close they all are. For this show, I'm interested in how we can make this friction visible. How we can make characters seem as if they are slipping away to another place.

### **Did you do any research? What's your process preparing for a show?**

The way I approach research changes with every show, some may be about researching the context of a play, when it was written, the place in which the action occurs. Other shows might require more abstract research around the wider themes of the show.

For *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* my research was mainly visual, creating a catalogue of images, mainly photography with some paintings – that spoke in some way to the feel of the play. I then used these images to create a shared language with the rest of the creative team, so we could start to understand what our world would look and feel like visually.

### **What have been the challenges? What have you discovered?**

As our staging of *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* is more abstract than might usually be presented, much of the challenge in the rehearsal room has been about learning how to translate Tennessee Williams' rich text into an open space. Learning the spatial rules and where the text allows us room for exciting visual images.

### **Can you describe an interesting moment in rehearsals, or during preparation or in collaborating with other members of the creative team that helped the play in some way?**

Before rehearsals began we as a creative team met for a number of creative meetings in which we would talk through the play. In these meetings we would talk through the text and discuss the possibilities of the world we are creating. It was really exciting to have space to think together and test our creative thinking before we started working with the cast in the rehearsal room.

### **How did you become a lighting designer and what do you enjoy most?**

I became interested in lighting when I was at school, I was lucky enough to be part of some youth groups and began to play with light and started lighting shows when I was a teenager. I ended up studying lighting design at drama school, and I've been lighting shows ever since.

What I enjoy most about my job is being part of a collective journey. Learning how best to share a story with an audience, and the electric feeling when something really sparks the imagination of an audience.

### **What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be a lighting designer or work in theatre?**

See as many different sorts of performance as you can, there is inspiration to be found everywhere. And keep on playing, there is always more to discover.

### **Do you have any exercises or activities you do as part of your process?**

When I'm in the rehearsal room watching a scene, I make a mark in my script every time it feels like the rhythm of the text is changing. I then get a sense of what the pace of the scene is, and how light needs to respond to support or oppose that rhythm. This is really handy when we move into the process of creating the lighting cues.



# THE CHARACTERS – 8 THINKING IN CHARACTER – BREAKING THROUGH WALLS

*'It is a lonely idea, a lonely condition, so terrifying to think of that we usually don't. And so we talk to each other, write and wire each other, call each other short and long distance across land and sea, clasp hands with each other at meeting and at parting, fight each other and even destroy each other because of this always somewhat thwarted effort to break through walls to each other.'*

Tennessee Williams, *Person to Person*.

Tennessee Williams begins with his characters and has long been admired for the complex personalities that he creates. You could say that he builds them brick by brick, ready to be dismantled or bulldozed. The idea that people build walls around themselves is one that is found in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*.

## CASTING EXERCISE

A director and casting director work together to find actors who can bring the qualities that the production is looking for to the roles. Using the overview for each character and your own research, try to think like a director or a casting director and create a casting breakdown for the play. This is a description of the qualities and skills that you think the actor needs to be able to play the role. Answer the question at the end of each overview to help you.

Character name

How would you describe the character?

Playing age?

Any specific skills required?

Any physical features that are important to the role?

## BRICK

The most literal sense of the walls that surround us is personified in the character of Brick, who has been likened to *'a monument to absence'*. Many parallels have been drawn between Tennessee Williams and Brick, and in particular, the construction of this character reflected the author's own internal war between *'self-destruction and creativity'* as Williams desperately tried to gain the respect and admiration of the Broadway establishment through *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*. It is important to note that Elia Kazan, who directed the first production and influenced the changes that Williams made to the script, suggested that Brick needed to change more as the story unravels. Williams had been compliant for the most part with Kazan's ideas, however he drew the line at giving Brick any sense of awakening, instead he held onto the belief that it was impossible for Brick to change. This may reflect the author's sense of self and identity, realising that we cannot lie to ourselves about who we truly are.

Brick is an ex-athlete turned sports announcer, married to his school crush; he is the son of a wealthy plantation owner, who has started drinking because of the death of his friend who was sexually attracted to him. Brick's *'absence'* is made physical in his crutch, which he uses to support his broken ankle. He doesn't join in, but chooses to look on from the outside, he leans on his crutch, in the same way that he leans on alcohol to support him. He broke his ankle trying to relive his youth as a successful athlete.

How would you describe Brick's energy levels? What animal would he be?

## MARGARET

Maggie is aware of the lies that people surround themselves with, and tries to speak what she believes is the truth. The lie that she is pregnant that she tells as the climax to the play, is the perfect example of the complexity of humanity and the contradictions that underpin the decisions that we make. Maggie is spirited and tenacious, determined to make her husband Brick sleep with her so that she can conceive an heir to the plantation. On the surface, this may appear to be for monetary reasons as she grew up in a poor family, but Williams was keen to acknowledge that he wanted audiences to like Maggie, to empathise with her. Her need for comfort and lovely things may be said to come more from her need to be loved and adored.

She faces criticism from the other female characters for not having children and is objectified by Big Daddy, her father-in-law, who she has an affection for. Maggie tells us that she is alive, that she is the Cat, from the title of the play. The tin roof gets very hot, and yet a cat will always look for the warmest place to sleep. Like the cat, Maggie clings on to the reality of the dream, rather than the dream itself.

Why do you think Maggie stays with Brick?

## BIG DADDY

Big Daddy was based on the father of a friend of the author who was also a wealthy plantation owner and contains characteristics of the author's own father. Big Daddy is the focus of the action of the play, as the other characters gather to celebrate his birthday and discuss his health and mortality. He has been described as the '*catalyst*' in the story, where his ferocious anger and '*rock bottom honesty*' sets the tone for the play. Big Daddy uses his virility and sexual appetite as a tool to maintain control. He is capable of hitting a child as well as having an innate sense of tolerance that he uses to make his son see that no matter how uncomfortable or in denial you may be about something, you have to have the strength to face it. This may seem erratic, overbearing and contradictory. Throughout the play, his love for Brick is expressed in a spectrum of ways, through physical violence, antagonism, care and concern.

If you imagine that Big Daddy represents America in the 1950's, what was it like?

## BIG MAMA

The first time we meet Big Mama she is full of happiness because she thinks that Big Daddy doesn't have cancer. She attempts to burst into Brick and Maggie's room, to find that the door is locked, which she doesn't approve of. Her longing for openness, for fun and crude '*horseplay*' gives her a naivety that is both endearing and uncomfortable. Big Mama has a love for shopping, spending extravagantly on a trip to Europe, and plays her role as dutiful mother and grandmother, seeing the best in her brood. She scorns Maggie, implying that Brick's alcohol dependency is because Maggie doesn't want a child.

Big Daddy is cruel and aggressive towards Big Mama, but she remains loyal and loving, needing only to be valued by him. She is likened to a bulldog, a rhino and a wrestler and these physically comic and unflattering images are not ways that she would see herself, they are the taunts of those around her who, for their own reasons, try to keep her in her place.

Why does Big Mama blame Maggie for the way that Brick is behaving?

## MAE, GOOPER AND THEIR CHILDREN

Mae is referred to as Sister woman and Little Mama, her status is defined by her fertility within this family. She is ambitious for her family and keen to expose Maggie as a liar. She represents the social climbers that Williams reportedly detested. Her husband, Gooper, is a successful lawyer and it is said that he is based on Williams' brother Dakin who he had a problematic relationship with. In fact, when Tennessee Williams died, his brother ignored his wishes to be buried at sea, instead burying him next to his mother in St Louis, a place that he despised. Gooper is the professional Corporation Lawyer, the personification of corporate identity, that is rising in 1950s America. Their children are dutiful, carrying out the wishes of their parents. Gooper and Mae are informers, they report back to Big Mama as they listen into Maggie and Brick's conversations, reminiscent of McCarthyism. Although they may be seen in negative terms because of the behaviours and ambitions that Williams bestows on them, he is also keen to humanise them through their philosophies and insecurities. Mae says that '*painful things can't always be avoided*' suggesting a grounded attitude and when accused of being malicious towards his brother, Gooper retaliates by saying that it is Brick who avoids him by not wanting to be in the same room as him.

Gooper and Mae's attempts to inherit the plantation must be viewed in practical terms, Gooper is the eldest son and has heirs, he is also hardworking and dedicated. Without this perspective, Gooper and Mae will only be perceived as greedy and ambitious which wouldn't reflect the complexity with which Williams creates his characters.

How do you imagine that Tennessee William's brother Dakin reacted to the character of Gooper?



## REVEREND TOOKER AND DOC BAUGH

These characters are archetypes of life and death, they represent the fate that Big Daddy will soon face but also the hypocrisy of religion and the fragility of health. They are complicit in the lie, and therefore contradict their vows to the church and the medical profession. But they are doing this within the context of the establishment, they have an official status which indicates the importance and wealth of the family.

Why does the play include a reverend and a doctor?

## THE GHOSTS – SKIPPER, STRAW AND OCHELLO

Gay characters are often portrayed as ghosts from the past in Williams' plays. Skipper is Brick's school friend and team mate, who reveals his love for Brick after sleeping with Maggie, his wife. Brick's rejection makes Skipper drink which leads to his death. His name suggests a youthfulness. Skipper's death instigates Brick's own dependency on alcohol, and a longing for his uncomplicated youth. Straw and Ochello owned the plantation, sharing the bed that Brick and Maggie now occupy (Brick choosing to sleep on the sofa). They gave Big Daddy the opportunity to manage the plantation, leading to the prosperity of the family. Their presence is often felt but their relationship is acknowledged ambiguously.

How could the ghost characters inspire the sound designer working on the play?



# THINKING LIKE AN ACTOR – CREATING THE CHARACTER IN REHEARSALS

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As you can see from the casting breakdown exercise, actors need to bring their own qualities and experiences to the process of making a play, they need to exercise their imaginations to be able to understand how to take the words and make them practical and physical. They work with a director to find all of the clues in the play that will help them make decisions along the way.

Rehearsals are the perfect opportunity to explore the ideas and questions that we have about a character. It is important to remember that in a play like *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, only 10% of the play is what people say, the other 90% is found in what people don't say, what they do and how they react to one another. In order to think like an actor, you have to be open to what else might be happening, because of your experience of knowing what it feels like to be human.

We have put together some exploratory exercises that we used in rehearsals for you to try for yourself to help you to start to think like an actor.

## REHEARSAL PREPARATION EXERCISE

Knowing what is said about a character, or what a character says to others is a useful starting point for rehearsals.

Pick a character and look through the text, make a list of:

- What a character says about themselves
- What the character says about other characters
- What other people say about the character

Be cautious, the text often contains opinions rather than facts. To think like an actor, you need to work out the difference.

There is an example below to guide you.

Once you have made your own list, complete the chart below in a group to start to build a picture of how the characters interact with one another. What do you discover from what others have found out?



## GROUP CHART – HOW DO THE CHARACTERS INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER?

Character	What the character says about themselves	What the character says about other people	What other people say about the character
<b>Brick</b>	eg. I try to look like I listen, but I don't listen, not much (To Big Daddy, Act Two).	eg. I feel embarrassed for you (about Maggie, Act One).	eg. You've always had that detached quality (Maggie, Act One).
<b>Maggie</b>			
<b>Big Daddy</b>			
<b>Big Mama</b>			
<b>Gooper</b>			
<b>Mae</b>			

### IN REHEARSALS

As you will see from the exercises below, thinking like an actor can be a playful process, games and exercises help to make practical associations with the ideas and questions that the play offers. A big part of this is getting those ideas into our bodies, which we often call developing the muscle memory. There isn't any point knowing about the character if you can't work out what an idea does to them in terms of how they move, speak, feel and think.

Try some of our rehearsal exercises for yourself, do you have any other ideas of ways that you can realise the physical action of the play?

### TEAMS, NEWS AND DRINKS – RELATIONSHIPS

We explored Act 3 using an exercise to help us all better understand the relationships between characters and their priorities in each scene.

Instructions

**TEAMS:** On four sides of the room, we imagine four teams: Team Brick and Maggie, Team Gooper and Mae, Team Mama, and Team Daddy. Actors may move throughout the scene to join different teams, depending on how their character feels at any given moment in the scene.

**NEWS:** There is a newspaper in the centre of the room, between all of the teams. Any time a character receives a piece of new information, the actor must pick up the newspaper (or take it from another actor).

**DRINKS:** Each actor has a glass, and in the centre of the room there is a box of (fake) ice cubes and several bottles of water. Every time a character encounters a problem, the actor must put an ice cube in their glass. These can be taken out if the problem is solved or goes away during the scene. If a character agrees with what another character is saying, the actor must raise their glass and say '*Cheers!*' If they disagree with what another character is saying, they must pour some water into the other actor's glass and say '*Down it!*'



## SAM ALEXANDER – GOOPER

### **Tell us a little bit about your character? What's your process for preparing for rehearsals?**

Gooper is Brick's older brother, by eight years. He is married to Mae and they have five children – with one more on the way. He is a corporate lawyer who, according to his wife, doesn't drink. Gooper has had to put up with something pretty rare: his parents openly express their preference for his brother. I am interested in what that might do to a person.

I don't have a set process when preparing, but I usually start by making three lists: uncontested facts about my character; things he says about himself; things other people say about him. I then ask myself what he wants to achieve. After that anything goes.

I try to avoid, or at least delay, making judgements about my character. This is particularly important when you're working on a famous play that has been done countless times.

People have preconceived ideas about characters and they are nearly always unhelpful. I find it much more useful to come up with a rough sketch of who I think the character might be, and then see how he responds to the dramatic situations he finds himself in.

### **What have been the challenges making this show? What have you discovered?**

It's been a really interesting and fun process – with added joy because most of us haven't done a play since Covid struck. Anthony has steered us away from obvious choices and naturalistic settings: he is interested in truthfully exploring the spirit of the play, not attempting to reproduce some definitive version. That has been freeing and, at times, challenging. Usually actors are asked to root what they're doing in 'realistic' choices, moment to moment: I respond like this because x, I stand up as I say this line because y, etc. Everything we do in this production is rooted in these 'true-to-life' decisions, but Anthony wants to tell the story in a stranger and more ephemeral way. Actions or physical objects that are mentioned in the text often don't appear on stage; characters who have left the room, may still be standing on stage while others talk about them; the action you imagined playing at one particular moment, when you read the script, might end up being totally transformed; and so on.

I think we've all learned to playfully set aside conventional staging ideas, stay responsive and 'go with it'. We're midway through rehearsals, but I think the results are going to be electric.

### **Why do you think *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* is an important story to share now?**

*Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* is one of those rare timeless plays because it's about families, and nearly all of us can relate to the confusing interpersonal chaos within our own family set-ups, even if we're lucky enough to come from a 'happy family'. That phrase says it all in a way. Most families seem happy enough, but their inner workings are usually highly complex and emotionally charged in my experience. And every family has its own set of extraordinary characters someone should write a play about.

Another important theme in the play is truth vs mendacity. Someone once said to me children can forgive everything except deceit. And we were all children once!

### **Can you describe an interesting moment in rehearsals, or during preparation or in collaborating with other members of the creative team?**

Anthony got us doing a brilliant exercise on Act Three. We had to play the scene but with some built in ground rules and props: if our character learned a new piece of information we had to pick up the newspaper; if we agreed with something that was said we had to raise our glass and say 'cheers'; if we disagreed with something somebody said we had to pour some water into their glass and say 'down it'; if we hit a problem in the scene we had to put an ice-cube in our glass; if the problem was resolved we took the ice-cube out.

We didn't always manage to remember it all, and once or twice, when we had to do lots of things at once, we fell about laughing. But it was a really revealing exercise and an efficient way to plot the major turning points in the scene and what they meant to each character.

### **How did you become an actor?**

I joined my local youth theatre when I was fifteen. I decided to go to university to do Drama & French (I felt a bit of parental pressure to do a 'useful' subject like French alongside drama and am very glad I did – my French skills have often paid the bills over the years). Then, eventually, I took the plunge and applied to drama school. It must be said that university fees were non-existent in my day: I'm not sure I would be able to manage so much studying today – which is not at all fair on today's students.

### **What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?**

Go to the theatre and do plays. Sounds obvious but you'd be surprised how many people apply to drama school having only been in a couple of school productions. By doing as many plays as you can you'll find out what kind of theatre you enjoy and teach yourself to be a better actor as you go.





## SHANAYA RAFAAT – MAE

### Tell us a little bit about your character? What's your process for preparing for rehearsals?

Mae is Gooper's wife. She has five sons and another one on the way. She's a strong, clever woman who wants the best for her family, especially her husband and kids.

My process changes a lot depending on the play that I'm working on. For this production we were asked to learn our lines beforehand. So I recorded the other actor's lines and left spaces for my own so I could practice them while I was doing other stuff – walking to work, washing dishes, etc.

I also put together some pictures of people or attitudes that my character Mae might try and emulate.



### What have been the challenges making this show? What have you discovered?

The main challenge for this production is that it's not particularly naturalistic in terms of set and style so it's about finding a language together, a physical vocabulary for how to play the scene.

### Why do you think *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* is an important story to share now?

What I find interesting about the play is that it's the story of a family and a breakdown in their communication as they wade through very tricky and powerful issues like terminal illness, alcoholism and a possible suicide from the past which still haunts them. In particular, there's one character in this show who is trying to deal with loss through alcohol. I think his family want to help him but they're also too wrapped up in their own problems and concerns. So you have a lot of characters talking to or at each other, even eavesdropping on each other but they aren't really, truly listening to each other.

### Can you describe an interesting moment in rehearsals, or during preparation or in collaborating with other members of the creative team?

The first week of rehearsals we spent a lot of time playing games and doing exercises which helped us bond as a company but also helped us uncover some of the subtext of the piece, ie. what's not written on the page in terms of how the characters try to communicate or reach out to each other. For example, Mae is often at odds with Brick and Maggie but it's also about trying to see if there are moments when she tries to reach out to them or if she does have genuine fondness for them which is then clouded over by her own ambitions.

### How did you become an actor?

I sort of fell into it. I was doing a bit of amateur/university theatre in Bombay (where I grew up) and a director saw me onstage and cast me in my first professional production at age 18. Till then, I hadn't really thought of being an actor professionally. It sort of happened – one role led to another and before I knew it, I was auditioning for drama school and had moved to London. And now I can't imagine doing anything else.

### What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?

Join a youth, amateur or community theatre group. It's a great way of figuring out whether this is something that you enjoy doing. I would also suggest drama school because I benefited so much from going to one and I think you learn so much about yourself in the process. More than anything, know that it takes a lot of mental and emotional stamina to be an actor. It's wonderful to be working but there will be times when you're not and you have to find a way to stay positive and creative at those times as well.



## MINAL PATEL – REVEREND TOOKER

### **Tell us a little bit about your character? What's your process for preparing for rehearsals?**

Rev Tooker is a close friend of the Pollit family. He's been the Reverend at the local Southern Baptist church for several years. In our version of the play he and Doc Baugh are the only two non-family members present at Big Daddy's birthday party – which we meet. We've all spent a lot of time in rehearsals chatting with each other about how our characters met, how they know each other, and essentially as much of a timeline of our relationships as we can understand, based on what Tennessee Williams provides us within the play. My preparation process for rehearsals changes from job to job. It depends on who I'm playing, whether it's a musical or a play, and whether or not any specific directions have come from the director. My standard process regardless of the job however is to read the play or script enough to get a sense of the story, the characters and themes. I find usually every director and creative team have very specific ideas and so being familiar with the piece before day one of rehearsals is good enough for me and then it's about playing with the creative team during the rehearsal process to mould and shape our unique version of the piece.

### **What have been the challenges making this show? What have you discovered?**

We've had a very, very creative process with this show. Anthony, our director, has encouraged us to know our characters very well and know our relationships with each other even more. This has allowed us space to explore a variety of choices when playing the scenes so that we can really be sure that we're exercising all possibilities – which is a really rare thing to do in rehearsals, so in many ways it's been challenging and freeing and has pushed us all to discover where the tension in our relationships lie. Anthony wants to strip away all the detail of the physical world this play is set in and really hone in on the relationships and what drives each character to do what they do. It's been a brilliant fascinating experience and allowed me to discover new ways to approaching character.

### **Why do you think *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* is an important story to share now?**

Coming out of the pandemic – It feels very poignant to explore this family drama as a reflection of what many people may have experienced with their own families in lockdown. Being confined in the same house as our families, or having moved back in with our parents and siblings, maybe even just the dynamics of spending more time with our housemates and friends, I think this story shines a familiar light on what family is. In some ways the characters are very open minded and in others they're very staunch and stuck in their ways. I'd hope that our version of the play makes audiences think about their role in their own families and other relationships – perhaps it encourages audiences to explore more truthfulness and honesty in their lives, possibly even change the way they interact with each other to find more kindness, peace and hope...

### **Can you describe an interesting moment in rehearsals, or during preparation or in collaborating with other members of the creative team?**

It really helps to have an excellent group of actors to play against. We've been able to riff off of each other in difficult or confusing moments. Most days there are many interesting moments where we come up against a tangle in our version of the story that needs to be untangled in order for it to make sense for our audience. Stripping away all the realistic elements of set and props etc., from the play and making it all about the characters' interactions and relationships has certainly been very interesting. It also helps to have the creatives in the room to help solve some of those challenges, and really understand why certain decisions have been made in regards to the set design, or whether or not we want to physicalise certain moments of the play.

### **How did you become an actor?**

I kind of fell into it. Began performing a lot in Christmas shows as a kid and then just so happened to go to a high school that specialised in performing arts – we had some BRILLIANT and visionary teachers who gave us a lot of opportunities and had a lot of faith in us. So many of my friends also have become professional performers. I ended up getting into a drama school and the rest is history!

### **What's your best piece of advice for someone who wants to be an actor or work in theatre?**

I would say pay attention and take care of your mental and spiritual well-being as your number one priority. Everything else will fall into place. There is a great quote I saw from Judi Dench recently which goes something like "I think you should take your job seriously, but not yourself, that is the best combination" Then I would say be courageous, learn to take risks and be kind to yourself in the process.





## CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF DESCRIBE THE PLAY IN ONE MINUTE



Watch members of our Cat on a Hot Tin Roof company describe Tennessee Williams' iconic drama in one minute.

**WATCH**



## CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF REHEARSAL TRAILER



Watch the company in the rehearsal room as they bring this show to life before it premieres at Curve.

**WATCH**



## CURVE IN CONVERSATION PODCAST INTERVIEWS WITH SIENA KELLY AND OLIVER JOHNSTONE



Listen to our Podcast to hear interviews with Siena Kelly and Oliver Johnstone speaking about their roles and the show.

**LISTEN**



## ASSISTANT DIRECTOR JENNIFER LANE BAKER'S REHEARSAL ROOM BLOG



Find out more about how this bold revival of Tennessee Williams' iconic play is shaping up in this blog by Birkbeck Trainee Director Jennifer Lane Baker.

**READ**



## CURVE IN CONVERSATION PODCAST INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY ALMEIDA



Listen to our Podcast to hear Anthony Almeida speak about his creative process.

**LISTEN**

# OPPORTUNITIES – SOME ROUTES INTO THEATRE

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## DIRECTOR OPPORTUNITIES

- [RTST Sir Peter Hall Director Award 2021 – Royal Theatrical Support Trust \(rtst.org.uk\)](http://rtst.org.uk)
- [RTYDS – Regional Theatre Young Directors Scheme \(rtyds.co.uk\)](http://rtyds.co.uk)
- [Directors Program | Young Vic Directors Program \(directorsprogram.youngvic.org\)](http://directorsprogram.youngvic.org)
- [Learn About Theatre Directing \(jmktrust.org\)](http://jmktrust.org)
- [By Directors, For Directors – Stage Directors UK \(stagedirectorsuk.com\)](http://stagedirectorsuk.com)

## PRODUCER OPPORTUNITIES

- [Stage One \(stageone.uk.com\)](http://stageone.uk.com)
- [The Optimists – China Plate \(chinaplatetheatre.com\)](http://chinaplatetheatre.com)

## WRITER OPPORTUNITIES

- [London Playwrights – Opportunities \(londonplaywrightsblog.com\)](http://londonplaywrightsblog.com)
- [The Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting \(writeaplay.co.uk\)](http://writeaplay.co.uk)
- [Papatango Theatre Company – Award-winning new writing \(papatango.co.uk\)](http://papatango.co.uk)
- [Playwriting – Royal Court \(royalcourttheatre.com\)](http://royalcourttheatre.com)
- [Writersroom – Opportunities \(bbc.co.uk\)](http://bbc.co.uk)
- [Writers' Guild of Great Britain \(writersguild.org.uk\)](http://writersguild.org.uk)

## DESIGNER OPPORTUNITIES

- [Opportunities & Jobs | Young Vic Directors Program \(directorsprogram.youngvic.org\)](http://directorsprogram.youngvic.org)
- [Linbury Prize \(linburyprize.org.uk\)](http://linburyprize.org.uk)
- [The Society of British Theatre Designers \(theatredesign.org.uk\)](http://theatredesign.org.uk)

## ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

- [Get Into Theatre \(getintotheatre.org\)](http://getintotheatre.org)

## ARTIST DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDLANDS/NORTH WEST

- [Curve Theatre – Artist Development \(curveonline.co.uk\)](http://curveonline.co.uk)
- [In Good Company \(ingoodco.org.uk\)](http://ingoodco.org.uk)
- [East Meets West \(eastmeetswest.org.uk\)](http://eastmeetswest.org.uk)
- [Amplify: Artist Development – Nottingham Playhouse \(nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk\)](http://nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk)
- [Artist Development – Birmingham Rep \(birmingham-rep.co.uk\)](http://birmingham-rep.co.uk)
- [New works – Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse theatres \(everymanplayhouse.com\)](http://everymanplayhouse.com)
- [Greater Manchester Artist Hub \(gm-artisthub.co.uk\)](http://gm-artisthub.co.uk)





# ARTIST DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES AND WORK WITH SCHOOLS AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

## COMMUNITY DAYS

We're looking forward to throwing open our doors for everyone to enjoy a Curve Community extravaganza of a day with free workshops, performances and activities for people of all ages. Look out for our Community Day on Sat 30 Oct and more in Spring 2022.

## FIRST FRIDAYS

Every first Friday in the month there will be one-to-one meetings with a member of Team Curve which is open to local artists and companies who want to talk to us.

These are on Zoom and last 45 minutes. They can be used to introduce yourself and your work to us, pitch an idea, get feedback on a script or project, ask questions about the industry and career pathways, ask for help with a specific project, or have a general conversation.

## ASSOCIATE COMPANIES

From September our Associate companies will be running weekly classes – movement for under 5's, singing workshops for young people and adults, dance for adults and young people with disabilities, writing workshops for young people and dance for over 55's.

## CURVE CONNECT

This is our free membership and network scheme for any artist in or from the Midlands.

When you join, you will receive a monthly newsletter, artist development opportunities and offers, discounted theatre tickets, networking events, workshops, access to space in the building when available, one-to-one meetings with relevant staff and opportunities to observe rehearsals and tech sessions.

## SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

We have a comprehensive programme of performances over the academic year to support teaching and learning in Drama, English and across the curriculum.

A range of workshops to support learning can be held at Curve or in your school. We can tailor bespoke workshops to meet the needs of specific groups and support classroom study. Or you can choose one of our industry insight sessions including:

- Page to Stage
- Careers in the Theatre
- Behind the Scenes
- Technical Theatre and Design

To find out more about our work with artists, communities, schools and young people visit

[www.curveonline.co.uk/  
get-involved/](http://www.curveonline.co.uk/get-involved/)

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**TICKETS 0116 242 3595**  
**WWW.CURVEONLINE.CO.UK**

**CURVE THEATRE, LEICESTER**



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