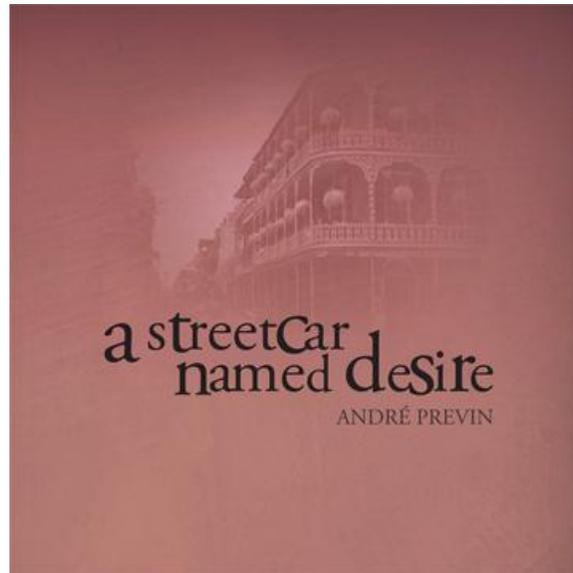


*Virginia
Opera*



STUDY GUIDE

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

by

André Previn

Libretto by

Philip Littell

based on the play by

Tennessee Williams

2012-2013 SEASON

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Preface

Purpose

This study guide is intended to aid you, the teacher, in increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE. This will not only add to knowledge about opera, but should develop awareness of other related subjects, making the performance they attend much more enjoyable.

Most Important

If you only have a limited amount of time, concentrate on the cast of characters, the plot and some of the musical and dramatic highlights of the opera. Recognition produces familiarity which in turn produces a positive experience.

The Language

The Virginia Opera will perform A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE in the original language, English, and an English translation will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these **Supertitles**, audiences can experience the beauty of opera in the original language, yet still understand the meaning of all that is being sung.

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A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Premiere

First performance on September 19, 1998,
at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, California.

Cast of Characters

Blanche Dubois.....	Soprano
Stanley Kowalski.....	Baritone
Stella Kowalski.....	Soprano
Harold Mitchell (Mitch).....	Tenor
Eunice Hubbell.....	Mezzo-Soprano
Steve Hubbell.....	Tenor
A Newspaper Boy.....	Tenor
Mexican Woman.....	Mezzo Soprano
Nurse, Doctor, Pablo Gonzales.....	Non-singing role

Brief Summary

Blanche has come to live with her sister Stella in New Orleans' French Quarter. Her transportation to the apartment is a streetcar with the name "Desire." Blanche is hiding facts about her past. She presents herself as a refined Southern lady but was a teacher who had an affair with a 17-year-old student and was dismissed. She had other affairs as well. She has lost the ancestral family home. Blanche is living on the edge of reality and is very fragile.

Stella's husband Stanley thinks Blanche is pretentious and feels she is deceitful. He is rough, brutish and dominating. Blanche does not understand Stella's love for Stanley. Stanley fights with Stella during a poker game with men friends. He hits her but later begs her forgiveness. Blanche feels Stanley is a brute and wants her sister to leave him. She is distraught when Stella returns to Stanley's embrace.

Blanche becomes interested in Mitch, one of Stanley's friends. They get along well and Blanche hopes to marry him. Stanley is trying to learn more about Blanche's past life. He is afraid she wants to destroy his marriage to Stella.

Stanley learns about Blanche's past and informs Mitch. Then he tells Stella and confronts Blanche. Mitch breaks with Blanche because of her lies. When Stanley finds Blanche home alone he rapes her. Blanche has a mental breakdown and can no longer distinguish between fantasy, illusion and reality. As she is committed to an asylum she tells the accompanying doctor, "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Full Plot Synopsis and Musical Highlights

Act I

The opera opens with a low deep note from the tuba followed by a wide dissonant chord heavy with trumpets. The chord is swiftly repeated. Some have likened the resulting sound to a distant train whistle. However, the effect of the repeated chord sets the location and atmosphere of the opera. It is jazz-like, languid and full of torpor. It is New Orleans sultriness with damp heat, jazzy riffs and plenty of booze. Once the repeated chord is established, it is used as a recurring motive. The repeated chord is composed of blocks of triads that are modified harmonically as they recur throughout the opera. The repeated chord motive is woven into the overall orchestration and can be juxtaposed with additional effects such as solo clarinet and rippling brass. The motive is linked to the character of Blanche Dubois; her needs and emotional instability. Additional recurring motives further amplify the unfolding action and serve as a unifying force.

The action of the opera unfolds in two ways. The dialogue between the characters is delivered through continual recitative (sung dialogue). There are occasional arias where the main characters, with the exception of Stanley, are more expansive and reflective in their expression. The orchestra provides the other essential piece by portraying the state of mind of the characters as well as illustrating their actions. It is the storyteller and the primary vehicle for revealing the mental deterioration of Blanche Dubois.

The action begins with Blanche's arrival at her sister Stella's apartment in New Orleans. She is seeking refuge. Using recitative Blanche sings that she was told "to take a streetcar named Desire then transfer to one called Cemeteries for six blocks and get off at Elysian Fields." The neighbor Eunice shows her into her sister's apartment. Before Eunice can get too nosy Blanche tells her she wants to be left alone. It quickly becomes clear that all is not well. As the orchestra provides the underlying narrative we hear the desperation Blanche feels as she looks for a calming drink of alcohol. The chord motive is heard. She looks up into a mirror but turns away and doesn't want to see herself. She tries to calm herself singing the words, "Keep hold... Keep hold of yourself, keep hold." The orchestra reflects her unsteadiness.

Blanche has come to her sister because she has lost her job and her ancestral home. Her mental state is uncertain and it is clear that she is hiding secrets about herself. She presents herself as a southern lady fallen on hard times trying to uphold high standards. She is upset by the shabby appearance of the area. Stella arrives home and the two sisters are happy to be together. We hear the chord motif as they embrace. Stella has a short aria, "I can hardly stand it," which displays her sweet-tempered and mild nature. Blanche tells Stella how she felt abandoned when Stella left home, leaving her to deal with all the family's problems. Using recitative she says, "You left! I stayed and struggled!" When family members died and the family home, Belle Reve, was lost, Blanche dealt with it all. A second motive is introduced after Blanche sings, "I...I...I took the blows on my face and my body. Death after death all of those deaths!" This

motive is played by jazz trumpets and a “sliding” trombone and consists of a chromatic two-note “wobble” supported by a chromatic run up and down a short interval. The composer indicated the musicians should “bend the pitch down,” to achieve a “vulgar” sound for this phrase.

Stanley Kowalski, Stella’s husband, arrives home and there is instant animosity between Blanche and Stanley. The underlying orchestral music provides insight into Stanley’s character, indicating that he is brutal and controlling. In the ensuing recitative, Stanley blusters that Blanche is “putting on airs” and is lying about herself. In response to his questions Blanche reveals that she once was married but that her husband died. He accuses Blanche of not giving Stella her fair share of the family money. In addition to the antagonism between the two characters, there is also an underlying physical attraction. Blanche flirts with Stanley and asks him to button up the back of her dress. The chord motive accompanies her actions. Stanley reveals that Stella is expecting a baby.

Stella takes Blanche out for the evening while Stanley has friends over to play poker. When they return Blanche meets Stanley’s friend Mitch. As they talk Blanche learns that Mitch once loved a girl who died. Blanche asks Mitch cover the bare light bulb in the room with a paper lantern to make it look prettier and diffuse the light. They turn on the radio and begin to dance a slow waltz. Stanley, who is now drunk, becomes very angry. He rips the radio from the wall and then hits Stella for complaining. The men pull Stanley away and Blanche takes Stella upstairs. Once Stanley sobers up he realizes Stella is not there. He is frantic and calls out her name. Stella cannot resist his entreaties and Stanley carries her to their apartment. In the morning Stella is consumed with thoughts of her night with Stanley. Blanche cannot comprehend her sister’s demeanor, believing that Stanley is little more than an animal. The two sing a duet that ends Act I. Blanche berates Stanley while Stella hums a sensuous jazzy tune, “Hmmm,” oblivious to her sister’s entreaties, “Stella? Stella?”

Act II

A brassy prelude featuring a trumpet and a tuba begins Act II. Stanley, who has been seeking information about Blanche’s past, asks her questions about a seedy hotel where a friend of his claims to have seen her. She denies the story. Blanche is waiting for Mitch and tells Stella she would like to marry him. Stella replies that she’s sure it will happen but that Blanche needs to stop drinking so much. After Stella leaves, Blanche is feeling a little sorry for herself as she drinks and sings the short aria (arietta), “Soft people have got to shimmer and glow.” The paperboy comes to the door and Blanche reveals her true self by trying to seduce him. The chord motive is heard in the background. But then she changes her mind and sends the paperboy on his way, simply kissing him at the door.

Mitch and Blanche have their date and Mitch wants to get closer. But Blanche, obsessed with her age, won’t say how old she is and doesn’t want to be seen in bright light. Mitch reveals that his dying mother would like him to be settled. He sings a lyrical aria, “I’m not a boy, she says,” that establishes him as a caring, loving man. Blanche is spurred to tell Mitch something of her past. In an extended piece she relates that years earlier she was married to a young man she loved very much, but discovered that he was

struggling with homosexuality. When she told him he disgusted her, he ran from her and committed suicide. The orchestra reflects her words and we hear both the chromatic motive and a return of the waltz music from Act I. Now, however, the waltz music is terribly distorted and full of dissonance, presented as a ghastly caricature of its earlier form. In a duet that ends Act II, Mitch presses her to think they might help each other, that perhaps they are right for each other. However, Blanche is too caught up in her unhappy memories and can't shake off the desolation. She sings that since that time there has been no light in the world.

Act III

The prelude to Act III is dark and mournful. There is a sense of tragic inevitability. Stella is preparing for Blanche's birthday. Blanche is bathing before dinner and a date with Mitch. Stanley tells Stella that he has found out everything about Blanche's sordid past. She was run out of Laurel, Mississippi for her immoral behavior. She was fired from her teaching job because she had seduced a student. Stella is upset but tries to defend Blanche. The three sit down to dinner and Stanley gives Blanche an envelope that he calls her birthday present. It is a one-way ticket back to Laurel, Mississippi. Mitch is late and Stanley tells Blanche that he won't be coming to see her anymore. Mitch now knows everything about her and her lies. Blanche is so upset she must leave the room. Stella goes into premature labor and Stanley takes her to the hospital.

Later that night Mitch knocks on the door. He is upset and demands true answers to his questions. How old is she? What does she look like in strong light? He wants to know what is real. She replies, "Real? Who wants real?" and sings the aria, "I Want Magic." She tells Mitch that she is not truthful but tells things the way they ought to be. Things look so much better by candlelight or starlight. After Blanche's aria, Mitch pulls her into the light and tells her he didn't care that she was older but he cared about all the lies.

A Mexican woman selling flowers comes to the door. She calls her wares "flowers for the dead." Her words punctuate Blanche's mind with images of death and remembered shame as the woman peddles her flowers. Blanche hears the woman's words and begins to sing of the young soldiers who camped near Belle Rive and enjoyed her sexual favors. The distorted waltz theme is heard in the orchestra as Blanche's jumbled mind associates the soldiers with her dead husband. She wants Mitch to marry her. He reacts by saying she is not even fit to meet his mother. Blanche shouts at him to leave.

The terrible reality is impossible for Blanche to confront and she seeks refuge in illusion. Haunted by the Mexican flower-seller's words, she dresses in a white nightgown and rhinestone tiara and sings "How about taking a swim," to a group of imaginary admirers in arioso form (similar to recitative but more melodic). The arioso is repetitive and very chromatic with sudden changes in the rhythmic pattern. It represents an effective "mad scene." In the midst of this fantasy, Stanley returns from the hospital. At first Blanche insults him but then becomes fearful. Stanley implies that this encounter was inevitable. He plays a brief cat-and-mouse game before overcoming Blanche and raping her. Musically, the rape scene is expressed through an orchestral Interlude. The

chord motive figures prominently as do the saxophones. Eventually the chord motive moves lower in pitch and slows, accented by high violin tones, as the scene ends.

Stella has come home with her new baby. Blanche has completely succumbed to madness and is living in a fantasy world. Stella has contacted an asylum to take Blanche away. The men are playing poker. A distressed Stella helps Blanche pack her clothes. Blanche believes she is going on a cruise and will spend her days at the ocean, eventually dying and being laid to rest there. She sings the moving aria, "I can smell the sea air," with an aura of transcendence. The doctor and nurse arrive. Blanche resists going with the nurse but yields to the doctor who treats her like a lady. She addresses the doctor, "Whoever you are, I have always relied on the kindness of strangers." The orchestral music is dirge-like. As she walks out Blanche repeats the words "whoever you are" three times, accented by a trumpet, the sound trailing away. The signature chord motive returns to close the opera, bringing full circle to the tragedy.

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Historical Background

The source material for the opera A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE is an award-winning play of the same name written by the American playwright, Tennessee Williams in 1947. The impact of this play on the public was immediate. At the close of its opening night performance the audience applauded unceasingly for thirty minutes. It achieved almost instantaneous status as an American masterpiece. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1948 and within three years was turned into an award-winning movie. It has also been performed as a ballet and adapted for television. Williams' play is considered somewhat biographical. There is widespread belief that the character of Blanche was loosely based on Williams' sister Rose who struggled with mental illness before being subjected to a lobotomy which resulted in her institutionalization.

From the end of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century the trend in stage dramas was moving away from melodrama and towards the concept of dramatic naturalism. The two main characters of *Streetcar*, Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski, were archetypes of the two styles. Blanche used the elements of melodrama to mask her frailties and project a false image, while the brash, crude Stanley was the epitome of dramatic naturalism. This new approach was promoted by Constantin Stanislavski and his method-acting system. The first Stanley was method actor Marlon Brando whose performance had a significant impact on the actors and dramas that followed. The 1951 movie featured the same director, Elia Kazan, and cast as the stage play, with the exception of Vivian Leigh, who took the role of Blanche in the movie.

Music played a central role in the stage play. Williams selected specific musical pieces for inclusion in the drama and notated thirty-five musical stage directions to weave the music into the fabric of the play. Additionally, the dialogue itself was considered very poetic and lyrical. For the film Director Kazan brought in composer Alex North to write the musical score for *Streetcar*. His original music was considered groundbreaking and had the distinction of being the first workable dramatic jazz score for a film. It set a very high standard for any future musical adaptation of the play.

During the 1990s the General Director of San Francisco Opera vigorously pursued the goal of commissioning an opera based on *Streetcar*. When the project was offered to André Previn he accepted without delay, relishing a new and challenging project. Librettist Philip Littrell signed on and produced a text for the opera that was faithful to the play, while reducing its length. To produce a singable and settable text he had to remove 40% to 50% of the original words of the stage play. The remaining words contained the essence of the play. The main focus of the opera is the character of Blanche Dubois and her descent into a fantasy world. To make the text of the opera very clear, Previn composed inflected recitative that follows normal speech patterns. There are a few well-placed arias, a flowing vocal line, recurring motives and an orchestral score that lushly supports the vocal line and elucidates the powerful narrative. Sir André Previn was at the podium on opening night in 1998, conducting the premiere of his first, but not last, opera. Since that time, A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE has been staged regularly at opera houses all over the world and become a part of the standard operatic repertory.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER: André George Previn



André Previn is an American pianist, conductor and composer who forged a successful career in the film industry before using his many talents to excel in a broad range of musical achievements. His accomplishments include two operas, several Broadway musicals, a wide range of orchestral and chamber music, songs and song cycles, piano compositions, a multitude of film scores and recordings, television appearances, and major conducting positions. He is also the recipient of four Oscars and ten Grammy awards.

Previn was born in Berlin, Germany, on April 6, 1929, and named Andreas Ludwig Priwin. His father was a successful lawyer, judge and a talented musician. Andreas excelled at the piano from a very early age and attended the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. Before the age of ten he was expelled from school and the family was forced to flee Germany because they were Jewish. His birth certificate was lost during this upheaval, which makes his birth date somewhat uncertain. Previn, himself, has stated that his birth year was 1930. From Berlin the family went to Paris and in 1939 moved to Los Angeles where Previn's great-uncle, Charles Previn, was music director of Universal Studios.

Previn became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1943 and graduated from Beverly Hills High School in 1946. Before graduation he was already working as a rehearsal pianist in the film industry, working his way up to film score orchestration and then full-fledged composition of film scores. In 1949 Previn became Music Director for MGM Studios and stayed with them for 16 years, winning many awards for his film scores. In 1951 he began to study conducting with Pierre Monteux, music director of the San Francisco Symphony. During the 1950s he also toured as a jazz pianist, working with jazz greats Shelly Manne and Leroy Vinnegar. His work as a pianist continued with numerous recordings and programs for television, working with such diverse artists as Charlie Martin, Ella Fitzgerald, Doris Day and Julie Andrews. In 1963 he made his conducting debut with the St. Louis Symphony. Previn was recognized as a world-class conductor in 1967 when he was appointed music director of the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Soon thereafter he took over the London Symphony Orchestra followed in succeeding years by the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic and eventually the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

As he matured as an artist Previn moved into more diverse areas of composition including concert pieces and art song. It was in this later period that his interest in opera was stirred. When it was suggested that he compose an opera based on the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* he remarked that the play "has always been an opera. It's just that the music was missing." Previn worked with librettist Philip Littrell to distill the dialogue of the stage play into a form that he could successfully set to music. The opera was two years in the making before its successful premiere in 1998. His second opera, *Brief Encounter*, had its premiere in 2009. A third opera is being considered.

Now past his 80th year, André Previn continues to compose and conduct. He remains a vital part of the American music scene, and a greatly admired figure around the world.

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country's folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.



The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<i>Soprano</i>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<i>Tenor</i>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<i>Baritone</i>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	Verdi Baritone Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<i>Bass</i>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	Buffo Bass Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	Basso Cantate Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.



Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume

designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the orchestra help us determine the location and time period of the opera? Are there jazz influences in the orchestra?
2. How does the orchestra play the role of storyteller?
3. How does the orchestral music differ from the vocal lines of the singers?
4. Which character has the first and last words of the opera? Does the opera revolve around this character?
5. How does the composer use recitative (sung dialogue) to convey character to the audience?
6. How do Blanche and Stanley's characters clash? What does Blanche think of Stanley? How does Stanley view Blanche?
7. How do Stanley's character traits control the mood of the orchestra?
8. How do Blanche's vocal lines reflect her state of mind? When are Blanche's melodic passages the most beautiful?
9. Both Blanche and Stella are sopranos. Which character has a higher and lighter sound? Does it match her demeanor?
10. How do the two sisters interact in their duet at the end of Act I? How do their vocal lines compare? What does the music tell us?
11. What does the character of Mitch represent to Blanche? What does their duet represent for both characters?
12. What does Stanley give Blanche for a birthday present? How do Stanley's actions help precipitate Blanche's mental collapse?
13. Stanley is the one main character with no aria. Why do you think this is the case? Would an aria help us to understand his character better?

Opera Etiquette at an opera performance

Before bringing a group to the Opera, please go over etiquette with your students to ensure an enjoyable experience for all audience members.

What to Wear

Most people like to dress up when they go to the opera because it's part of the fun! Nowadays you can pretty much wear whatever you want. However, an evening at the opera is usually considered to be a special occasion. We encourage dressing in layers so bring a sweater, wrap or jacket just in case.

Arrive On Time

You should always make sure you get to the opera house in plenty of time to find parking, get your tickets and be seated before the performance starts. Thirty minutes before start time (curtain) is usually sufficient. If you are late, the ushers may let you in after the overture, but, if there is not an overture, you may have to wait until intermission and miss the entire first act!

Remain Quiet during the Performance

There is nothing worse than sitting near a chatterbox, someone text messaging or a ringing cell phone during a performance. Please turn off anything that can make noise or light. Save your comments for intermission and, by all means, do not sing along! Remember recording devices, video and photography is not permitted of any Virginia Opera performance.

Applaud When Appropriate

The correct times to applaud are when the conductor takes the podium at the very beginning of the performance, after the overture, after a big aria, at the end of each act, and when the singers come out to take a bow. If you are unsure when those times are, it is best to wait and follow the lead of other audience members.

Applaud Appropriately

Clapping while sitting or standing is always acceptable, and you can yell "*Bravo!*" to show appreciation for a male singer, "*Brava!*" to show appreciation for a female singer, and "*Bravi!*" to show appreciation for a group of singers. Yelling out anything other than those three words, as well as screaming or whistling, is inappropriate.

Why we follow these etiquette rules:

- Because it is respectful to the performers and the theater to dress nicely.
- Because it's dangerous to try to step over people in the dark, and because it's disrespectful to the performers and the other audience members.
- Because the performers really can hear the whispers from on stage, and other people are trying to watch.
- Gum, candy, and drinks make noise that will distract the performers, and are not permitted in the theatre.