

# Erika Stone steps into Blanche's shoes

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS



Stone

Actress Erika Stone was perplexed by the vintage cover of a 1950s Wonder Woman comic book depicting the Amazonian superhero held in the arms of a man in uniform. The caption above her read: "Will she stay with him or save the world?" Stone brought the image to the second rehearsal for Theatre Tallahassee's production of "A Streetcar Named Desire" to fulfill an assignment given by the director, Matthew Watson.

"I saw it and thought, this is Wonder Woman... can you not wait for me while I save the world and then we'll have dinner later?" quips Stone. "It's that juxtaposition of a woman of power, strength, and independence being carried by a guy, and she can either stay with him or save the world but she can't do both."

The cast was asked to bring in images that depicted themes in the, at times, dark and dramatic play, such as reality, fantasy, and gender roles, as the play deals with the expectations and treatment of women versus men in the late 1940s.

Stone says the exercise not only brought the group closer together but also allowed her to flesh out the shape of her character, another strong woman within challenging circumstances, leading lady Blanche DuBois.

"I'm more convinced the play is about a woman out of time who is simply misunderstood," expounds Stone on Blanche and 'Streetcar.' "It's that whole idea of being a couple generations off of where you should be — if Blanche had grown up in this time I have no doubt she would be a highly successful person. Desire also plays a part in it and people's different ideas about love."

While playing Blanche has been one of her bucket-list roles, acting is not the only path Stone has taken in theater.

Growing up in New York City, her stage debut in elementary school was first as a magic snowman, then Dorothy in the "Wizard of Oz." Stone went on to study art and began painting sets. She quickly realized that she wanted to stay on the stage, however, instead of behind the scenes, and attended NYU to earn a degree in educational theater. Other actors have inspired Stone along the way as she has had the opportunity to see and participate in many productions.

"When I have the chance to work with people who are really talented it's exciting and I think you can see that," says Stone. "Your scenes

just crackle and pop because you have two people being actively creative together."

The New York State Theatre Institute's resident company was her first contract outside of college, allowing her to act and teach simultaneously. When she left theater company to pursue movies and television, Stone participated in the making of indie and student films in New York before moving to Los Angeles where she guest starred in various soap operas and films. Out of her many roles, her favorite experience was one of her most challenging ones as Rosie in "Slow Dance on the Killing Ground."

"It's a dramatic three-person play and I was playing a character who was my polar opposite," explains Stone. "It gave me a freedom I don't think you have in roles that are much like you, so it really allowed me to create and physicalize a character. I got to go to depths that I'm not always asked to go as well, as the character dealt with self-image and low self-esteem."

Stone has had similar feelings in her exploration of Blanche in "A Streetcar Named Desire," as the character struggles with getting older and coming to terms with her worth in the world.

She did extensive research in rural Mississippi, and the period of time when "Streetcar" takes place in order to portray a fully dimensional character and make choices as an actor who accurately depicts how Blanche would react or interact with others.

As a professor in Florida State University's College of Motion Picture Arts, Stone says her experiences acting in front of a camera have also contributed to her methodology as an actress and instructor.

"We paint pictures on

## If you go

**What:** A Streetcar Named Desire  
**When:** 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. on Sundays, June 23-25  
**Where:** Theater Tallahassee, 1861 Thomasville Road  
**Cost:** \$22 for Adults, \$17 for Seniors, and \$12 for Students  
**Contact:** For more information, call 850-224-8474 or visit <http://theatretallahassee.org/>.

film and I think that my knowledge of color and composition from painting helped me as an actor on film," says Stone. "I try to teach my acting students how to think actively. Thinking actors are ones that are always actively listening because the camera picks up every little subtlety. If you're not honest about everything you do, the camera will catch you in a lie every time."

In fact, her biggest piece of advice to any aspiring actor is just that — believing in every line spoken with honesty as that "belief will get you there." She has also enjoyed the playwright, Tennessee Williams'



Ken Catullo as Stanley with Erika Stone as Blanche in Theatre Tallahassee's production of "A Streetcar Named Desire."



writing, as he makes it easy to believe in lines that "trip off the tongue" with natural styles and rhythms.

With the final weekend of performances for "A Streetcar Named Desire," on June 23-25 at Theater Tallahassee, Stone wants to make her character, alongside her fellow actors, live and breathe for the audience, while bringing to light

many social issues that still face the country today.

Stone sees theater as the way in which to pass down this cultural heritage and maintains plays like "Streetcar" as a moral compass and mirror for attendees to reflect on their own lives.

"The theater helps us to be tolerant and have a better understanding of our humanity through experiencing somebody else's journey," says Stone. "I certainly hope the audience will feel for Blanche and recognize

that she was up against some pretty tremendous odds. I also hope it will make them think about how we justify different standards for men and women, as well as relationships and violence against women, and ask themselves how we can get out of the idea that this is normal."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).

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