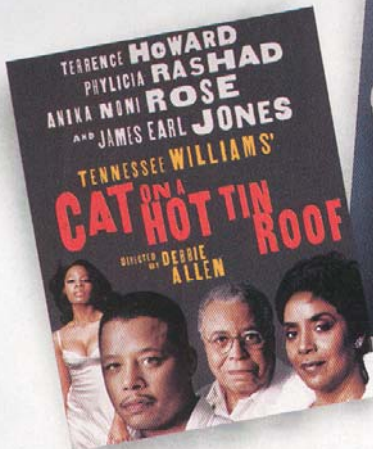


the arts



Director Debbie Allen and *Cat* star Phylicia Rashad; "the dream cast" of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*



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Great Expectations

Under the direction of Debbie Allen, an all-star cast heats up Broadway in a smoking revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

If you need proof that no one can do drama quite like us, look no further than Broadway's Broadhurst Theatre this month, where an all-Black cast will bring *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*—Tennessee Williams's classic pot-boiler about greed, lust, death and juicy secrets seeping through a squabbling southern family—to life. When *Cat* first debuted in 1955, it shocked audiences with its daring view of homosexuality and marital discontent. African-American producer Stephen Byrd tapped Debbie Allen of *Fame* fame to direct this latest revival. The New York City limited engagement begins previews February 12 and opens March 6 and has become the hottest ticket in town.

"*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is going to be very unsettling and dramatic and tell a universal family experience," says Allen. She's assembled a dream cast for this adaptation. James Earl Jones—who could read a DMV manual and make it compelling—leads off the star-studded ensemble in the iconic role of iron-fisted patriarch Big Daddy Pollitt. Phylicia Rashad takes on the role of Ida "Big Mama" Pollitt, who knows deep-down that her 40-year marriage to Big Daddy is a sham. Allen is prepared for talk of nepotism, but pooh-poohs it. "I cast my sister because I'm her best director," says Allen.

We've all heard about having big shoes to fill, but a slip? Allen is convinced *Dreamgirls*' Anika Noni Rose will surprise audiences with her spin on feral Maggie "The Cat" Pollitt, portrayed memorably by Elizabeth Taylor flouncing around the big screen in a white slip in the 1958 film version. "I fell in love with Anika's voice," says Allen. "The first act with Maggie is like an aria, and I could hear her voice carrying it. I also love her talent and ambition." Rounding out the cast and taking on the acting challenge of his career is Terrence Howard, who will make his Broadway acting debut as Brick, a has-been jock who, like mostly everyone in the Pollitt house, has learned to lie convincingly. Though Allen's no stranger to Broadway—she has received two Tony nominations—she knows she's making history as one of the first Black women to direct a classic Broadway drama. But she's trying not to think about it too much. She says, "I'm just trying to navigate the path in my life and navigate the path onstage." —PATRIK HENRY BASS

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