



## Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

An all-Black cast in this Broadway revival

By Linda Armstrong

Excitement among theatergoers reached fever pitch in the run-up to the preview on Feb. 12 of a landmark production of Tennessee Williams's 1955 play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Staged from March 6 for a limited engagement at the Broadhurst Theatre on West 44th Street in New York City, the production features an all-Black cast for the first time in the drama's film or stage history, with Tony Award winners James Earl Jones as Big Daddy, Phylicia Rashad as Big Momma, Anika Noni Rose as Maggie, and *Hustle & Flow* film star Terrence Howard, making his Broadway debut as Brick. It also features Broadway talents Lou Myers (*The Color Purple*) and Count Stovall (*The Philadelphia Story*) and movie actors Lisa Arrindell Anderson and Giancarlo Esposito. In another first, the play is directed by actress-choreographer-director Debbie Allen, sister of Rashad, marking the first time a director directs her own sister in a Broadway show.

"I felt if we put together the right cast it could definitely be done."

—Stephen Byrd

For producer Stephen Byrd, who is making his first stab at a Broadway show, the opening of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a particularly momentous occasion. It took Byrd 12 years to secure the rights to the play, a feat he was determined to accomplish for his history-making production. "I felt if we put together the right cast it could definitely be done," he remarks.

Although the play has been performed on Broadway four times between 1955 and 2003 and once at The Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C., in 2004, most people call to mind the movie version that starred Burl Ives as Big Daddy, Judith

Anderson as Big Momma, Paul Newman as Brick and Elizabeth Taylor as Maggie. At a press conference on the first day of rehearsals, Byrd's cast was as excited as its soon-to-be audience. Howard noted that while Newman portrayed Brick as a depressed man who had given up on life, he sees the character differently. Rose, who starred in the movie version of *Dreamgirls* and who received a 2004 Tony Award for her performance in the Broadway musical *Caroline, or Change*, said she relished the opportunity to be on Broadway in a purely dramatic production, for which she is better trained than musicals.

Anyone who has seen Rashad on Broadway, especially in her Tony Award-winning performance as the matriarch in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, or as a 300-plus-year-old woman in August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*, knows that this gifted thespian always finds a way to deliver the characters she plays in her own inimitable style. Two-time Tony winner Jones is known for his legendary acting ability. He was last seen on Broadway in 2005 in *On Golden Pond*, where he played the role that the late Henry Fonda portrayed in the movie version, another example of Jones being cast in a groundbreaking production.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with an all-Black cast shows the changing view of Broadway when it comes to Blacks," says Myers. "What's great about this is [the fact that] at times Broadway has been able to set the tone that other places in the industry follow. This is the best time for Blacks since the opportunities that presented themselves at the end of slavery. Broadway opening up more opportunities for Blacks is just the way that the universe is beginning to correct itself."

Tickets for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* may be purchased by calling 212-239-6200, or at [www.telecharge.com](http://www.telecharge.com). **TNI**

Photo credit: Albert Watson