

Audition Pack – REP's 2021 production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

SYNOPSIS

In Tennessee Williams' Pulitzer Prize-winning *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the dysfunctional but wealthy Pollitt family gathers to celebrate aging patriarch Big Daddy's birthday. But there is more to this gathering than a family reunion-- Big Daddy, unbeknown to him, is dying of cancer. He is still to decide which of his sons will inherit the estate. His options include favorite son Brick, who drinks himself into oblivion in order to bear the desires of his determined wife, Maggie, or his less-favored son Gooper, his fertile wife Mae, and their "no-neck monster" children. While sensuous Maggie "the cat" tries to work her wiles to secure a future for them, Brick spirals deeper into despair, crippled by both physical pain and emotional loss. Lurking under every practiced interaction between the Pollitts is an ulterior motive, under every smile, a challenge, and under every statement, the spectre of mendacity. For the Pollitts, the truth is as hazy as the late summer sun in Mississippi, and sometimes the only way to find it is to journey through the lies.

SUMMARY

Before Act 1 of the script, the playwright provides a detailed description of the setting: the "bed-sitting-room of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta." Tennessee Williams describes the room's furniture, which includes a big double bed, a huge radio-phonograph-television, and a liquor cabinet. He also describes the layout of the house and the lighting, a "fair summer sky" that fades to dusk and night as the play progresses. The notes point out that the play unfolds in real time: it "occupies precisely the time of its performance" with the exception of the intermission.

Williams notes that the room must "evoke some ghosts." It is haunted by the original owners of the house, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, a "pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together." The playwright mentions a faded photograph of the veranda of 19th-century author Robert Louis Stevenson's home on a Samoan island that showed a "quality of tender light on weathered wood," which reminds him that the lighting for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* should suggest the "grace and comfort" of light on a late, fair summer afternoon. He tells the designer that the set must fit a play that "deals with human extremities of emotion." Finally, he points out that the actors need room to move about freely so they can express their "passion for breaking out."

Character Notes

Maggie "the Cat" Pollitt - Mid 20s to early 30s

Maggie is a pretty southern woman who comes from a humble family and sees a slim but promising hope of getting "something out of what Big Daddy leaves." She has a melodic southern drawl, a tolerance of her husband Brick's alcoholic distance but also a self-confessed "hard" edge, brought about her desperate situation. She has a dual purpose between her love for Brick and her desire for a healthy portion of the Pollitt estate: she wants the money, but she hungers for her husband's attentions as well.

Maggie calls herself a "cat on a hot tin roof" alluding to her precarious position with Brick, who will not sleep with her, and with her brother- and sister-in-law, who have the better claim on the Pollitt estate because of their brood of "no-neck monster" children. Maggie, with the tenacity of an alley cat, intends to convince Brick to have sex with her to keep them in the running. The bow-and-arrow "Diana trophy" she won in an archery contest at Ole Miss is emblematic of her relationship with Brick and his family — she is the hunter. On stage Maggie is an elegant beauty, alternating between unabashed coquetry and vicious reproach: she is "catty" because, as she puts it, she's "consumed with envy and eaten up with longing."

The exhilaration of the play lies in the force of the audience's identification with its gorgeous protagonist, a woman desperate in her sense of loneliness, who is made all the more beautiful in her envy, longing, and dispossession.

Brick Pollitt – Mid to late 20s to early 30s

Brick embodies an almost archetypal masculinity. Brick has made a virtue of indifference, first as a football star admired from afar by family and friends, then as an alcoholic, hiding the truth of his complicity in his best friend's death behind a mask of indifference. Brick punishes himself and his wife, Maggie, whom he would rather have taken the blame for Skipper's descent into drugs and alcohol. Brick imposes two punishments on himself and on his wife. One is drinking until he feels the "click" releasing him into the welcome oblivion of intoxication; he uses alcohol as a means of escape, the other is sexual abstinence. His detached, cynical attitude remains constant.

Brick believes that his feelings for Skipper were "pure an' true," and he claims disdain for a world that would have called him and Skipper "fairies." But the real source of his guilt lies instead in remembering the night that Skipper called him, drunk, to confess, having been tricked by Maggie into believing himself a homosexual. Brick hung up on him. It was Brick's own rejection that caused Skipper's death, not an uncomprehending world. Brick fails to recognize his guilt until his father forces him to face it. Big Daddy loves Brick and wants the truth but Brick tragically misunderstands his father's motives and once more retaliates outward instead of accepting the truth. According to Williams, Brick suffers from "moral paralysis:" he cannot rise from the morass of his "spiritual disrepair."

Big Daddy Pollitt – 50s to mid 60s

Big Daddy is the center of attention in the Pollitt family, not only because he holds the position of patriarch but because he is dying and his property is up for grabs. Big Daddy has risen from the position of plantation overseer to the owner of the plantation. He thinks he has a spastic colon, "made spastic by disgust" by "all the lies and liars . . . and hypocrisy" that surround him. When Big Mama protests that she has loved Big Daddy, in spite of his "hate and hardness" for forty years, he responds with the exact words that Brick speaks to Maggie, "Wouldn't it be funny if that was true."

Big Daddy has been his own man for so long that he has not been “infected by [the] ideas of other people.” Thus, remarkable for the era in which the play takes place, Big Daddy does not judge Brick’s relationship with Skipper as inappropriate. Unfortunately his acceptance comes too late for Brick, who continues to keep himself emotionally removed from everyone around him. Big Daddy genuinely loves Brick, offering his son the kind of unconditional love for which Brick respects his father. It is this unbounded trust for each other in a world of “mendacity” that ties the two men together and which not one other character in the play possesses or comprehends. Big Daddy’s tragedy is not that he must die but that he dies thinking that Brick, just like all of the others, was going to lie about his cancer too.

Big Daddy goes through the most change of any character. When he thinks he doesn't have cancer, Big Daddy wants to celebrate by having affairs with women. He also wants Brick to stop drinking and have a child, but thinks he has time for this to happen. Even so, Big Daddy tries to find out from Brick the reason for his drinking and, in the process, learns he does have cancer. As a result, Big Daddy becomes enraged and distraught. His agony is relieved through Maggie’s lie about being pregnant. He believes her and intends to make plans for Brick to inherit.

Ida "Big Mama" Pollitt – 50s to mid 60s

Sincere, foolish, always laughing “like hell at herself,” Big Mama’s idea of fun (pulling the Reverend Tooker onto her lap when he extends his hand to help her up from the sofa) is not consistent with the kind of society to which Mae and Maggie aspire. Big Mama laughs the loudest at her husband’s insults about her “fat old body” and general incompetence, but she often has to “pick up or fuss with something to cover the hurt the loud laugh doesn’t quite cover.” She only lamely chastises Brick for drinking and expresses genuine concern for Maggie’s childless plight.

She loves her husband unconditionally despite his cruelty and indifference. She loves both her sons but she cannot help but prefer Brick, who is so much like his father. Her outbursts are a willful effort to avoid the truth about Big Daddy's health.

She is constantly concerned about what Big Daddy wants and how he treats her. According to Big Daddy, Big Mama has a darker side. He claims that she really was looking forward to his death because she would gain control over the estate, so Big Mama's displays of affection for Big Daddy disgust him. For her part, Big Mama tries to be oblivious to her husband's hatred of her. Even when Big Daddy clearly shows his animosity toward her, she has difficulty believing he really means it. So, Big Mama lives in a state of delusion concerning her marriage.

Ida is ineffective at bringing her family around to her values of Christian love and forgiveness, loving and forgiving them so absolutely that they ignore her existence.

Mae "Sister Woman" Pollitt – Mid 30s to early 40s

Mae flaunts the comfortable snobbery of the foolish. She is probably the driving force behind her impassive husband Gooper’s persistence in securing Big Daddy’s estate, despite Big Daddy’s obvious scorn for his elder son. Mae’s one shining moment was as the “cotton carnival queen.” Now she is squared off against Maggie for the role of future matriarch over Big Daddy’s twenty-eight thousand acres of land — and the place in society such a role will accord her. Mae fights with everything she’s got: by producing five children (the sixth is on the way) to guarantee the family line, by kissing up to Big Daddy and Big Mama, and by eavesdropping outside of Maggie and Brick’s bedroom door in order to report Brick’s drinking and sexual abstinence or any other gossip that might discredit their claim to the inheritance.

Gooper "Brother Man" Pollitt – Mid 30s to early 40s

The elder of the Pollitt children by eight years has languished in Brick's shadow since the day his brother was born. While Brick got the attention with looks and football, Gooper married into society and became a successful lawyer. But the continued focus on his ne'er-do-well brother has turned Gooper bitter and mean as well as paranoid, and so it is out of both greed and spite that he actively campaigns for control of Big Daddy's estate.

In his race against his brother Brick to win Big Daddy's approval and guarantee his claim on the estate, Gooper stoops quite willingly to calling attention to Brick's drinking problem and general indifference to Big Daddy. Gooper announces to the assembled birthday celebrants that he bets "500 to 50" that Brick does not even know what gift he bought for Big Daddy, knowing that Maggie bought the present since Brick himself would not bother. The older son hopes that by exposing Brick's disdain for their father, Big Daddy will transfer his allegiance to Gooper. Big Daddy prefers his younger son's honest neglect over his elder son's obsequious fawning.

Doctor Baugh – Late 40s to mid 50s

Doc Baugh's purpose in the play is to authenticate the fact that Big Daddy, does, indeed, have terminal cancer and not a "spastic colon" as Big Daddy has been led to believe. By ignoring the comments around him, Doc Baugh manages to stay out of the family's destructive squabbling; he simply explains the medical reality and leaves a hypodermic package of morphine to relieve Big Daddy's more severe pain when it inevitably come.

Reverend Tooker – 50s to 60s

The stage notes read that Tooker is "the living embodiment of the pious conventional lie." Reverend Tooker spends his time at the birthday party dropping transparent hints about the various endowments other families have given to rival churches when their patriarchs died. His only purpose in sharing Big Daddy's birthday celebration seems calculated to garner his church a generous portion of the Pollitt estate. Tooker's nature is nakedly revealed when an unexpected pause in the general conversation catches him crassly joking to Doc Baugh about the "Stork and the Reaper running neck to neck" in the Pollitt home. He is an opportunist who displays a particular lack of taste and tact.

Note also in Act III his off-hand anecdote about the colors of his cheap chasuble fading into each other.

Dixie, Buster and Trixie – Playing age 8 to 11 yrs

Dixie, Buster and Trixie are three of Mae and Gooper's five children. They appear late in Act 1, when Dixie, Buster and Trixie burst in on Maggie and Brick, firing their cap pistols at Maggie. Dixie shows that she listens to her parents' conversation because she taunts Maggie for being childless. They appear here as grotesque, demonic "no-necked monsters" who intermittently interrupt the action on-stage. Under Mae's direction, they offer up a burlesque image of familial love and devotion. Mae's children are a symbol of how she uses trickery and deviousness in an attempt to manipulate Big Daddy. The author makes use of this symbol forcefully in Act 2, when Mae has her kids sing a cloyingly sweet birthday song to Big Daddy. The lyrics include, "We love you in the morning; we love you in the night." Mae is using her children to unabashedly trick Big Daddy into believing he is deeply loved by Mae and her family and thus should give them the estate. The children often behave meanly or mischievously when they are not trying to manipulate Big Daddy. Dixie yells at Maggie about being "jealous because [she] can't have babies."

AUDITION SCRIPT

Below are the scripts which will be utilized for the audition process. Please prepare accordingly.

- **Maggie monologue – p 26**

Brick: Not love with you, Maggie, but friendship with Skipper was that one great true thing, and you are naming it dirty!

Margaret: Then you haven't been listenin', not understood what I'm saying! I'm naming it so damn clean that it killed poor Skipper! – to Skipper is dead! I'm alive! Maggie the cat is alive! I am alive, alive! I am alive!

- **Maggie monologue – P 7.**

Here they? Hear them screaming? to Of course it's comical but it's also disgusting since it's so obvious what they're up to!

- **Maggie and Brick – p 17 & 18**

MARGARET [as Mae closes door]: I wonder what Dixie's real name is? to MARGARET: I CAN'T! CAN'T! CAN'T!

[She seizes his shoulder.]

- **Buster, Trixie, Dixie and Maggie – pp 27 & 28**

A little boy, Buster, accompanied by Dixie and Trixie burst into the room, wearing Indian war bonnets and firing cap pistols at Margaret and shouting: 'Bang, bang, bang!' to DIXIE [with a precocious instinct for the cruellest thing]: You're jealous!--You're just jealous because you can't have babies!

[She sticks out her tongue at Margaret as she sashays past her with her stomach stuck out, to the gallery. Margaret slams the gallery doors and leans panting against them. There is a pause. Brick has replaced his spilt drink and sits]

- **Big Mama, Big Daddy – pp 35, 36 & 37**

BIG MAMA [quickly]: Big Daddy, come blow out the candles on your birthday cake! to BIG DADDY [to himself]: Wouldn't it be funny if that was true----

[A pause is followed by a burst of light in the sky from the fireworks.]

- **Big Daddy Monologue – p 40**

BIG DADDY: We got that dock the summer we went to Europe, me an' Big Mama on that damn Cook's Tour, to I'm wiser and sadder, Brick, for this experience which I just gone through.

- **Big Daddy and Brick – pp- 46,47 & 48**

BIG DADDY: Stay here, you son of a bitch!--till I say go! to BIG DADDY: Has someone been lying to you?

- **Big Mama, Reverend Tooker, Dr Baugh, Mae, Gooper – pp 63, 64, 65 & 66**

BIG MAMA: Why're you all surroundin' me--like this? Why're you all starin' at me like this an' makin' signs at each other? to GOOPER [with jocularly]: She's gonna keep her ole chin up, aren't you, Big Mama? [Big Mama sobs.] Well Doc we sure do appreciate all you've done. I'm telling you, we're obligated____

- ***Reverend Tooker, Gooper, Big Daddy, Mae, Maggie – pp 29 & 30***

REVEREND TOOKER [vivaciously]: Oh, but St Paul's in Grenada has three memorial windows, and the latest one is a Tiffany stained-glass window that cost twenty-five hundred dollars, a picture of Christ the Good Shepherd with a Lamb in His arms. **to** GOOPER: We gave 'em that thing for a third anniversary present, got three speakers in it.

[The room is suddenly blasted by the climax of a Wagnerian opera or a Beethoven symphony.]

- ***Mae and Maggie – pp 15, 16 & 17***

[Mae enters bearing aloft the bow of a young lady's archery set.]

MAE: Brick, is this thing yours? **to** MAE: You know the real names of my children. Buster's real name is Robert. Sonny's real name is Saunders. Trixie's real name is Marlene and Dixie's--

[Someone downstairs calls for her. 'Hey, Mae!'--She rushes to door, saying:]

Intermission is over!

- ***Big Mama Monologue pp 70 & 71***

BIG MAMA: Now you listen to me, all of you, you listen here! **to** That's right--CRAP! I say CRAP too, like Big Daddy!

AUDITION PACK INFORMATION – Call for Expressions of Interest

Director – Anne Somes

Production Manager – Marya Glyn-Daniel

Expression of Interest- EOI and Scripts.

1. **Adult actors - we are looking for experienced performers for this classic play. The roles are varied, diverse and across an age range.**
2. **Please take careful note of the requirements for young children performers. Playing age is of vital importance.**
3. **Please send through an up to date theatre CV and recent headshot. Also indicate the role/s for which you wish to be considered.**
4. **For bookings, scripts and information please contact us by email – cat_auditions@canberrarep.org.au It is important that you are familiar with the script. Please make sure you access a copy from Canberra Repertory during office hours, 10am – 4pm Monday to Friday. A refundable \$5.00 deposit is required.**
5. **The extracts which are required for your audition are included in this pack and coincide with the pages in the purchased script. Please make sure you are totally prepared and cognizant of the script requirements. You may also be asked to respond to directorial feedback on the floor.**

Allocation of Slots for Audition.

- Please note: to facilitate the audition process for the Casting Panel, auditionees will be allocated audition slots.
- Slots will be allocated in segments of 15 mins.
- Please attend 10 mins prior to your required time to fill out the Audition Form.

Location, Dates and Times of Auditions.

Venue - Cook Community Hub, 41 Templeton St, Cook.

Enter the carpark, the Hall is directly in front of you. Go to the stairs at the right hand end, go down the stairs and into the undercroft. The tenancy is Free-Rain and SUPA Productions the second door on your left.

- Adult auditions will be held on Sat 31st October and Sun 1st November 2020. 10.00a.m to 4.00p.m. Call backs as required for adult roles on Mon 2nd November from 6.00p.m.
- Young performers' auditions will be held on Sat 31st October from 4.30p.m to 5.45p.m.
- Where appropriate auditionees will be supported by a reader/s for their audition.

Information for Young Performers.

- Please make sure that young performers for the roles of Buster, Trixie and Dixie are well prepared and understand their relationship with their parents and how their behavior is influenced by them. Please note advisory comments especially on playing ages for young performers.

Call backs.

- Auditionees will be notified at least 24hrs prior to callback date if required. Please note that callbacks are only actioned where casting needs further consideration.
- Accents are required – Southern Colonial. Note: accents will be refined in the rehearsal process.

Cast Rehearsals

- Cast members are advised that rehearsals will take place on Tues and Wed evenings from 7.00p.m to 10.00p.m. Sunday daytime rehearsals will be scheduled.
- All Cast should note that you will only be required when called.
- The rehearsal schedule is complete and will be available well in advance so planning is possible. Note there may be some slight variations dependent upon progress.
- Note one early exception with rehearsals commencing with a read through on Mon 23rd November from 7.00p.m to 10.30p.m. Rehearsals will break for Christmas and family time from 17th December 2020 up to and including 12th January 2021.