



Artwork by
Sarah Haley

The Rose Tattoo

by Tennessee Williams
Directed by
Bonnie J. Monte

Know-the-Show
Audience Guide
researched and written by
the Education Department of

The
SHAKESPEARE
Theatre of
New Jersey



In this Guide

- Director’s Notes: “My Thoughts About the Play” 2
- The Life of Tennessee Williams 4
- Selected Plays of Tennessee Williams 5
- *The Rose Tattoo*: A Brief Synopsis..... 6
- Selections from “The Timeless World of a Play” Williams’ Introduction to *The Rose Tattoo*..... 8
- Who’s Who in the Play 9
- *The Rose Tattoo*: A Brief Production History 10
- In This Production..... 11
- Commentary and Criticism 12
- Explore Online 13

THIS PRODUCTION OF *THE ROSE TATTOO* IS SPONSORED BY
THE S. DILLARD AND ADRIENNE KIRBY FAMILY PHILANTHROPIC FUND (CFNJ)





Director's Notes

"My Thoughts About the Play"

For me, *The Rose Tattoo* is an astonishing piece of theatre. It plunges into territory not often explored in American drama, and it does so with unapologetic bravado and frankness. I think its brilliance lies in the very things for which it's often criticized, including its cacophonous profusion of dramatic styles that careen from scenes that are downright operatic and epic in scope, to intimate moments of such emotional and physical vulnerability that we feel our hearts ripping apart along with the characters on stage. It is a play of compelling and dramatic opposites, seemingly chaotic in structure, but in fact, carefully constructed, and rife with all the aspects of what it is like to be alive in moments of heightened emotion.

Williams captures the lives of his main characters at desperate turning points in their journeys, and with his words and the world he depicts, gives us a picture of life that is both brutally and joyously real, surreal, and symbolic all at once. It is a play about deep and aching longing; about a level of loneliness that is physically painful and seemingly incurable; and it is about sensuality and the power of physical love and raw chemistry. It deals with the comforts and deceptions of religion; it lets science and superstition spar



Tennessee Williams and actress Anna Magnani.
New York Public Library, ca.1952.

throughout; it doles out cruelty and kindness; depicts youth versus age; and beauty versus ugliness, both physical and spiritual. It deals with prejudice in many forms; with infidelity and motherhood. It is about pride of all varieties — from merited, to stubborn, to destructively foolish. It revels in a setting that is such a mixture of colorful people and cultures that it feels like a place from another realm, and yet is simply a shabby home on the edge of a highway and the water. It is a place that turns tawdry and carnival-esque, then becomes sublimely beautiful and majestic. It feels at moments like a Greek tragedy, then swings wildly into a kind of comedic burlesque. It descends into the darkness of true despair, only to be interrupted again and again by both the high drama of cataclysmic circumstances as well as the trivialities of domestic life. We see the darkness become infused with light, and light overtaken by shadows of doubt and fear, and we watch a cavalcade of such fully-felt lives that it leaves one feeling intoxicated. It is Tennessee's visceral ode to joy, and it oozes with his love and affection for the human spirit, and his deep belief in the power of close human contact.

It is a magical piece of theatre that I find to be heart-breaking and heart-soaring all at once. It is thrilling in its courage, and deeply cathartic. Most importantly, it lets us share in the experience of the human heart in all of its messy squalor, its infinite capacity for hope, its tenderness, its brutality, and its ability to bloom into splendid glory, like a lustrous rose, when nourished with the embrace, both real and metaphorical, of a kindred spirit.

I was very lucky and privileged to have had the opportunity in 1981 and 1982 to work with Tennessee Williams shortly before his untimely death.

He has influenced my life in the theatre more than any other playwright besides Shakespeare. *The Rose Tattoo* is Tennessee's homage to love and life, and this production is my grateful homage to him.

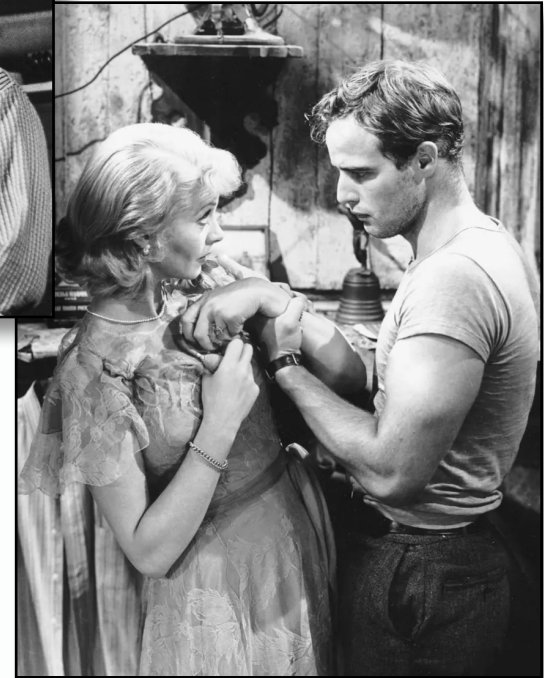
A Rose of a Different Color

Written only a few years after *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *The Rose Tattoo* is in many ways a continuation of the themes that dominate those plays. It is however, a very different "beast" atmospherically. To this day, it continues to hold a unique place in Williams' canon, for it emanates a level of raucous exuberance and constant humor that is rare in his work. Almost none of his other plays or stories give us a world where hope, healthy love, and promise for the future are not only possible, but palpable; and that, more than anything, I think, distinguishes it as a brilliant anomaly in his vast canon.

That being said, in so many ways, *The Rose Tattoo* is a thematic mirror image of most of his other masterworks, most notably *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but in a diametrically opposed universe. Serafina and Rosa Delle Rose are southern women whose lives are largely defined, like Blanche and Stella's, by their relationships with men. While Rosa is akin to Stella in many ways; earthy, peasant-class Serafina and fragile, once-patrician Blanche are total opposites with the significant exception of their shared burden of desperate loneliness and longing. Serafina's blatant desire for her husband Rosario, and her proud boasts of their love-making, stand in stark contrast to Blanche's pretense of lily-white purity, and her repressed desires and subsequent shame. Like Blanche, Serafina falls into the category of Williams' "the fugitive kind" – characters who by many virtues, or lack thereof, are shunned by society and even punished by its more "normal" members, but Serafina and Blanche are relegated to that status by very different attributes, and they react in very different ways. Like *Streetcar*, *The Rose Tattoo* focuses on two couples – in the case of *Tattoo*, Serafina and Alvaro, and Rosa and Jack. And like *Streetcar*'s Stella and Stanley, and Blanche and Mitch, all four of *Tattoo*'s lovers are beset



LEFT: Burt Lancaster and Anna Magnani in *The Rose Tattoo*.
BELOW: Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.



by deeply felt emotional dilemmas. In *Streetcar* it tears them apart or destroys them, in *The Rose Tattoo* it brings them together and heals them. The two stories are so similar in their antithetical way, that even Stanley's devastating sexual attack on Blanche is echoed in *Tattoo*, but in a burlesque version, via Alvaro's harmless, drunken, mistaken identity encounter with Rosa.

A book could be written on the particular comparison of *Streetcar* and *The Rose Tattoo*, but my main point is that despite its unique flavor and rare emotional optimism in relation to the rest of Tennessee's oeuvre, his obsessions remain constant throughout his body of work, and are all contained within the pages of this play. The joyous difference is in the resolution. When we see Serafina, at play's end, move beyond despair, loneliness, longing and grief, and follow her heart, ours soars along with hers. *The Rose Tattoo*, like Williams' other masterpieces, is a priceless gem, but amidst all of his "diamonds" this is the only one that is rose-colored.



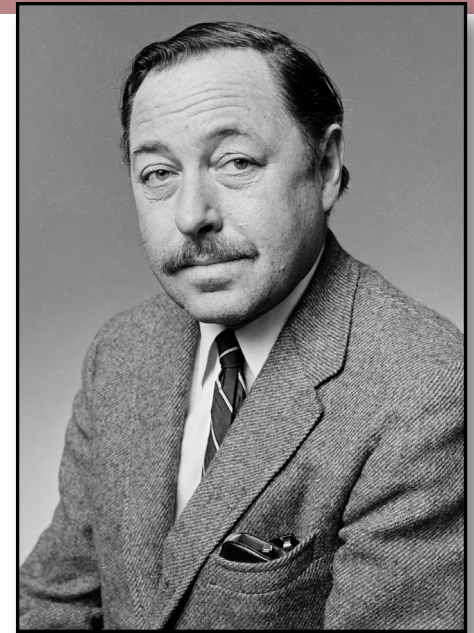
The Life of Tennessee Williams

Thomas Lanier Williams was born on March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, the second child of three children of Cornelius Williams, a traveling salesman, and his wife Edwina (Dakin) Williams. Because his father was away from home so much, until the age of 7, young Tom lived with his mother, his older sister Rose and his maternal grandparents in Clarksdale, Mississippi. This brief time, when he was doted upon by his mother, his grandparents, and a nursemaid nicknamed “Ozzie,” was the foundation of his lifelong love of the South.

In 1918, Cornelius Williams obtained a steady job in sales with a St. Louis-based shoe company, and relocated his family (which soon included a new son, Dakin). Tom’s idyllic Southern childhood was over, and his feelings of dislocation were exacerbated by the unhappiness of his mother, who missed the social status that she had enjoyed as a minister’s daughter in a small Mississippi town. Edwina Williams reminded her children, bitterly and often, that they were now poor outsiders in St. Louis. Although Cornelius Williams attained a managerial position, money was a constant source of conflict between the couple, conflict that escalated as Cornelius turned to drinking and Edwina to manipulating her children’s lives.

As a child, Williams was often ill and confined to his tumultuous household, where he found solace in the company of his sister Rose as well as in voraciously reading and writing. In 1927, he received third prize in a national essay contest, and had a story published the next year in the magazine *Weird Tales*. As a graduation present, his grandfather took him on a trip to Europe, whose atmosphere and culture further fueled his literary ambitions.

Portrait of
Tennessee Williams:
Jack Mitchell /
Getty Images



In 1929, he enrolled in the University of Missouri in Columbia. One of the many versions of the origin of Williams’ nickname which he circulated during his lifetime held that it was his brothers in the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity there who first christened him “Tennessee,” to tease him about his heavy Southern drawl. Williams struggled academically, and in 1931 his father forced him to withdraw and take a job at the shoe factory. It is this unhappy period of his life that is memorialized in *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams continued writing on the side, and saving money from his detested job to re-enroll in college on his own. After a brief stint at Washington University in St. Louis, Williams eventually enrolled at the University of Iowa, supporting himself with odd jobs and eventually graduating in 1938. It was at U of I that Williams had his first play, *Spring Storm*, produced.

However, in escaping his poisonous family environment for Iowa, Williams had been forced to leave behind his beloved sister, who had been diagnosed with the then-poorly-understood condition of schizophrenia. By the time Williams was reinventing himself in Iowa, Rose had begun to experience hallucinations and seizures, and their parents were told that she should be considered for a new type of brain surgery, prefrontal lobotomy. This procedure, which has since been described as “one of the most barbaric mistakes ever perpetrated by mainstream medicine,” involved causing targeted brain damage with an ice pick or other sharp instrument. In Rose Williams’ case, as



in numerous others, the dangerous surgery left her mentally incapacitated. Her brother was not informed about the surgery until afterwards, and his guilt and anger over this would haunt him and his writing for the rest of his life.

In 1939, Williams moved to New Orleans and formally adopted his old nickname, "Tennessee," marking an almost complete break with his family. After short stints of work with the Group Theatre and MGM, Tennessee Williams established himself as a major playwright with *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944-45.

In little more than a year, Williams followed it up with an even bigger success, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The New York Daily News reviewed the premiere as "the answer to a playgoer's prayer... full-scale-throbbingly alive, compassionate, heart-wrenchingly human." Over the next decade, Williams produced two dozen plays, many successful in their own right, and several adapted as movies, including the famous film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the Academy Award-winning *The Rose Tattoo*.

Williams was plagued by bouts of drinking and depression throughout his life, and these worsened following the death from cancer of his longtime partner, Frank Merlo in 1961. At the same time, critics and audiences alike cooled on Williams' new plays. In 1969, he hit bottom, and his brother Dakin, fearing that he was suicidal, had him hospitalized in St. Louis.

After being released from the hospital, Williams resumed writing, but his dependency on drugs and alcohol as a means of self-medicating his depression continued. Despite his personal struggles, he wrote a number of innovative, experimental plays during this period, and supervised productions of his earlier work.

In 1983, he died in his room at New York's Hotel Ellysée, apparently from asphyxia caused by choking on the cap of a pill bottle. He was interred alongside his mother in St. Louis's Calvary Cemetery.

Selected Plays of TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Williams wrote 39 full-length plays, dozens of one-acts, and numerous short stories, poems, and other works over the course of his five-decade career. Here are a few of his most memorable theatrical works:



- *Fugitive Kind* (1937)
- *Not About Nightingales* (1938)
- ***The Glass Menagerie* (1944)**
 - Sidney Howard Award, Donaldson Award, NY Drama Critics' Circle Award
- *Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton* (1946)
- *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* (1946)
- *This Property is Condemned* (1946)
- ***A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)**
 - NY Drama Critics' Circle Award, Donaldson Award, Pulitzer Prize
- *Summer and Smoke* (1948)
- ***THE ROSE TATTOO* (1951) -Tony Award for Best Play**
- *Camino Real* (1953)
- ***Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) -Pulitzer Prize, Tony Award**
- *Orpheus Descending* (1957)
- *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958)
- *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959)
- ***The Night of the Iguana* (1961)**
 - NY Drama Critics' Circle Award, Tony Award
- *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963)
- *Small Craft Warnings* (1972)
- *Vieux Carré* (1977)
- *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* (1979)



The Rose Tattoo

A Synopsis

SPOILER ALERT: The following includes spoilers about the events of the play.

In a small Sicilian-American community by the Gulf Coast somewhere between New Orleans and Mobile, a seamstress, Serafina delle Rose, lives with her young daughter and husband. As the neighborhood children are called home for their dinners, Serafina awaits her husband, Rosario delle Rose. Serafina is deeply in love with her husband who she claims was a baron in Sicily. In America he drives a ten-ton banana truck, which he uses to smuggle illegal goods. Assunta, an old woman and friend of Serafina, arrives peddling aphrodisiac powders, which Serafina assures her she does not need for her husband. She tells Assunta of her passionate relationship with her husband and of the night she conceived the child she is carrying. She knew right away that she was pregnant because she woke to a burning pain on her chest and saw her husband's rose tattoo there. The flower faded before her husband could see it, but she knew it was a sign that she had conceived.

A woman arrives and tells Rosa, Serafina's daughter, to fetch her mother. The woman wants a shirt made for the man she loves. She says he is a wild man, and she has brought rose-colored silk from which she asks Serafina to make the shirt. The woman, who says her name is Estelle Hohengarten, says the cost is no object, but she wants the shirt made by the next day. Serafina agrees. While Serafina is out of the room, Estelle steals a small framed picture of Rosario, Serafina's husband.

Very early the next morning, Father De Leo arrives with several of the women of the community dressed in black. They observe Serafina sewing the shirt through the window. They have come with news that Rosario has been killed.

Upon seeing the mourners, Serafina seems to know their news and she collapses in despair.

Later that morning the Doctor informs Father De Leo that Serafina has miscarried and lost her baby. He instructs Assunta, Serafina's friend, to keep Serafina in bed so she can recover. Serafina has asked that her husband be cremated, which is against the Catholic religion. Dressed in black, Estelle arrives wishing to see the body of her dead lover, Rosario. The women attack her and thrust her out, stating that Serafina does not know anything about her husband's infidelities. Rosa, largely ignored in all the drama, comes out of the house and retrieves Estelle's mangled veil and roses, and sobs over the loss of her father.

Three years pass, and it is the day of Rosa's high school graduation. The women of the neighborhood arrive at Serafina's house to pick up the dresses they ordered for their daughters, but Serafina does not answer the door. They gossip about how Serafina has locked Rosa up in the house and confiscated her clothes. Apparently Rosa had met a sailor at the school dance a week earlier and when Serafina found out about it, she locked up the girl's clothes and refused to let her out even to take her final exams. Rosa's teacher, Miss Yorke, arrives at the house to bring Rosa to the graduation ceremony. Serafina bursts out of the house dressed only in her slip. She is in great distress because Rosa has cut her wrist. Miss Yorke tries to calm Serafina, saying the cut is only a scratch. Rosa explains how her mother has not been the same since Rosario died; she has remained in the house and has not dressed properly since his death. Miss Yorke convinces Serafina to allow Rosa to dress to go to the graduation. Serafina lashes out at Miss Yorke and the school for hosting a dance where her daughter met a sailor who was not even a student. As Rosa leaves in a fury, disgusted by her mother's actions, the neighbor women rush in to get the dresses they ordered for their daughters.

As Serafina prepares to go to the graduation, two women, Bessie and Flora enter. They are about to catch a train to New Orleans for an American Legion parade, but Flora needs the blouse she ordered from Serafina before they leave.



As Serafina finishes sewing the blouse, the women chat giddily about lewd activities they expect to find at the parade. When the women spy a group of legionnaires on the side of the road they holler and flirt with them from the porch. Outraged, Serafina tells them that she will not tolerate such dirty talk from a pair of man-crazy women in her upright Catholic home. The women mock her and Flora tells her that everyone knows that Serafina's late husband was having a long-standing affair with Estelle Hohengarten when he died. Serafina chases them out of the house as they threaten to call the police on her.

Sometime later, Rosa and Jack arrive at the house and find it shuttered and dark. They go in and discuss their new relationship. Jack seems a bit worried by Rosa's intensity and calls her wild. They hear Serafina in the other room, and Rosa helps get her presentable to meet Jack. Rosa tries to tell Serafina about the graduation ceremonies and the honor she was awarded, but her mother is deeply traumatized by the "lies" she heard from Flora and Bessie. After a few minutes, she recovers enough to interrogate Jack regarding his intentions towards her daughter. While Rosa is out of the room, Serafina insists that Jack swear before the Virgin Mary to honor Rosa's purity and innocence. Jack, who has already insisted that his intentions are honorable and that Rosa is the only girl he's ever felt this way about, does as she asks. Rosa and Jack rush off to join friends for a picnic.

Serafina calls Father De Leo to the house. De Leo lectures her about cremating her husband and creating a shrine to the ashes. He says she should not leave herself secluded in her house. Serafina proclaims that she remembers her perfect marriage, but then she asks whether Rosario ever confessed to having slept with another woman. When De Leo says that he cannot answer her or break the sanctity of the confessional, she becomes violent and he rushes off, calling her an animal.

A salesman comes to the house. As he attempts to sell Serafina a cheap novelty toy, a truck pulls up and the driver, Alvaro, gets out and begins to argue with the salesman. Alvaro says the man drove him off the road while shouting ethnic slurs at him. They fight, and the salesman knees Alvaro in the groin

before storming off and vowing to call Alvaro's boss to report him. Alvaro goes into Serafina's house, and she goes about mending his torn jacket. Alvaro tells her of the three relatives he must support, and she tells him of her strained relationship with Rosa. When Alvaro stands in the window, Serafina observes how his body resembles her late husband's. Alvaro calls his boss and finds out that he has been fired. There is a clear connection between Alvaro and Serafina borne of their shared distress. They plan to have dinner that night as long as Rosa is not back from her picnic.

When Alvaro returns, they have both cleaned up significantly. He wears rose oil in his hair and she dons a beautiful dress. Their "date" is riddled with missteps and misunderstandings, but it ultimately leads to Serafina deciding to seek out Estelle Hohengarten to confront her about her illicit affair with Rosario. Alvaro says he knows Estelle and calls her at work. As they speak on the phone, Serafina learns that Rosario did indeed have an affair with Estelle. When Alvaro goes in the other room, Serafina smashes the urn with Rosario's ashes. She then tells Alvaro to park his car down the block and to quietly enter through the back door so the neighbors do not see him returning to spend the night. He does and they retire to Serafina's bedroom.

Rosa and Jack return from their picnic late at night. Rosa is deeply resentful of her mother for the vow she made Jack make earlier. Jack is leaving the next morning for an extended tour of duty. Rosa vows to meet him in hotel room in New Orleans before he sets sail. She sobs herself to sleep on the sofa.

The next morning, Alvaro, half-drunk, half asleep, stumbles into the front room and discovers Rosa asleep and he is taken by her beauty. Waking, Rosa screams at the sight of the unknown man in her home. Serafina rushes in, assumes the worst, and attacks Alvaro and drives him out of the house. Rosa calms her mother, but then realizes why Alvaro was in the house. Furious at her mother's hypocrisy, Rosa gathers her things and prepares to leave for New Orleans to see Jack. The women of the community enter and mock Serafina for her late night indiscretion, but Serafina claims to feel the same burning sensation she felt years earlier and that she is pregnant again. She hears Alvaro calling her and turns toward him.



Selections from "The Timeless World of a Play"



The following are selections from Tennessee Williams' introduction to *The Rose Tattoo*. The article was originally printed in *The New York Times* on January 14, 1951, just two weeks before *The Rose Tattoo* opened on Broadway.

Carson McCullers concludes one of her lyric poems with the line: "Time, the endless idiot, runs screaming 'round the world." It is this continual rush of time, so violent that it appears to be screaming, that deprives our actual lives of so much

dignity and meaning, and it is, perhaps more than anything else, the *arrest of time* which has taken place in a completed work of art that gives to certain plays their feeling of depth and significance...

Whether or not we admit it to ourselves, we are all haunted by a truly awful sense of impermanence...

In a play, time is arrested in the sense of being confined. By a sort of legerdemain, events are made to remain *events*, rather than being reduced so quickly to mere *occurrences*. The audience can sit back in a comforting dusk to watch a world which is flooded with light and in which emotion and action have a dimension and dignity that they would likewise have in real existence, if only the shattering intrusion of time could be locked out...

So successfully have we disguised from ourselves the intensity of our own feelings, the sensibility of our own hearts, that plays in the tragic tradition have begun to seem untrue. For a couple of hours we may surrender ourselves to a world of fiercely illuminated values in conflict, but when the stage is covered and the auditorium lighted, almost immediately there is a recoil of disbelief. "Well, well!" we say as we shuffle back up the aisle, while the play dwindles behind us with the sudden perspective of an early Chirico painting. By the time we have arrived at Sardi's, if not as soon as we pass beneath the marquee, we have convinced ourselves once more that life has as little resemblance to the curiously stirring and meaningful occurrences on the stage as a jingle to an elegy of Rilke.

This modern condition of his theatre audience is something that an author must know in advance. The diminishing influence of life's destroyer, time, must be somehow worked into context of his play. Perhaps it is certain foolery, a certain distortion toward the grotesque, putting a mute on the strings that would like to break all bounds. But almost surely, unless he contrives in some way to relate the dimensions of his tragedy to the dimensions of a world in which time is *included*—he will be left among his magnificent debris on a dark stage, muttering to himself: "Those fools..."

-Tennessee Williams

"Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence."

-Tennessee Williams



Who's Who in the Play

SERAFINA DELLE ROSE: wife to Rosario and mother to Rosa. She is a passionate woman with an immense love for her husband. After his death she is wracked with despair and shuts herself off from the world.

ROSARIO DELLE ROSE: Serafina's husband. Though the character never appears on stage, his presence (and absence) is quite significant in the life of Serafina and Rosa. According to Serafina, he was a baron back in Italy, but in America he drives a banana truck. He smuggles illegal goods in his truck and is known by the community to have had an illicit affair Estelle Hohengarten.

ROSA DELLE ROSE: daughter to Serafina and Rosario; smart and precocious. She falls in love with a young sailor named Jack despite her mother's disapproval.

ASSUNTA: an old woman who sells herbal and other remedies to the local Sicilian American population; friend to Serafina.

GIUSEPPINA, PEPPINA, VIOLETTA, MARIELLA: women of the community

SALVATORE, BRUNO, VIVI: children in the community

THE STREGA: a neighbor to Serafina. Serafina says she is a witch because of white eye and gnarled fingers. Her black goat frequently escapes and invades Serafina's yard, trampling her tomatoes.

FATHER DE LEO: the local priest. He is a strong defender of the laws of the church, and reprimands Serafina for cremating her husband's body and keeping his ashes.

A DOCTOR: the local doctor. He delivers unpleasant news after Rosario's death.

ESTELLE HOHENGARTEN: a blackjack dealer from Texas. She has an affair with Rosario and commissions Serafina to make a silk shirt for him on the night he is killed.

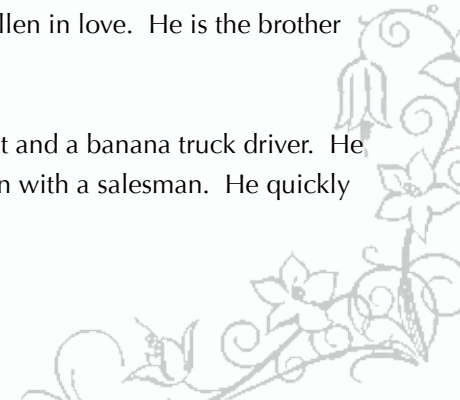
MISS YORKE: Rosa's teacher.

BESSIE & FLORA: customers of Serafina's "shop." They are not part of the Sicilian community. Williams describes them as "clowns" in his stage directions. Bessie has commissioned Serafina to make her a blouse for the ladies' trip to New Orleans.

THE SALESMAN: a traveling salesman who attempts to sell Serafina a novelty toy. He gets into a fight with Alvaro.

JACK HUNTER: the sailor with whom Rosa has fallen in love. He is the brother of one of Rosa's classmates.

ALVARO MANGIACAVALLLO: a Sicilian immigrant and a banana truck driver. He arrives at Serafina's home during an altercation with a salesman. He quickly falls for Serafina.

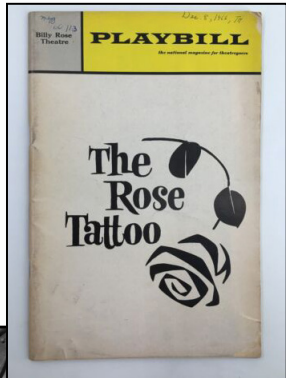




The Rose Tattoo

A Brief Production History

- The play was first staged in Chicago in 1950, starring Maureen Stapleton as Serafina Delle Rose. Williams was extremely involved in every phase of production, and 10 different endings were rendered during the early life of the piece.
- The following year in 1951, *The Rose Tattoo* premiered on Broadway, to public and critical acclaim, garnering six Tony Awards, including Best Play, Set Design, Author of a Play, Featured Actor (Eli Wallach), and Featured Actress (Maureen Stapleton), playing for a total of 306 performances.



• In 1955 a film adaptation was produced, starring Burt Lancaster and Italian actress Anna Magnani, who Williams had tapped for the Broadway production, but who had declined because she felt her English wasn't strong enough. Four years later Williams insisted she be cast in the film, and her performance was heavily lauded, winning the Academy Award for Best Actress, as well as BAFTA, Golden Globe, and New York Film Critics Circle Awards. The film also won Academy Awards for its Art Direction and Cinematography.



- In 1957, *The Rose Tattoo* had its Irish premiere at the Pike Theatre in Dublin. The play opened to huge acclaim, but was cut short in the second week of its run when

the producer was arrested and the production shut down for "obscene and objectionable passages," namely a moment when the dropping of a condom from a pocket was mimed. The case was brought to both High and Supreme Courts before its eventual dismissal, but by that time, the producer had suffered significant financial losses and the Pike Theater was forced to close.

- Just under a decade later in 1966, *The Rose Tattoo* was revived on Broadway, once again starring Maureen Stapleton as Serafina. The production also featured Christopher Walken as the young sailor, who won the Theatre World Award for his performance, and Maria Tucci, who was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Play.
- Nearly 30 years later in 1995, the play returned to Broadway, starring Mercedes Ruehl as Serafina and Anthony LaPaglia as Alvaro, who received a Theatre World Award for his performance. The production was also nominated for the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play.
- The play's most recent return to Broadway came in 2019, starring Academy Award Winner Marisa Tomei as Serafina.

Information compiled by Bonnie J. Monte, Director



TOP LEFT: Playbill from the 1966 revival.
BOTTOM LEFT: Maureen Stapleton and Don Murray in the original Broadway production, 1951.

TOP RIGHT: Publicity shot of Mercedes Ruehl for the 1995 revival.
BOTTOM RIGHT: Emun Elliott and Marisa Tomei in the 2019 revival.





In This Production

Scenic rendering by Sarah Beth Hall, Scenic Designer and
Costume renderings by Hugh Hanson, Costume Designer, for the
2023 Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey production of *The Rose
Tattoo*, directed by Bonnie J. Monte.





Commentary & Criticism

"First produced in 1951, when it (astonishingly) became the winner of Williams' only Tony Award for Best Play, *The Rose Tattoo* is perhaps the most hopeful and lighthearted work in its author's suffering-packed canon."

-Ben Brantley for *New York Times*

"*The Rose Tattoo* has an interesting position in the Williams canon. There is no shortage, in his plays, of lustful, delusional women who fall for attractive younger men. But rarely do they have, as here, even the hope of a happy ending."

-Adam Feldman for *Time Out New York*

"*The Rose Tattoo* is what happens when a poet writes a comedy — something strange, but kind of lovely..."

-Marilyn Stasio for *Variety*

"Williams' idiosyncratic and playful experiment stands out within the context of his work as a whole, as most of his other plays are serious dramas shot through with tragedy and eruptions of violence."

-Carol Dell'Amico

"*The Rose Tattoo* is a comic celebration of what the ancient Greeks or Romans would call the Dionysian elements of life, a celebration of eros, creative intoxication, virility, and regeneration...It is one of Williams' few comedies, based on the medieval *fabliau*, or bawdy tale, which also underlies Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The play is full of earthy, simple humor, with a group of peasant characters Williams refers to as clowns, a goat that is chased through the yard at strategic times to emphasize the sexuality in the scene, physical humor involving a girdle and a condom, and broad sexual puns about driving truckloads of bananas."

-Brenda Murphy, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*

"*The Rose Tattoo* is 'an experiment in comedy,' a blending of many comedic traditions. Slapstick, farcical, and bawdy elements are predominant, as the play is a strung together series of ridiculous events revolving around Serafina Delle Rose, a woman whose major preoccupation is her handsome husband's virility."

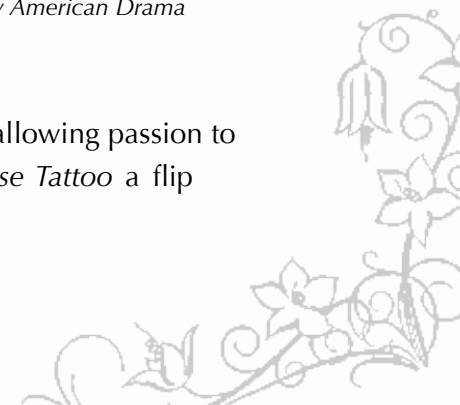
-Philip C. Kolin, *Tennessee Williams: A Tribute*

"The play is about the resilience of the human spirit, the undeniable power of the will to live and the primacy of the sexual impulse."

-C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*

"Williams suspends his 'romantic fatalism,' allowing passion to redeem rather than destroy, making *The Rose Tattoo* a flip side of *Streetcar*."

-Ben Brantley





Explore Online



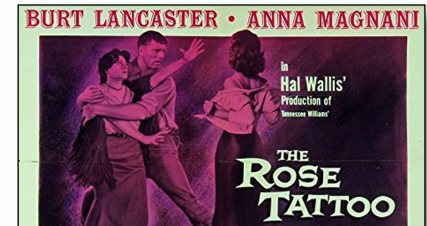
INTERVIEW WITH TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A ship's reporter snags Tennessee Williams on the deck of the SS Queen Mary for a quick chat. They cover a surprising number of topics in this brisk four-minute video from 1950.



TRAILER: THE ROSE TATTOO

Anna Magnani and Burt Lancaster star in the 1955 film adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play.



TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: WOUNDED GENIUS

from the Biography series. (45 minutes)

