



Cities Prepare for Tennessee Williams Celebrations

March 2011 will mark the centennial of the playwright's birth

By [MICHAEL MORELLA](#)

Posted: December 13, 2010

Tennessee Williams "speaks to the heart perhaps better than any other of our more famous playwrights," says Robert Bray, a professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University and founding editor of *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*. Williams, the author of more than 70 plays, including *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, died in 1983 at the age of 71. But in the coming months, his audience will widely celebrate the centennial of his birth on March 26. Remember the famous *Streetcar* scene, immortalized by Marlon Brando in the 1951 film adaptation, in which a sobbing Stanley Kowalski [stands](#) on a New Orleans street and bellows "Stell -lahhhhh!" to his wife in the shuttered apartment above? Visitors to next March's Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival can re-enact that "heaven-splitting" cry (per Williams's stage directions) for prizes during the Stanley and Stella Shouting Contest. It's the final act in a week of events that include literary panels, theatrical performances, and a breakfast book club.

New Orleans isn't the only city staging a Williams fest. Provincetown, Mass., and Clarksdale and Columbus, Miss., each offer an annual blend of his plays, discussion, and relevant history. "He's not a good writer, he's a *great* writer," says David Kaplan, curator of the Provincetown festival, "and so the depth of what is there is still unplumbed." [Theater](#) students at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., will study and produce for the public several plays and readings during "A Season Named Desire." And theaters in communities from Westport, Conn., to Nelsonville, Ohio, to Berkeley, Calif., plan to include Williams in their 2011 repertoire. In Paris, the Comédie-Française will open its first main-stage production of an American play with *Streetcar*.

In his new book *Tennessee Williams and Company: His Essential Screen Actors*, John DiLeo analyzes performances by 11 actors who have appeared in multiple [films](#) based on Williams's plays. "Why did the actors always come back to do another one?" DiLeo asks. "Well, where were the better roles than these?" See for yourself, by reading, viewing, or listening to Williams as he hits 100.