

MAN WITH BLUE GUITAR: SYNOPSIS

- Concept: The brilliant poet Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) struggles to come to terms with his own humanity, emotions and relationships. A dreamy and lyrical chamber opera that draws upon his poems, letters and journals.
- Cast Size: 2M, 2F with minor doubling. Stevens' muse, Erato, does some simple ballet and modern dance.
- Structure: Act One: Long Key, Florida, 1930. We join Stevens in his beloved retreat on a remote key near Key West, with his only true friend, attorney Arthur Powell. We flash back to his tender courtship of Elsa, his wife, with whom his relations are now strained. We experience the impact of this overwhelming natural beauty on his poetry, which had been icy and philosophical but is now suffused with delights of the senses and a spirit of ecstasy. We get to know the brilliant raconteur Powell and watch him try to give some gentle advice to the poet, but it becomes clear that Stevens now prefers the company of his muse Erato to that of his wife Elsa.
- Act Two: Hartford, 1955. Now forced into retirement from his long business career and facing death, Stevens retreats to the Canoe Club for a liquid lunch. He is visited by various spirits from his past. We see the steady slide of Elsa into madness. Powell urges him to reconcile with his daughter. Though he is now a famous poet, Stevens sees he has failed as a man. He realizes that he must make amends with his daughter and finally summons the courage to ask her to forgive him. On his deathbed, he is accompanied by his daughter and is visited by the spirit of Powell; he faces the ultimate question of whether to renounce his lifelong atheism; his answer is famously ambiguous.
- Characters: Stevens, seen at age 50 and at age 75
Erato, his muse
Holly, his daughter (doubled with Erato)
Elsa, his wife, seen in her forties and in her sixties
Arthur Powell, his attorney and friend
- Rights: All but a few poems quoted are now in public domain; permission from Random House has been obtained for the others, subject to renewal. Permission obtained from Stevens family for quotations from letters and journals.
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