

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 memory play that draws upon his poems, letters and journals.

Cast Size: 4M, 2F with appropriate doubling. Stevens' muse, Erato, does some simple ballet and modern dance.

Structure: Act One: Key West, 1936. Stevens' beloved retreat on Long Key, Florida, where he spent eleven artistically fertile Januaries with his only true friend, Arthur Powell, has been destroyed by a hurricane; Powell has brought him to a tony resort on Key West this year. Powell is hosting a cocktail party tonight to introduce Stevens to his fancy friends, but Stevens wants nothing of it. He cannot write, and quarrels with his muse Erato and with his younger self, Wallace, throughout the day. We flash back to his inspired and enthusiastic youth with Erato; to his tender courtship of Elsa, his wife with whom his relations are now strained; and to the happy days with Powell on primitive, beautiful Long Key. We also witness a strange incident with Prof. Santayana at Harvard that left a deep emotional impression. His frustration and sense of loss builds steadily; at the party he gets drunk and provokes the famous fistfight with Ernest Hemingway in which his long-suppressed demons are finally released.

Act Two: Hartford, 1955. Now forced into retirement and facing death, Stevens retreats to the Canoe Club for a liquid lunch. He is visited by various spirits from his past, some dead and some still alive. We flash back to the ugly argument in which he and his daughter parted ways and to the ominous death of Prof. Santayana; we track the steady slide of Elsa into madness. Hemingway confronts him with the stark realities of his life; Powell urges him to reconcile with his daughter; even Erato seems to have grown more distant. 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 faces the ultimate question of whether to renounce his lifelong atheism; his answer is famously ambiguous.

Characters:	<u>Primary</u>	<u>Other</u>
	Stevens	Elsa (Stevens' wife Elsie)
	Erato, his muse	Holly (Stevens' daughter)
	Wallace (Young Stevens)	Prof. George Santayana
	Arthur Powell	Hemingway

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