

## = A Streetcar Named Marge =

" A Streetcar Named Marge " is the second episode of The Simpsons ' fourth season . It first aired on the Fox network in the United States on October 1 , 1992 . In the episode , Marge wins the role of Blanche DuBois in a musical version of Tennessee Williams ' A Streetcar Named Desire . Homer offers little support for his wife 's acting pursuits , and Marge begins to see parallels between him and Stanley Kowalski , the play 's boorish lead male character . The episode contains a subplot in which Maggie Simpson attempts to retrieve her pacifier from a strict daycare owner .

Jeff Martin wrote the episode , and Rich Moore served as director . Jon Lovitz made his fourth guest appearance on The Simpsons , this time as musical director Llewellyn Sinclair , as well as Llewellyn 's sister , who runs the daycare . The episode generated controversy for its original song about New Orleans , which contains several unflattering lyrics about the city . One New Orleans newspaper published the lyrics before the episode aired , prompting numerous complaints to the local Fox affiliate . In response , the president of Fox Broadcasting issued an apology to anyone who was offended . Despite the controversial song , the episode was well received by many fans , and show creator Matt Groening has named it one of his favorite episodes .

## = = Plot = =

While Homer , Bart and Lisa are watching television , Marge announces that she is going to audition for a local musical production of A Streetcar Named Desire , and she wants to meet new people because she usually spends all day caring for Maggie . The rest of the family pay no attention and continue to watch television .

The musical is called " Oh , Streetcar ! " , which is directed by Llewellyn Sinclair . After Ned Flanders is cast as Stanley Kowalski , Marge auditions for Blanche DuBois . Llewellyn immediately rejects Marge , explaining that Blanche is supposed to be a " delicate flower being trampled by an uncouth lout " . However , as a dejected Marge calls home and takes Homer 's dinner order , Llewellyn realizes that she is perfect for the role .

The next day , Maggie causes distractions when Marge brings her to rehearsal , so Llewellyn tells Marge to enroll the baby at the daycare center called Ayn Rand School for Tots which is run by his sister Ms. Sinclair , who immediately confiscates Maggie 's pacifier . Maggie and the other babies later engage in an attempt to retrieve their pacifiers , but Ms. Sinclair thwarts their efforts and sends Maggie to a playpen .

During rehearsal , Marge struggles with a scene in which Blanche is supposed to break a glass bottle and attack Stanley , but she cannot muster enough anger towards the Stanley character to break the bottle . After coming home , Marge asks Homer to help her learn her lines , but Homer is disinterested . The day before the performance , Marge and Ned are again practising the bottle scene as Homer arrives to drive Marge home . Homer repeatedly interrupts the rehearsal . Imagining that Stanley is Homer , Marge finally smashes the bottle and lunges at Ned .

The next day at the Ayn Rand School for Tots , Maggie again attempts to regain the pacifiers and this time succeeds . Homer arrives to pick her up and he and his children go to watch the musical . Homer immediately falls into boredom , but he perks up when Marge appears on stage and becomes saddened over the way Stanley treats Blanche . All the while Homer slowly picks up the plot and Marge 's feelings along with it . At the end of the musical , Marge receives a warm reaction from the crowd , but she misinterprets Homer 's sadness for boredom . Afterwards , she confronts him with hostility , but Homer is able to explain that he was genuinely moved by Blanche 's situation . Thus , he reacted with sadness because he wanted to be the husband that she deserves to have in her life who loved her , not like Stanley who neglects and mistreats her . Marge realizes that Homer really did watch the musical , and the two happily leave the theater .

## = = Production = =

== Writing and music ==

" A Streetcar Named Marge " was conceived about two years before it aired on television . Jeff Martin first pitched the idea of Homer being in a theatrical production of 1776 . Producer James L. Brooks then suggested that Marge could play Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire . Brooks saw that Marge 's relationship with Homer was similar to Blanche 's relationship with Stanley , and he wanted to use that fact to build the emotional arc for an episode . The estate of Tennessee Williams would not let the show use large excerpts from the actual play , since the work was copyrighted . However , Fox lawyer Anatole Klebanow said that original songs based on the play were acceptable . According to producer Mike Reiss , Klebanow even promised to " take [ their ] case to the Supreme Court to get [ the ] episode aired . " Martin later explained that while the songs made the episode funnier , they also made it harder to write .

The Maggie subplot was present in Jeff Martin 's episode pitch . The music in the sequence is Elmer Bernstein 's march theme from The Great Escape . Simpsons composer Alf Clausen secured the rights to the score , along with the original orchestra charts . The Great Escape had been Martin 's favorite film as child , and he said " it was so exciting and so stirring " to hear the music being performed by the Simpsons ' studio orchestra .

== Animation ==

" A Streetcar Named Marge " posed a challenge to the show 's animation directors . The episode contains many long setpieces , especially during the third and final act , which includes the end of the Maggie subplot and the performance of the musical . Several scenes required the animators to draw dozens of background characters . Rich Moore , the head director , initially feared the episode would not be completed in time . David Silverman , the supervising director , also had doubts ; according to Jeff Martin , Moore sent back a cartoon of himself reading the script with his eyes popping out and his jaw dropped . Producer Al Jean said that Moore " worked himself to death " to produce the episode 's most elaborate sequences .

A number of scenes that appeared in the storyboard and animatic were reordered or dropped altogether in the final version of the episode . Much of the Maggie subplot , for example , was modified before the episode aired . A scene in which the babies lock Ms. Sinclair in her office is missing from the final version of the episode .

== Voice acting ==

All the main Simpsons cast members lent their voices to the episode , along with semi @-@ regulars Maggie Roswell and Phil Hartman . Assistant producer Lona Williams also had a minor speaking role . Comedian Jon Lovitz , who played Llewellyn Sinclair and Ms. Sinclair , made his fourth guest appearance on The Simpsons . He had previously voiced characters in " The Way We Was " , " Brush with Greatness " , and " Homer Defined " . Lovitz later worked with Al Jean and Mike Reiss in the short @-@ lived animated sitcom The Critic , and returned to The Simpsons for the episodes " A Star Is Burns " , " Hurricane Neddy " , " Half @-@ Decent Proposal " , " The Ziff Who Came to Dinner " , and " Homerazzi " . In 2006 , Lovitz was named the eighth best Simpsons guest star by IGN .

== Cultural references ==

Though " Oh , Streetcar ! " is based on A Streetcar Named Desire , the title of the musical alludes to the theatrical revue Oh ! Calcutta ! . Besides Blanche and Stanley , characters from A Streetcar Named Desire who appear in " Oh , Streetcar ! " include Stella ( played by Helen Lovejoy ) , the Young Collector ( played by Apu Nahasapeemapetilon ) , Mitch ( played by Lionel Hutz ) , the Doctor ( played by Chief Wiggum ) , Steve ( played by Jasper Beardley , although Apu originally said he was playing Steve ) , and Pablo ( originally played by Otto Mann but taken over by Llewellyn prior to

curtain ) . The musical 's closing song , " Kindness of Strangers " , is a reference to Blanche 's last line in the original play : " I have always depended on the kindness of strangers . " However , the song is very cheery in tone , intentionally missing the point of Blanche 's line , which is meant to be ironic .

The episode contains multiple references to Ayn Rand 's novels and Objectivist philosophy . Maggie 's daycare center is called the " Ayn Rand School for Tots " , and Ms. Sinclair can be seen reading a book called *The Fountainhead Diet* , a reference to Rand 's novel *The Fountainhead* . On the wall of the daycare is a poster that reads " Helping is Futile " , an allusion to Rand 's rejection of the ethical doctrine of altruism . Another wall sign reads " A is A " , the law of identity , which plays a central role in Rand 's novel *Atlas Shrugged* . The Ayn Rand School for Tots is seen again in the 2012 short film *The Longest Daycare* .

The Maggie subplot uses the musical score of *The Great Escape* and contains several other allusions to the film . At one point , Ms. Sinclair punishes Maggie by sending her to a playpen called " The Box " , a play on " The Cooler " from the 1963 film . Maggie even bounces a ball against the wall of the playpen , as Steve McQueen 's character Virgil Hilts does throughout the film while he is in confinement .

In the scene when Homer , Bart and Lisa pick up Maggie from the daycare center , babies are perched all over the building , staring at the family and quietly sucking on pacifiers . This is a spoof of the final shot of Alfred Hitchcock 's *The Birds* . Indeed , a cartoon @-@ version of Hitchcock can be seen walking his dogs past the daycare , a reference to his own cameo appearance in the film . The episode also contains an allusion to the opera scene in *Citizen Kane* , in which Homer plays with a shredded playbill while he watches his wife in the musical .

= = Merchandise = =

All the songs from " A Streetcar Named Marge " were released on Walt Disney Records ' 2000 album *Songs in the Key of Springfield* . The episode was included in the 2005 VHS set *The Simpsons Go Hollywood* and released on DVD in 2004 as part of *The Simpsons Complete Fourth Season* . Jon Lovitz participated in the DVD 's audio commentary , alongside Matt Groening , Al Jean , Mike Reiss , Jeff Martin , and Hank Azaria .

= = Reception = =

In its original broadcast , " A Streetcar Named Marge " finished 32nd in ratings for the week of September 27 ? October 4 , 1992 , with a Nielsen rating of 11 @.@ 8 , equivalent to approximately 11 @.@ 0 million viewing households . It was the second highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network that week , following *Married ... with Children* . Since airing , it has received many positive reviews from fans and television critics . Michael Moran of *The Times* ranked the episode as the seventh best in the show 's history . *Entertainment Weekly* 's Dalton Ross lauded it as " the show 's best ever musical episode " , while Dave Kehr of *The New York Times* called it a " brilliant ... parody of Broadway musicals that should be required viewing for every Tony viewer . " In a list of his favorite episodes , Kevin Williamson of *Canadian Online Explorer* added , " As pitch @-@ perfect eviscerations of community theatre go , this tops *Waiting for Guffman* . " Series creator Matt Groening has listed it as one of his own favorites , calling the subplot " Maggie 's finest moment " , and future *Simpsons* guest star Trey Anastasio said the episode " may have been the best TV show ever " . Executive producer James L. Brooks also listed it as one of his favorites , saying it " showed we could go into areas no one thought we could go into " . Following the episode , the Ayn Rand Society called Groening to say they were amazed at the references to Rand . They also asked him if the show was making fun of them .

In 1993 , " A Streetcar Named Marge " and " Mr. Plow " were submitted for the Primetime Emmy Award for " Outstanding Comedy Series " . Before this season , the series had only been allowed to compete in the " Outstanding Animated Program " category , winning twice , but in early 1993 the rules were changed so that animated television shows would be able to submit nominations for "

Outstanding Comedy Series ". However , the Emmy voters were hesitant to pit cartoons against live action programs , and The Simpsons did not receive a nomination . The Simpsons ' crew submitted episodes for Outstanding Comedy Series the next season , but again these were not nominated . Since then , the show has submitted episodes in the animation category and has won seven times .

= = = Controversy = = =

The musical within the episode contains a controversial song about New Orleans , which describes the city as a " home of pirates , drunks and whores " , among other things . Jeff Martin , the writer of the episode , had meant the song to be a parody of a song in Sweeney Todd , which speaks of London in unflattering terms ( " There 's No Place Like London " ) . Al Jean later explained that two Cajun characters were supposed to walk out of the theater in disgust , but none of the voice actors could provide a convincing Cajun accent . An early version of the scene can be seen in an animatic included in the DVD boxset .

Before the premiere of the fourth season , the producers sent two episodes to critics : " Kamp Krusty " and " A Streetcar Named Marge " . A New Orleans critic viewed " A Streetcar Named Marge " and published the song lyrics in his newspaper before the episode aired . Many readers took the lyrics out of context , and New Orleans ' then @-@ Fox affiliate , WNOL @-@ TV ( then @-@ owned by musician Quincy Jones ; the Fox affiliation for the area later moved to WVUE ) , received about one hundred complaints on the day the episode aired . Several local radio stations also held on @-@ air protests in response to the song .

At the urging of WNOL , Fox president Jamie Kellner released a statement on October 1 , 1992 :

The Simpsons ' producers rushed out a chalkboard gag for " Homer the Heretic " , which aired a week after " A Streetcar Named Marge " . It read , " I will not defame New Orleans . " The gag was their attempt to apologize for the song and hopefully bring the controversy to an end . " We didn 't realize people would get so mad , " said Al Jean . " It was the best apology we could come up with in eight words or less . " The issue passed quickly , and a person in a Bart Simpson costume even served as Krewe of Tucks Grand Marshal at the 1993 New Orleans Mardi Gras .

The episode generated further controversy in September 2005 , when Channel 4 in the United Kingdom decided to air the episode a week after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans . Arguing that the episode was an insensitive choice , given recent events , several viewers filed complaints with Ofcom . Two days later , Channel 4 apologized on @-@ air and directly contacted all those who had complained . Channel 4 had screened the episode for offensive content , but the reviews focused on the main content of the episode , and the song was not considered a key part of the plot . Channel 4 promised to update their review process to ensure that similar incidents would not occur .