



WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF? GETTING SERIOUS AT SUZE'S PRESCOTT CENTER FOR THE ARTS - DAVID STRINGER, PUBLISHER

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Photo: Left to right, April Manchester-Miller, Dowe Kreibich, Tiffany Rial , and Wayne Purves

With this ambitious production of Edward Albee's hit Broadway drama from 1963, **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf**, Suze's Prescott Center for the Arts has tackled one of the most important plays from mid-twentieth century American drama. I refer to the production as "ambitious" because it takes courage to produce a play with such a storied history on Broadway, and which was also made into an award winning film.

The original stage production was Edward Albee's first major commercial success, running for 644 performances. It won the 1963 Tony Award for Best Play. It was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize but the nomination was withdrawn because of the controversial material. Two members of the nominating committee resigned in protest. The 1966 Mike Nichols film version earned Academy Award nominations for all four cast members and an Oscar for what many consider Elizabeth's Taylor's finest performance as the neurotic and combative Martha. Sandy Dennis also won for best supporting actress.

The caliber of the performances in the well-known screen version sets a high bar. Albert Hendeaux, as the director of the Suze's production, is due great thanks for bringing this psychologically complex drama to life. The four local actors who undertook this emotionally wrenching play of non-stop verbal cruelty and satire also deserve high praise. The opening night performance I witnessed was a smooth and polished example of ensemble acting. This 'theater in the round' production created an unusually strong sense of immediacy and connection with the actors and the story.

The plot is a simple one—George and Martha, a middle-aged university couple invite a younger couple, new to the school, home for drinks after a faculty party. But George and Martha are no ordinary couple. Over the next two hours, their troubled marriage and lives of desperation, fantasy, betrayal and hopeless dependence on each other are laid bare. **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf** is a drama of psychological depth and an examination of the modern condition. It is a serious play. But it is also an entertainment. Albee was a master of clever, biting dialogue. The humor is lacerating. The audience is appalled at the painful self-revelations of the characters. But also

amused. It was written to be thought provoking. And funny.

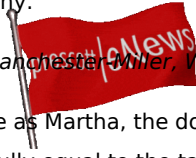


Photo: Left to right, April Manchester-Miller, Wayne Purves, and Dowe Kreibich

April Manchester-Miller gives a tour-de-force performance as Martha, the dominant personality who drives the action of the story. The role requires an actress of strength and range. She was fully equal to the task. The versatile Ms. Miller is well known to local theatergoers for the many roles she has played over the years in Prescott community theater.

Wayne Purves plays George, Martha's satirical foil in the psychological gamesmanship that sustains their empty but mutually dependent marriage. It's a big role. George is onstage virtually the entire play. His lines are often subtle, double edged, funny and full of irony. George is the most self-aware of the characters. Mr. Purves delivers a fine performance of intelligence and understanding.

Tiffany Rial as Honey was a nice surprise on the upside. I came to the play with the memory of Sandy Dennis's Academy Award winning performance as the slightly vacuous and mousey naïf. Ms. Rial made the part her own. Her understated personality seemed to grow from scene to scene. She gave the kind of relaxed, self assured performance that only comes from a natural sense control as an actress.

I have left Dowe Kreibich for last to single out his very fine job as Nick, the new faculty member and Honey's husband. George sees him as a potential academic rival. Martha sees him as a potential romantic conquest. He seems to be an innocent--devoted to his wife, full of decency and rectitude. Until George unmasks his mercenary motives for marrying Honey, whose father left her money. And Nick turns out to be eminently vulnerable to Martha's seductions. He is the innocent who betrays everyone. It's a role that grows as the layers of Nick's personality are stripped away. Mr. Kreibich brought this character to life with great skill and depth of understanding.

Photo: left to right, Dowe Kreibich, Tiffany Rial, David Stringer (author), April Manchester-Miller, and Wayne Purves

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf is one of the great works in the canon of American theater. It's a night of serious theater. But it's also a night of fun and laughter. Like all theater, it is fundamentally an entertainment. The fact that it ran for 644 nights on Broadway is proof of its audience appeal. The play continues at Suze's Prescott Center for the Arts thru May 5th. Tickets are available online at PrescottArtCenter.org or by calling the box office at 928.445.3286.