

EDWARD ALBEE'S WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?


Sydney
Festival
2022

State Theatre Company South Australia

Edward Albee's WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

State Theatre Company South Australia

Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House

13 - 23 Jan, 3 hours 25 minutes, with two 15 minute intervals

CAST AND CREDITS

Playwright: Edward Albee

Director: Margaret Harvey

Set & Costume Designer: Ailsa Paterson

Lighting Designer: Nigel Levings

Sound Designer/Composer: Andrew Howard

Associate Director (Sydney): Mitchell Butel

Associate Director (Brisbane): Anthony Nicola

Martha: Susan Prior

George: Jimi Bani

Honey: Juanita Navas-Nguyen

Nick: Rashidi Edward

Understudy: Benjin Maza

Understudy: Isabel Vahakartano

Stage Manager: Bridget Samuel

Assistant Stage Manager: Isabella Strada

Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Licensed by Music Theatre International (Australasia)

on behalf of Dramatists Play Service Inc

ABOUT THE SHOW

Edward Albee's booze-fuelled cage fight between some of the most complex anti-heroes in the theatrical canon is the stuff of theatre legend. This new production, envisioned by First Nations director and actor Margaret Harvey pulls the rug out from under a whole new generation of viewers with a modern, race-conscious and revealingly Australian interrogation of this dinner-dive into illusion, identity and desire.

Academic couple George and Martha have invited their new colleagues, Nick and Honey, over for a friendly drink. As the alcohol flows, the conversation darkens, and the mood sours. Edward Albee's scalding portrait of 1960s America erupted onto the Broadway stage in 1962 and burned up the big screen in 1966 with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, captivating audiences ever since.

Central to this production is a brilliantly disruptive choice of actors: Wagadagam man and star of the ABC's Mabo Jimi Bani is George; screen and stage star Susan Prior is Martha; Juanita Navas-Nguyen and Rashidi Edward are Honey and Nick. This is an American classic for an Australia at the crossroads.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I acknowledge the Gadigal people, the traditional custodians of the land waters and sky of where we are presenting this work to you. And I pay my deepest respect to all of their elders past & present.

As a First Nations woman of Saibai Island blood and English heritage, I cannot ignore the lens through which I view this work. Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a scalding vitriolic commentary of the state of America in the early 1960's. At times dark, there are also humorous moments. But what does this almost 60 year old play say about the time we're living in now?

By suggesting setting this story here on Australian soil what comes to fruition is the state of a nation - there is an alignment with the socio-politics that has permeated this nation state. We have these intersecting power dynamics that reframes the writer's original themes of the work and re-interrogates an audience's perception of the work. Colour-conscious casting was at the forefront of my mind when breathing new life into *Who's Afraid*. At the same time, race is just one aspect of every character's identity, and is conveyed alongside other aspects like class, gender and age. I've simply chosen to make race explicit rather than implicit through colour-conscious casting. Race is a social construct, that promotes social and political hierarchies and power relations. While we have insightful and ultra-talented BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) playwrights investigating and exploring themes around race politics and identity there is another layer to extract when we move race dynamics to the foreground in classics of the western canon, just by simply casting actors who are BIPOC.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is essentially about who's afraid of living a life without false allusions. Australia is at a crossroads and the political paralysis that has gripped this country on issues of immigrants and asylum seekers, environment, sexual politics and Indigenous issues will not make it all go away, it is only exacerbating the historical untruths this country is built on.

So who's afraid of the truth?

— Margaret Harvey

ABOUT STATE THEATRE COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA

State Theatre Company South Australia is the premier theatre company of South Australia and is a resident artistic company of the Adelaide Festival Centre. In 2022 the Company celebrates 50 years since its establishment in legislation in 1972.

We commission, perform and tour theatrical productions of new and existing, classic and contemporary, Australian and international work. From a rich legacy of visionary theatre makers and landmark theatrical productions, we strive to make, present and promote phenomenal, transformative, and inclusive theatre that enriches South Australian and Australian culture.

State Theatre Company South Australia is proud to also be represented at Sydney Festival 2022 through our co-production of *Girl From the North Country*.

