



Nick and Honey:
what are they're
walking into?

Imelda Staunton as
Martha in the current
London production.

PARTY IN HELL

Explosive characters, deception, torment, breakdowns.
Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf? You should be!

IN 1962, *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?* was billed as the “most praised, most talked about and most exciting play of the year.” It more than lived up to its hype and became an award-winning theatre sell-out. Written by Edward Albee, what distinguishes this piece is the engaging, raw human emotion drawn from its characters in a lively and clever script.

Similar to the works of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller (and pre-empted in the dialogue of Shakespeare's *Taming Of The Shrew*), *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?* delves into the human psyche, exposing the innermost secrets, anguish and torment of its characters. Albee, who happened to be gay, created a story that takes a cynical dig at conventional life in the Cold War era, and still resonates today.

The story's two protagonists are George and Martha, a middle-aged college professor and his wife, who invite the newest young faculty member Nick, and wife Honey, over for drinks. But their bickering and discord quickly consumes their guests and a friendly cocktail evening becomes a psychological rollercoaster ride of antagonistic and traumatic mind games.

While many will be familiar with the classic 1966 movie, superbly cast with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, the play has experienced many revivals including memorable performances by Kathleen Turner and Bill Irwin

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A friendly cocktail evening becomes a psychological rollercoaster ride of antagonistic mind games.

in 2005 and Amy Morton and Tracy Letts in 2010. The current production on London's West End has theatre lovers falling over themselves to grab a seat.

Imelda Staunton (*Pride and Harry Potter*) has stepped into the shoes of Martha. Conleth Hill, currently very famous as the spymaster Varys on *Game Of Thrones*, is George. Playing the roles of the handsome young Nick is Luke Treadaway (*The Hollow Crown*) and Imogen Poots (*Filth*) as his innocent wife, Honey.

As expected, Staunton's robust and combative energy works well in Martha. She can twist her character's fiery emotion from downright nasty into a pitiful woman on the edge of breakdown. Audiences swing wildly from loving to loathing Martha, as do the other characters in this long, yet gripping play.

The current production has fulfilled the high expectations that audiences and critics have of this work. *The Guardian* says, “play,

performance and production perfectly coalesce.” Paul Taylor of *The Independent* believes Imelda Staunton's performance is one of the greatest feats of acting he's witnessed. It is directed by the noted James McDonald with a detailed set designed by Tom Pye.

Considering the play's length, credit is due to any cast who takes on such an intense theatrical performance. Broken down into three acts (*Fun And Games*, *Walpurgisnacht* and *The Exorcism*), each run an hour with two interval breaks. Snaps for simply memorizing the script.

The unique quality of Albee's play is its engaging beats of witty dialogue and the crackling energy it creates between characters. It pulsates, and its suspense keeps audiences fixated and wide-eyed.

This production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* brings credit not only to the cast and crew but also to Albee's original objective. The drama unfolds as emotions awaken inside its characters – and audiences. It's exhausting but worth every minute.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is playing at London's Harold Pinter Theatre. An Australian revival opens in May at the Ensemble Theatre, Sydney starring Genevieve Lemon and Darren Gilshenan.

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