

On Stage

Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

By [Matt McGee](#) 02/12/2015



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Most of us see plays and films purely for entertainment. A little insight doesn’t hurt, and having a few favorite actors in the cast is nice. Then, once in a while, a particular story or film becomes a lifelong favorite. We memorize all the lines. We claim to have witnessed the ultimate version on Broadway, on screen or in an intimate setting we swear can never be replicated. I’d hate to be a member of the cast that has to live up to that expectation.

Yet producer Vivien Latham and director Tom Eubanks have stacked the deck in Ojai Art Center Theatre’s 2015 opening production, Edward Albee’s masterpiece, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* One need only step into George and Martha’s household and witness the arrival of their unsuspecting yet emotionally charged guests, and even the biggest cynic will come away feeling winded from what has just been observed.

Latham and Eubanks bring four talented actors bearing impressive professional résumés. And yet, to this cast’s credit, no single talent hovers above the others, as each delivers individual and sharply honed strengths. And because of the emotional acrobatics of Albee’s powerful script, each proves to be part actor, part daredevil in pulling it off.

Tracey Williams Sutton is the foul-mouthed Martha we know and hate, the one we loathe while loving to hear her swear and swing her way through the night with clenched fists aimed at anyone who dares come near. Playwright Michael Perlmutter plays George, Martha’s punching bag of choice. And despite early doubts by their guests as to his backbone, George emerges as the strength with insight that is the rudder to the ship.

Jessica Stone has all the quiet, Midwestern sweetness and naiveté of Honey, the young woman who can’t handle her booze or the night’s excitement but did pretty well at roping herself a prize husband. Sean Flynn (of Nickelodeon’s *Zoey 101* and grandson of someone named Errol) has Nick’s smug arrogance of youth, which he lords over George and dangles like bait for Martha. He’s intent on working his way up the ladder of the university, “plowing a few pertinent wives” on the way. Martha is supposed to be only the first rung going up — if he doesn’t flop on the way.

The action takes place on Kenny Dahle’s living room set that wears all the lived-in decadence of a professor who no longer cares to ascend professionally, and of a professor’s wife who drinks too much to care about order. In fact, chaos being Martha’s stock in trade, a taste of disorder is just what Nick and Honey have dropped in for. And still no one comes away unchanged — even the toughest of critics who may know the story by heart.

Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolfe? through Feb 22 at Ojai Art Center Theatre, 113 S. Montgomery St., 640-8797 or www.ojaiact.org.