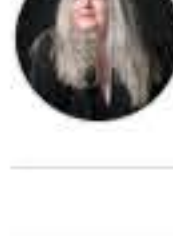


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Cocktails and cruelty fuel Mountain Community Theater's fierce 'Virginia Woolf'



BY JANA MARCUS 3 hours ago

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Powered by standout performances and emotional precision, Mountain Community Theater's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" pulls audiences straight into the middle of one very dangerous late-night cocktail party. Capturing both the venom and heartbreak inside Edward Albee's iconic play, audiences are in for a marathon, but the effort is rewarded.

Some plays invite audiences into the room politely. "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" kicks the door open, hands everyone a stiff drink and dares you to survive the night.

Now playing at Mountain Community Theater under the direction of Peter Gelblum, the production embraces Edward Albee's legendary emotional cage match disguised as a late-night party, while wisely resisting the temptation to imitate the famous film version starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Those performances loom large over any staging of the play and have become permanently lodged in theater history.

If you go

Who: Mountain Community Theater
What: Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"
When: Through June 7
Where: Park Hall, 9400 Mill Street, Ben Lomond
Tickets: [Click here](#)

Thankfully, this cast understands that the key is not imitation, but emotional truth.

For those unfamiliar with the story, the play follows a middle-aged married couple, George and Martha, who stumble home from an evening university faculty gathering and invite a younger couple, Nick and Honey, over for drinks. What starts as awkward cocktail chatter slowly mutates into an alcohol-soaked battlefield of emotional manipulation, buried resentment, cruel party games and devastating truths.

Make no mistake, this is a marathon. The three acts and two intermissions stretch the evening close to 3½ hours. But Albee's dialogue crackles with danger and remains sharp after more than 60 years. The humor still bites. The emotional wounds still sting. When performed well, as at Mountain Community Theater, the play pulls you into its claustrophobic orbit. You feel trapped in the room with these people yourself.

The cast is exceptionally strong overall. They carry the emotional weight of Albee's marathon with commitment, intelligence and stamina. Manirose Bobisuthi's Martha and Ian Dyer's George offer layered, calibrated performances full of resentment, intimacy, humor and damage. Instead of chasing the ghosts of Burton and Taylor, Dyer and Bobisuthi create their own version of this famously toxic marriage.

Dyer shows remarkable control over timing and facial expression, often communicating whole emotional shifts with the smallest glance or pause. George can easily become too passive or too sardonic, but Dyer carefully reveals the intelligence and suppressed fury smoldering beneath the character's exhausted exterior with such retorts as: "In my mind, Martha, you are buried in cement, right up to your neck. No, right up to the nose. That's much quieter."



Left to right: Isaac Ludington as Nick, Sarah Mitchler as Honey, Ian Dyer as George and Manirose Bobisuthi as Martha in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf." Credit: Davis Banta / Right Hand Creative

Bobisuthi's Martha is just as compelling. She represents both the character's theatrical style and the vulnerability below her bravado. One moment she dominates the space with acerbic wit and playful flirtation, relentlessly berating George. Next, you see the loneliness and disappointment that drive her, as in her monologue: "... I cry all the time. We both cry all the time, and then we take our tears, and we put them in the icebox, in the goddamn ice trays until they're all frozen, and then ... we put them in our drinks."

Together, their timing is razor-sharp. Their arguments land with precision. And perhaps most impressively, they create the uncomfortable sensation that the audience has somehow wandered directly into the middle of a very real party that is slowly unraveling before them. Watching the two verbally circle, provoke and dismantle each other becomes gripping theater.

The evening's quiet revelation is Sarah Mitchler as Honey.

Mitchler delivers a performance that sneaks up on the audience. At first, small mannerisms and nervous reactions catch your eye. Scene by scene, as the alcohol takes hold and Honey unravels, Mitchler becomes impossible to ignore. Watching her drift drunkenly across the stage – with a mix of fragility, confusion and comic absurdity – becomes an unexpected highlight. Her performance is wonderfully detailed and never tips into caricature.

Isaac Ludington brings a solid presence to Nick, though the performance can feel stiff at times. Nick is driven by ambition, ego and sexual confidence, and loosening up physically and emotionally could better highlight the tension and anger within the character. Small details often make a performance believable. For example, audiences can always tell when a nonsmoker pretends to smoke onstage. Still, Ludington has a strong foundation, and his performance can deepen as the run continues.

Visually the production is grounded and effective. Mark Hoagland's set captures a tired academic atmosphere without distracting. The space feels lived-in and cluttered with years of disappointment. Scenic artists and prop designers Gary Lepori and Michele Estrin-Gelblum create a believable world of academic decay and exhaustion. Lighting designer Josephine Czarnecki shifts the emotional temperature as tensions escalate.

For the most part, Susan McKay's costume work fits well into the production, but I question the wardrobe choices for Martha. The character dominates with every entrance, and the clothing selections, unfortunately, worked against both the performer and the commanding nature of the role. More elegant silhouettes, flowing loungewear or stronger structured pieces might have better complemented Bobisuthi's stage presence and Martha's unapologetically larger-than-life personality.

At its core, Albee's play is less about cruelty than loneliness. About the fantasies that people construct to survive disappointment. About marriage as both a prison and a shelter. These characters weaponize the illusion because reality seems unbearable. They perform versions of themselves because the truth beneath is too fragile to face directly.



Ian Dyer (left) and Manirose Bobisuthi as Martha and George in Edward Albee's classic "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf." Credit: Davis Banta / Right Hand Creative

This is what keeps the play modern. Strip away the cigarettes, the academic cocktail chatter and the midcentury décor and it becomes a story about people terrified of failure, aging, disconnection and irrelevance. George and Martha destroy each other because they know each other well enough to do real damage.

And somehow, despite all the venom hurled across the stage, the play never feels heartless. At its center is the desperate human need to be seen, even at your absolute worst.

While Mountain Community Theater's production may demand stamina from its audience, it rewards the effort. They deliver a thoughtful, emotionally charged production of a notoriously difficult American classic. It's long, messy, funny, cruel and exhausting, exactly as Albee intended. And by the end of the night, you may feel like you've survived the cocktail party yourself.