

A Deep Journey with a Couple of Couples

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Heavy, complex interpersonal drama can be rendered in profound detail on the small stage. One of the more intricate dramatic scripts of the 20th century is brought to the stage as **Milwaukee Entertainment Group** welcomes audiences into the basement of the classy Brumder Mansion for Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Director **Mark Neufang** brings together a cleverly-articulated cast for a very intimate evening's get-together with four characters from the early 1960s. The period of the piece is brought to the stage in vivid style thanks to the natural atmosphere of a distinguished, old mansion and very crisp set and costuming by **Amanda J. Hull**.

Amy Hansmann is wearily restless as Martha. She's just returned home for a late night with her husband and a couple of guests. Hansmann's careful calculations in the role are tempered by Martha's thirst for alcohol and the dizzy chaos social stimulation. She's caught between a pair of people she hardly knows and the husband she knows all too well from what has likely been years and years of merciless intellectual sparring. Hansmann's cageyness as Martha does a great deal to anchor an intriguing depth into her relationship with George.

Martha's husband George is a bewilderingly complex person with profoundly sophisticated dialogue. There are countless ways to deliver George to the stage and so very, very few of them work. Thankfully, **Bryant Mason** carries some kind of genius with him onstage in the role of George. Every line seems animated and illuminated from multiple angles. George has designed a dizzyingly deep intellectual world to inhabit. Mason has clearly given a great deal of thought to bringing George's complexity to the stage. The fact that Mason brings it across with such an organic intellectual gravity is impressive. As with everywhere else in the cast, George's complexity doesn't seem at all forced.

POWERED BY

nd Honey for a few late night drinks. Martha, George, Nick and y. Martha and George are middle-aged. Honey and Nick are just

Russ Bickerstaff

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Cara Johnston channels a timid presence to the stage in the role of Honey. Looking like the perfect early 1960s wallflower, the alcohol brings out a more candid side of her as the play progresses. Johnston speaks a great deal more with incredibly thought-out body language and facial expressions than Albee allows her with actual dialogue. The intimacy of the stage allows Johnston's physicality to be incredibly subtle without any need for amplification at all. A great deal can be read into her postures and movements in such a cozy, little space.

In the role of Nick, **Matt Specht** has a similarly profound transformation in the course of the play. A very poised, professional presence in a colleague's home gradually disintegrates over the course of the drama as George and Martha needle Nick and Honey into a state of volatility. The physicality of Specht's performance pleasantly collides onstage under the direction of **Christopher Elst**, who is responsible for the production's Intimacy Design. Physical romance onstage can be so very, very difficult to bring across with any kind of believability on the small stage. Under Elst's direction Specht and Hansmann manage a very believable kind of intimacy onstage which amplifies the complexity of everything else that takes place onstage.

The drama has a great depth to it. It's a descent into emotional/intellectual hell on so many levels. It's really just four people, but it really feels like a powerful journey into the nature of human connection. It's a full evening. Get in at 7:30 pm. Get out after 10 pm. There are a couple of intermissions. Grab a couple of drinks and sit back--it's going to be a deep, intimate night with a couple of couples.

Milwaukee Entertainment Group's production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* runs through Nov. 2nd at the Brumder Mansion on 3046 West Wisconsin Avenue. For ticket reservations and more, visit [Milwaukee Entertainment Group](#) online.

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