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MKE Entertainment Group Confronts 'Virginia Woolf'

BY CHARLES GROSZ OCT. 10, 2019 10:40 A.M.

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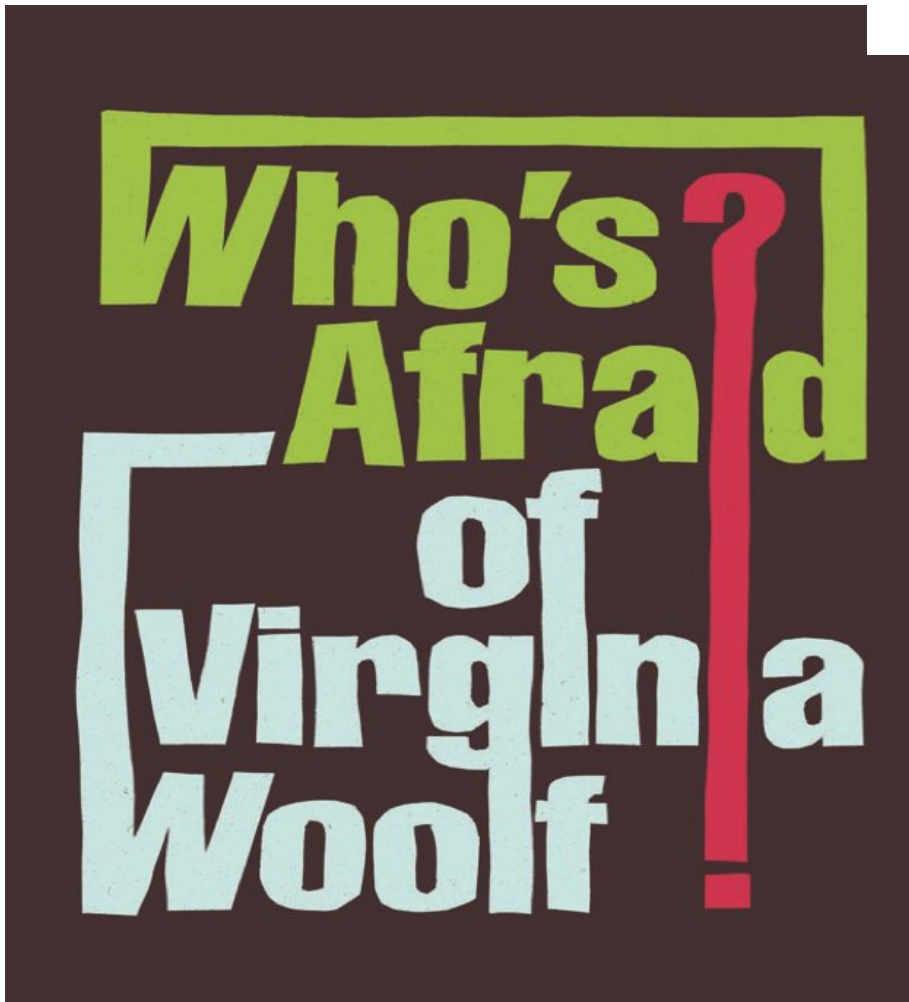
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“I swear if you existed, I'd divorce you.” So says wife Martha to her husband, George.

Milwaukee Entertainment Group is opening their new season with Edward Albee's play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at the Brumder Mansion, an upscale bed and breakfast with a fully functioning theater.

Director Mark Neufang says, “I've always wanted to direct this work. It is confrontational, natural and surreal. Most actors jump at the chance to play these roles, and I am so fortunate that the four actors in this production are a spectacular fit. Plus, the Brumder is the perfect venue for this play—the intimacy of the house forces the audience to be a participant, willingly or not.”

The play is set in the home of George, an aging university professor, and his restless spouse, Martha. Late one evening, they invite a young math professor and his wife over to use as pawns in their perverse game of “get the guests.” The night soon dissolves into a liquor-fueled arena of recriminations and regret.

Neufang explains, “George and Martha are emotional gladiators with a unique communication of equal parts love and hate. They both invent spiteful party games that they force upon their guests, changing the rules as they go.”

When Edward Albee wrote the play in 1962, it was an idyllic and innocent America. The Kennedys were in the White House, the civil rights movement had not yet turned violent and Vietnam was still considered a small skirmish. The play provoked outrage when Albee shredded the '60s zeitgeist via a married couple who spew vicious dialogue with cruel intentions. Sacred American traditions such as marriage, family and success were suddenly being questioned.

The play is considered a modern American classic, seeing three Broadway revivals and another planned for the spring of 2020. “This masterpiece deserves revisiting as one matures through life,” says Neufang.

Milwaukee Entertainment Group presents Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? at the Brumder Mansion, opening Friday, Oct. 18.

A string quartet playing the Ramones?

Joe 2.0 is the musical brainchild of violinist Joe Ketchum and singer Xenon, who was the original lead singer for the

rock group Cheap Trick. The two met when they both worked a stage at Summerfest; Ketchum was a stage manager, Xeno a performer.

“I’ve studied classical music since I was very young, but I also had interest in bluegrass, jazz and rock,” says Ketchum. “There were no opportunities to explore both in the same ensemble. There was a vacuum.”

Joe 2.0 has performed at Summerfest and Bastille Days, and he opened for the rock groups Chicago and The Moody Blues. They will headline their own show at the Marcus Center in 2020.

Ketchum strives to create a blend of lush string instruments coupled with the driving force of drums and a killer voice. “We keep the songs in the rock idiom. We don’t change the tunes, we just add a new layer,” says Ketchum. “There are wide varieties of colors that great string players can draw from their instruments. We are rockers who happen to be string players. We are a rockestra.”

Violinists Pamela Simmons and Gina Wood, violist Olga Tuzhilkov and cellist Scott Cook are all top-level classical freelancers in the Milwaukee area with principal positions in several orchestras. Drummer Brian Bruendl provides the beat.

Ketchum arranges all of the songs which are selected by the band. Covers run from Etta James, and Radiohead to John Legend. They have also produced an album of original works. “We recorded The Who’s ‘Baba O’Riley,’ and they contacted us to say that they liked it,” says Ketchum

When the juice is turned down, Joe 2.0 can relax into an ensemble more suitable for an elegant wedding or quiet

receptions. "But then we plug in, we are ready to rock!"

Joe 2.0 will be performing Saturday, Oct. 19, at the County Lanes in Hales Corners

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