

# denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

theater review

## Review: "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

\*\*\*\* RATING

By John Moore  
Denver Post Theater Critic

Article Last Updated: 07/20/2007 11:12:43 AM  
MDT

**Paragon Theatre's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Call 303-300-2210.**

Just try tiptoeing anywhere close to a bar after seeing this. Or an altar.

Paragon Theatre's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" is antabuse for anyone addicted to alcohol - or married. But if theater is your habit, it's the club drug of choice. It's disorienting, inebriating and consuming. And yet after three sweaty, sickening hours, long after the inevitable crash, you're still left craving one more shot.

"Virginia Woolf" is furious theater that eats its young.

Paragon Theatre just stepped into the big leagues.

In Edward Albee's boozy bloodbath, professional drunks George and Martha savagely toy with one another; with young foils Nick and Honey; with you, with me and anyone else in the Phoenix Theatre. No special reason. To them, this is just another Saturday night drinking game.

Is a word that comes out of either mouth true? "Might be. Might not." No matter. The carnage they inflict feels as real as letting blood.

Martha and George live in what's been aptly described as "uproarious antagonism." She's a fading daddy's girl; he's a history teacher ... who's history. It's 2 a.m. in 1962. Albee calls it "Walpurgisnacht" - the night witches celebrate the coming of spring. The civility of the era is about to give way to the effects from eight hours of drinking at daddy's faculty cocktail party. Man, should these two just go to bed.

Instead, Martha has invited daddy's latest biology prodigy and his mousy wife over for a wee-hours afterparty. Some party. They toss barbs and bottles. They hurl epithets and innards. But in the hazy, final moments of the play, which Albee calls "The Exorcism," they offer a jarring modicum of tenderness - a prayer, if you will, emerging with the sunrise.

Like his sloshed characters, Albee's story can't quite stand up in the end. But as a metaphor

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture

**OFFICE LIQUIDATORS**  
Profit From Our Experience  
303-759-3375

**SHOWROOM COUPON**  
**\$50 OFF**  
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.  
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.  
Expires 7-31-07

OfficeLiquidators.com  
11111 W 6th Ave  
Between Kipling & Simms

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

for raging self-destructiveness, this effort stands tall.

In the same way "Leaving Las Vegas" left viewers utterly drained yet invigorated by Nicolas Cage's performance, "Virginia Woolf" is a tour de force for director Warren Sherrill and brilliant actors Sam Gregory (of the Denver Center Theatre Company), Martha Harmon Pardee, Barbra Andrews and Ed Cord.

Gregory's George is like a toenail that keeps growing on a corpse. He's dead - done in by his failure to fulfill his professional destiny. But Gregory's a stiff who is still twitching - cursed with a wicked wit he can't help but bring out for a walk. He's a shark; whiskey is his blood.

As the sexy, cackling cluck Martha, Pardee repeatedly drops jaws like rungs down a ladder. She's snarling one minute, china fragile the next. She's riveting, not just for her callous cruelty but for her wrenching sympathy.

Much of their acidic banter is absurdly funny, and like any party guests trapped into witnessing a public humiliation, Paragon's audience has almost no choice but to laugh, however skittishly. The couple's primal anger and disgust drips with sexual tension; their escalating banter as erotic as a key party. Their sick, raw interplay grows to such intensity that when George finally smacks

Martha, it incredulously, sickeningly, almost seems a favor.



Martha Harmon Pardee reaches a career pinnacle as a Martha who is snarling one minute, fragile the next. Behind are Ed Cord and Sam Gregory. (Paragon Theatre)

As the ambitious playboy jock Nick, Cord brings unexpected sobriety (for lack of a better word). Just as Nick initially seems out of his league with George, Cord manages to keep surprising pace with Gregory.

As his defective young wife, Andrews simply puts on an acting clinic. She constantly communicates character, notably nonverbal symptoms of what we would today identify as anorexia and OCD. Andrews is smashing when smashed, floating in and out of consciousness with a vacant smile.

Under all this soddenness is an equally hazy netherworld of pain and delusion that baffled audiences in 1962, but grew in clarity with each of Albee's successive efforts ("Woolf"

## Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



**OFFICE LIQUIDATORS**  
Profit From Our Experience  
303-759-3375

**SHOWROOM COUPON**  
**\$50 OFF**  
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.  
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.  
Expires 7-31-07

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

was, believe it or not, his first full-length play).

For example, children here are a fiction. Nick and Honey married because of a hysterical pregnancy; George and Martha would have you believe their son turns 21 today. Then again, George also says his son is a bean bag - a classic Albeeism.

Sartre had his inescapable limbo, Beckett his everpresent tree. Albee has this living room. And despite the massive front door that anchors David LaFont's sleek set design, there is no exit. Oh why doesn't someone, anyone, use it?

Albee suggests anything is possible and resolves nothing. Did George and Martha invent this son in some stuporous party game as cavalierly as George has tonight killed him off? If so, what ever made these sickos this way? Did George shoot his own mother and drive his own father into a tree at age 15? Was a young Martha sexually abused by her father after her mother died?

Is it true these two actually need, help and - gasp - love one another?

"Might be. Might not."

Theater critic John Moore can be reached at 303-954-1056 or [jmoore@denverpost.com](mailto:jmoore@denverpost.com).

**"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"**

DRAMA | Presented by Paragon Theatre | Written by Edward Albee | Directed by Warren Sherrill | Starring Martha Harmon Pardee, Sam Gregory, Barbra Andrews and Ed Cord | THROUGH AUG. 11 | At the Phoenix Theatre, 1121 Santa Fe Drive | 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays | 3 hours, with two intermissions | \$17-\$19 | 303-300-2210 or [paragontheatre.org](http://paragontheatre.org)

**3more**

**"JULIUS CAESAR"** This ain't your granddaddy's "Caesar." The Colorado Shakespeare Festival's fifth offering of 2007 is a cautionary power tale set in a fictional Rome a few years from now - with some contemporary political undercurrents. 8:30 p.m. Saturday and Wednesday, times then vary through Aug. 16 at the Mary Rippon Outdoor Theatre at the University of Colorado-Boulder. \$5-\$38 (303-492-0554 or [coloradoshakes.org](http://coloradoshakes.org)).

**"BOWL OF BEINGS"** El Centro Su Teatro's annual outdoor summer offering is described as "a revolutionary comedy about life, death ... and pizza! 8:05 tonight, Saturday and July 27-28 at 4725 High St. \$12-\$15 (303-296-0219).

**"TRUNK-A-RE-RUNK"** Buntport's charming biweekly live children's serial "Trunks" celebrates the end of its second season with a "rerun" of the episode audiences voted their favorite. 11 a.m. Saturday, (JULY 28). \$6-\$8 (\$1 off if you dress like a superhero) at 717 Lipan

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture

**OfficeLiquidators.com**  
11111 W 6th Ave  
Between Kipling & Simms

**OFFICE LIQUIDATORS**  
Profit From Our Experience  
303-759-3375

**SHOWROOM COUPON**  
**\$50 OFF**  
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.  
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.  
Expires 7-31-07

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# denverpost.com




THE DENVER POST

St., 720-946-1388.

- John Moore

## COMING SUNDAY...

**ONE MASSIVE "MERMAID" ...** Denver Post theater critic John Moore takes you behind the scenes at the making of Disney's next Broadway spectacular. The first staging launches Thursday at our own Ellie Caulkins Opera House. additional features at [denverpost.com/theater](http://denverpost.com/theater)

 Print  Email  Return to Top

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



**OfficeLiquidators.com**  
11111 W 6th Ave  
Between Kipling & Simms

**OFFICE LIQUIDATORS**  
Profit From Our Experience  
303-759-3375

**SHOWROOM COUPON**  
**\$50 OFF**  
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.  
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.  
Expires 7-31-07

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™