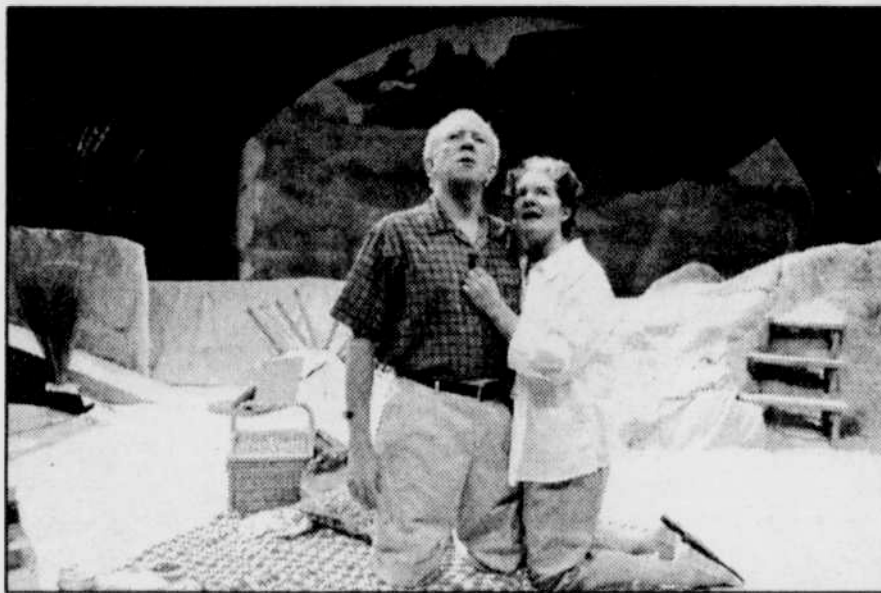


THEATER

Albee all over

Two theater companies celebrate the master of American drama

BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN



Nancy and Charlie have quite a day at the beach in Profile's Theatre Project's *Seascape*

PHOTO BY JAMIE BOSWORTH

Portlanders have numerous opportunities during the next several months to participate in the bona fide case of Edward Albee fever sweeping the Rose City (as well as the rest of the country).

Portland Center Stage is producing the gay playwright's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* through Feb. 9 at Newmark Theatre. One of Albee's best-known works, this complex, fascinating (three-hour!) drama reveals an evening in the life of married couple George and Martha drunkenly playing host to a younger couple in their home following a faculty party.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the river, Profile Theatre Project presents *Seascape* through Feb. 16 at Theater! Theatre! as part of its all-Albee season. (See review.)

Those who attend Profile's Jan. 19 matinee can stay after the show for a "mat chat," which, according to marketing and development director George Taylor, is "a great chance for the audience to talk with the director and actors about the production they have just seen."

On Feb. 8, the man himself will be at Portland State University's Lincoln Hall for a free *Seascape*-oriented Q & A. "The seeds for arranging this visit were planted back in June when I attended a playwrights conference...with which Edward Albee's been involved for the past 10 years," says Jane Unger, Profile's artistic director. "He was

extremely pleased that Profile was doing a season of his work."

Financially, though, getting Edward Albee to your "new and small theater company," she continues, is daunting. "We could have brought him to visit through his lecture agent.... However, it was too large a financial undertaking.... Instead we're working with him directly. He's been extremely generous in agreeing to speak to Profile's audience and will be donating his fee back to his Playwright's Foundation."

Adds Mead Hunter, literary director at Portland Center Stage: "Edward Albee is a national treasure. The resurgence of interest in [his] work these days proves that people have caught on to that—again.... It was easy for Americans to forget about him during the years when he wasn't creating large-scale 'hits.' But as recent years have proven, he is a major artist working at the top of his creative powers." □

Tickets to *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* at Newmark Theatre, 1111 S.W. Broadway, are \$12-\$47 from the box office or 503-274-6588. Tickets to *SEASCAPE* at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St., are \$12-\$25 from 503-242-0080.

beach—and their encounter with creatures of the sea, specifically what appear to be two giant, talking lizards named Sarah (Kimberly Howard) and Leslie (Tony St. Clair).

It's Nancy who carries the burden of the play's overarching evolutionary metaphor concerning the opposing modes of stasis and mobility, complacency and engagement, life and death. "Grow or die," Albee tells us through her. It's hardly a new or radical idea about aging and vitality—a theme just as effectively dealt with on *The Golden Girls*—but Albee's ability to pinpoint very specific pockets of human pain and emotional urgency effectively brings it home.

With Nancy's incessant pleading with her husband—a man content to lie in the sun and wait to die—to turn their golden years into an adventure, she's a sort of bearer of existential life force, refusing to make things comfortable for Charlie—in fact making things uncomfortable in order to keep him moving.

Albee's plays have been said to contain in their heterosexual relationships veiled, symbolic depictions of gay male couples. It's an interesting and plausible way to interpret *Seascape*, but, in the end, it seems beside the point, as does Nancy and Charlie's very apparent material security. Their leisure-class existence deserves a theme play of its own, but it's a context that allows a deeper humanistic exploration of universal emotional and spiritual worries.

There are noticeable flaws—the playwright coasts a little on the lizards, who are obvious constructions in aid of his thematic scheme, which itself comes to seem a tad self-impressed—but Profile's staging of the piece, the performances (especially Anderson's) and some sharp life-and-death insights should make attendance a priority for Portland theatergoers. □

REVIEW

Despite the expansive implications of the play's title, Profile Theatre Project's new production of Edward Albee's *Seascape* is perfectly suited for the company's intimate venue at Theater! Theatre!

The two-act comedic drama, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975, benefits greatly from a sense of isolation for its surprising surrealism to work. Thanks to the closeness of the space and Curt Enderle's unassuming miniature-seashore set, the play's action really does feel cut off, far away from the everyday—perfect for the work's expressly reflective, metaphorical tone.

Seascape presents the audience with an upper-middle-class retired couple, Nancy (JoAnn Johnson) and Charlie (Tobias Anderson), who find themselves in the midst of an ennui-infused marital crisis during a day at the

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