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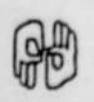
30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY TOUR!

# SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

**Friday, January 31<sup>st</sup> 8pm**

**ARLENE SCHNITZER HALL**

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## In the company of Woolf

Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* is a (nearly) perfect film

BY LISA BRADSHAW

**A**daptation is a tricky business. Michael Cunningham's 1998 Pulitzer-winning novel *The Hours*, based on the style and work of Virginia Woolf, is not only a popular, beloved piece of fiction (particularly with queer readers), it is, like Woolf's books, a story made up of emotional connections, of abstract thought. It's a stream-of-consciousness tour de force about three women in three different time periods spanning through the century like water rushing over rocks.

Those rocks belong to Virginia Woolf. She put a very large one into a pocket of her trench coat to ensure her drowning (she had previously been unsuccessful) in 1941 England. She had written more than 20 books, innumerable essays and was one of the most celebrated authors and intellectuals in the world. But she was mad—having severe bouts of mania and hearing voices—and another war had begun.

So *The Hours* begins (book and movie): with Virginia's plunge and lifeless, peaceful float over the rocks at the bottom of the Ouse River.

Cunningham's book is so beautifully written and original, it's the kind of artistic experience that makes your heart beat faster. Drawing on Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, about a day in the life of an upper-class society woman in post-WWI London, Cunningham reinvents his Clarissa Dalloway in late 1990s New York. And he makes her a lesbian—long-term relationship and all.

This modern-day Clarissa is throwing a party, just like Woolf's Clarissa, but for very different reasons. She is celebrating her former lover Richard's poetry prize. Richard is gay, and he's dying of AIDS.

Bounce back to the 1920s. Virginia Woolf is writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. She's getting over a bout of illness while living in the suburbs with her husband, Leonard. She has everything she needs, but she exhibits a lonely, frightened quality. She eats nearly nothing.

Bounce into the 1950s. Laura Brown is an unhappily married woman with a child she seems to not know what to do with. And she's pregnant with another. She is indifferent to her spouse and is a rather hopeless housewife. She

feels like a failure, but she loves to read and escapes by plunging into books. She has just begun a wonderful one called *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Bounce into the '90s and find Clarissa arguing with Richard about whether they gave him the poetry prize because he is deserving or because he is dying.

Bounce back to the 1920s. Virginia visits with her sister, Vanessa Bell, and her uproarious children. She kisses her sister to taste the sights, sounds and smells she used to know. She misses London.

Bounce to the 1950s. Laura has shared a kiss with a neighbor woman. She's thinking of killing herself.

You get the picture. How do you adapt that? As it turns out, rather well.

Fans of Cunningham, the gay author who also wrote *Flesh and Blood*, could have been utterly disappointed. (Remember *Beloved*?



Top: Meryl Streep and Ed Harris are perfect foils in *The Hours*. Middle: Jack Rovelto and Julianne Moore are a mother and son in crisis. Bottom: Nicole Kidman as Virginia Woolf and Stephen Dillane as patient husband Leonard.