



Associated Press/Steven Senne

'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf' will make its return to Broadway starring Kathleen Turner and Bill Irwin.

## Broadway play revives an old theater classic

By Michael Kuchwara  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

NEW YORK (AP) — Broadway hasn't seen the play in years, but there's one word its author refuses to use in describing the new production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* — revival.

"A revival means that something was dead," says Edward Albee, and *Virginia Woolf*, with its fierce tale of marital discord, always has been very much alive ever since it first shook up Broadway in 1962.

The play is continually on stage around the world, and, of course, there's the celebrated movie version that starred Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton (Albee says he wanted Bette Davis and James Mason for the film) as the New England college professor and his boozey, belligerent wife.

And, now, it has reappeared in New York at the Longacre Theatre with Bill Irwin and Kathleen Turner playing the combative George and Martha.

Albee credits Elizabeth McCann, his affectionately described "lunatic producer" with wanting to bring *Virginia Woolf* back to Broadway after an absence of nearly three decades. That journey has lasted more than five years.

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Edward Albee  
playwright

the playwright recalled. "And it's taken all this time to get the ideal cast together."

To find the right George and Martha, as well Nick and Honey, the young twosome who stumble into the older couple's alcohol-fueled nightmare, Albee and McCann held a series of readings with various actors — just to see how they worked with each other.

"Oh, I don't want to mention any names," Albee said diplomatically, but he called those readings absolutely essential.

"You can have two wonderful actors and if they are not good together, it wouldn't be right," he said. "I guess since Liz [McCann] kept telling me it was a very important new production, I was even stricter than I usually am."

Out of that process came Turner, who has worked her way through such stage roles as Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Mrs. Robinson in *The Graduate*, and Bill Irwin, a veteran of Albee's last Broadway play, *The Goat*, and whom Albee had seen in plays by Samuel Beckett and

many of the performer's own clown pieces.

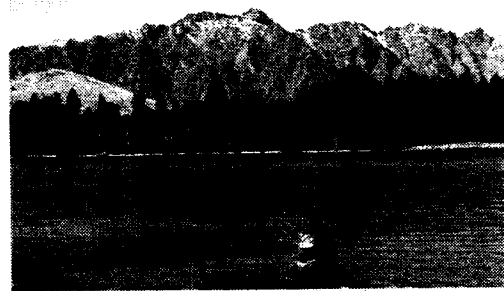
"I love the contrast between the two of them," Albee said. "Kathleen is loud and forceful. Bill is quiet. He works intellectually rather than emotionally."

And ask the actors where they went to find their characters and the low-key Irwin says simply, "Text. I only have text."

Turner expounds. The actress read the play in college when she was about 20 and thought, "Well, when I am 50, I will do it," she recalled. "And the week I turned 50, [the producers] said, 'Yes,' which kind of spooks me."

"Martha is a pagan and a woman with few boundaries. I think it's a question of trying to ... overcome some of my early diplomatic training to behave and be a good woman. I losing all inhibitions now. [Martha] is out there, you know."

Turner finds in Martha a haunting sense of failure, a failure of self and of what she expected from her husband. "This woman of intelligence and energy was unable to fulfill her own ambitions," she said.



New Zealand (photo courtesy of Hobbit ArtLab)

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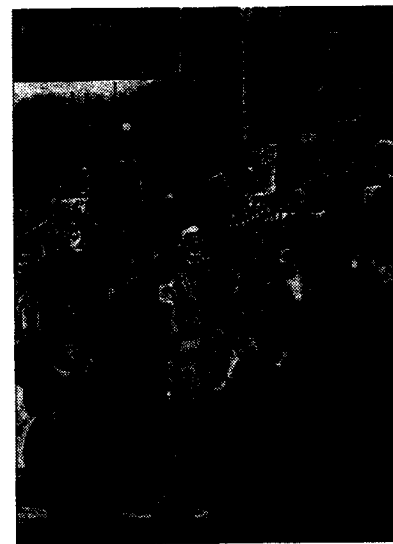


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