

Interview with Kat Stewart and David Whiteley: The joy of sharing the stage

Husband and wife duo Kat Stewart and David Whiteley chat to us about working together on Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* – the latest production to open at Sydney Theatre Company from sold out seasons in Melbourne.



David Whiteley and Kat Stewart in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf. Image: Eugene Hyland

Kat Stewart and **David Whiteley** met in the early noughties at Melbourne's Red Stitch Theatre Company and in 2023 were a part of the company's 21st birthday celebrations presenting *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. The production brought them back on stage together for the first time since having kids, and they discussed with me the creative joys of sharing the stage once more.

Sharing the Stage at the Sydney Theatre Company

Set in 1960s America, the play sees an extremely toxic and destructive, middle-aged couple who tear shreds off each other over the course of one drunken, very late night. The work delves into the uglier elements of human nature and the extent we go to in order to present a perfect façade, even at the cost of hurting the ones we love most. With such vicious content, I was interested to hear what precautions or preparations the actors took to protect themselves from the toxic and dark nature of the work.

KS: "This is our third run, and we always knew that we'd need to be really nice to each other off-stage, but we're being actors, it's not us. I just get a kick out of seeing him, he's so brilliant as George. Even though [on stage] he's being beastly to me a lot of the time, I get a kick out of seeing him do his thing and fly."

DW: “You rarely get the opportunity to work with your partner. It is wonderful, you get to see each other at their best.”

Recreating the Magic

This is the team’s third run of the production after the 2023 season at Red Stitch, then at Melbourne Comedy Theatre in 2024. When speaking of this original production, Stewart said, “Initially we did it for 5 weeks at Red Stitch (which is where we met all those years ago) an 80-seater, that was so exciting because it was so intimate, there was nowhere to hide, we had 4 weeks rehearsal – it was white-knuckle stuff. We sold out before we even opened, and it was such a great experience.”

Discussing how the production has evolved with each season, Whiteley talked about how each iteration has been more refined and beautiful. “It’s such a layered piece of text – there are so many things that are ambiguous that you can read in several different ways so even on a regular play there’s a ritualistic or poetic dimension that you only become aware of after doing it several times.”

Stewart remarked on **Sarah Goodes’** direction and their ambition to extract extra layers and discover fresh details from the text rather than recreating previous performances to keep it feeling fresh and alive. “It’s lovely to get the opportunity to go that little bit deeper each time. We find something new with each show.”



David Whiteley and Kat Stewart in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Image: Eugene Hyland

Beyond the 20th Century Audience

Together they shared insight and discussed the relevance of the work and why it still appeals to audiences over half a century on. “It’s 60 years old and it’s so modern,” says

Stewart. *“I find that reassuring because you can get overwhelmed by the news cycle and where we’re at but I find it strangely reassuring that people our aged 60 years ago were having the same existential crises about technology and developments (worried about test tube babies the way we’re worried about AI) and the crisis of middle age is universal. The character of Martha was so shocking then and is still shocking now. It blows me away about how relevant and universal the human condition is. I take comfort in that.*

Says Stewart about what audiences can expect, *“it’s not quite naturalism, it’s quite surreal in parts, it’s heightened in parts, it’s just endlessly challenging and fascinating, a real privilege to work on something like this.”*

Originally published at <https://theatrethoughtsaus.online/news-interview-kat-stewart-theatre/>