

EDWARD ALBEE
THREE TALL WOMEN





Macaulay

Salon

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THEATRE
COMPANY

Welcome to **THREE TALL WOMEN**, the first production of our 1996 International Season.

This is a very personal play. Edward Albee acknowledges its autobiographical nature but hotly denies revenge as his motive for writing it. Rather, he has "translated fact into fiction", creating a character who in every way, in every event, resembled his adoptive mother. By all accounts, the real woman was a monster: prejudiced, paranoid and full of loathing. Her fictional counterpart is a testament to Albee's skill: a towering and majestic figure refusing to go gently into that great good night. Albee has commented that few people who met the adoptive mother in the last years of her life could abide her, while many people who have seen the play find her fascinating. Somewhat ruefully, he adds "Heavens, what have I done?!"

THREE TALL WOMEN is also descriptive of tonight's cast. Lee Grant, Ilona Rodgers and Theresa Healey are three of New Zealand's finest actresses. ATC is privileged to welcome back Lee and Ilona, last seen in **ANGELS IN AMERICA** and **BY DEGREES** respectively. Theresa joins us for the first time, as does Nic Berry, a recent graduate of the Performing Arts School, who makes his professional debut. We wish him all the best for the years ahead. Raymond Hawthorne begins a busy year with the ATC as director of **THREE TALL WOMEN**, full of admiration for Albee's skill as a wordsmith and fearless expression of confrontation. John Harding and Lesley Burkes (*La Sposa*) complete a first-class team.

ATC is indebted to our sponsors listed in the back of this programme and further acknowledges the generous assistance of Creative New Zealand and Auckland City's Arts Alive programme. Similarly, Greg Innes and his team at the Aotea Centre and Ben Unger at Ticketek have provided invaluable support that is greatly appreciated. To all of our subscriber's, many of whom have shown their support since the Company's inception, we offer our sincerest thanks. Finally, I would like to offer my personal thanks to Teresa Sokolich, Amy Drury and Diana Goulding who have contributed more than can be mentioned to the realisation of our mutual dream of an on-going live professional theatre company.

I leave you with a quotation from Edward Albee which struck a chord, and wish you all the best for 1996.

"I am very concerned with the fact that so many people turn off because it's easier; that they don't stay fully aware during the course of their lives, in all the choices they make: social, economic, political, aesthetic. They turn off because it's easier. But I find that anything less than **dangerous participation** is an absolute waste of some rather valuable time".

Here's to dangerous participation.

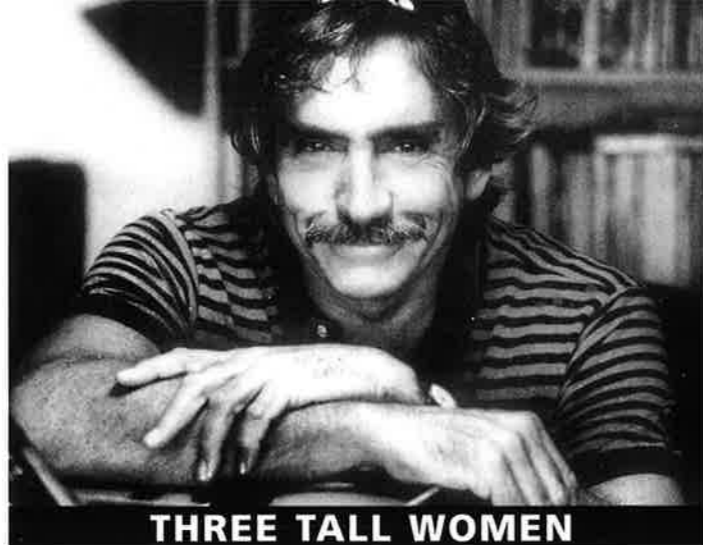


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Edward Albee's **THREE TALL WOMEN** first opened in Vienna in 1991 and has since had successful productions in New York, London, Sydney and Christchurch. The play received the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. This is Albee's introduction to the published script.



"People often ask me how long it takes me to write a play, and I tell them "all of my life". I know that's not the answer they're after - what they really want is some sense of time between the first glimmer of the play in my mind and the writing down, and perhaps the duration of the writing down - but all of my life is the truest answer I can give, for it is the only one that is exact, since the thinking about the play and the putting it to paper vary so from play to play.

Few sensible authors are happy discussing the creative process - it is, after all, black magic and may lose its power if we look that particular gift horse too closely in the mouth, or anywhere else for that matter; further, since the creative process cannot be taught or learned, but only described, of what use is the discussion? Still, along with "where do your ideas come from?", the question is greatly on the mind of that tiny group of civilians who bother to worry about it at all.

With **THREE TALL WOMEN**, I can pinpoint the exact instant I began writing it, for it coincides with my first awareness of consciousness. I was in a group of four who were on a knoll (I could even now show you the exact spot, the exact knoll) observing the completion of a new house, the scaffolding still on it. There were three adults and tiny me - my adoptive mother, my adoptive father, my nanny (Nanny Church), and in Nanny Church's arms - what? Three month old Edward, certainly no older. My memory of the incident is wholly visual - the scaffolding, the people; and while I have no deep affection for it, it is my first

awareness of being aware, and so I suppose I treasure it.

I have the kind of mind that does not retain much consciously - I experience, absorb, consider, banish into the deeps. Oh, should someone remind me of a significant event, its sights and sounds will come flooding back, but free of emotional baggage - that dealt with at the time of the incident or catalogued elsewhere. And I know that my present self is shaped as much by self-deception as anyone else's, that my objectivities are guided by the maps I myself have drawn, and that nothing is really ever forgotten, merely filed away as inconvenient or insupportable.

So when I decided to write that which became **THREE TALL WOMEN**, I was more aware of what I did not want to do than exactly what I did want to accomplish; I knew my subject - my adoptive mother, whom I knew from my infancy (that knoll!) until her death over sixty years later, and who perhaps knew me as well. Perhaps.

I knew I did not want to write a revenge piece - could not honestly do so, for I felt no need for revenge. We had managed to make each other very unhappy over the years, but I was past all that, though I think she was not. I harbour no ill-will toward her; it is true I did not like her much, could not abide her prejudices, her loathings, her paranoias, but I did admire her pride, her sense of self. As she moved toward ninety, began failing rapidly both mentally and physically, I was touched by the survivor, the figure clinging to the wreckage only partly of her own making, refusing to go under.

No, it was not a revenge piece I was after, and I was not interested in "coming to terms" with my feelings toward her. I knew my feelings, I

thought they were pretty much on the mark, and knew that I would not move much beyond the grudging respect I'd slowly developed for her. I was not seeking self-catharsis in other words.

I realised that what I wanted to do was write as objective a play as I could about a fictional character who resembled in every way, in every event, someone I had known very, very well. And it was only when I invented, when I translated fact into fiction, that I was aware I would be able to be accurate without prejudice, objective without the distortive folly of "interpretation".

I did not cry and gnash my teeth as I put this woman down on paper. I cannot recall suffering either with her or because of her as I wrote her. I recall being very interested in what I was doing - fascinated by the horror and sadness I was (re)creating.

Writers have the schizophrenic ability both to participate in their lives and, at the same time, observe themselves participating in their lives. Well...some of us have this ability, and I suspect it was this (frightening) talent that allowed me to write **THREE TALL WOMEN** without prejudice, if you will.

I know that I "got her out of my system" by writing this play, but then again I get all the characters out of my system by writing about them.

Finally, when I based the character "Grandma" (**THE AMERICAN DREAM, THE SANDBOX**) on my own (adoptive) maternal grandmother, I noticed that while I liked the lady a lot - we were in alliance against the folk in the middle - the character I created was both funnier and more interesting than the model. Have I done that here? Is the woman I wrote in **THREE TALL WOMEN** more human, more multifaceted than its source? Very few people who met my adoptive mother in the last twenty years of her life could abide her, while many people who have seen my play find her fascinating. Heavens, what have I done?!

MONTAUK, NY, 1994

EDWARD ALBEE - Playwright



Edward Albee's extensive body of work consists of **THE ZOO STORY** (Vernon Rice Award), **THE DEATH OF BESSIE SMITH, FAM AND YAM, THE AMERICAN DREAM** (Foreign Press Association Award), **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?** (Tony and Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play), **TINY ALICE, A DELICATE BALANCE** (1966 Pulitzer Prize), **EVERYTHING IN THE GARDEN, BOX AND QUOTATIONS FROM CHAIRMAN MAO TSE-TUNG, ALL OVER, SEASCAPE** (1974 Pulitzer Prize), **LISTENING, COUNTING THE WAYS, THE LADY FROM DUBEQUE, ANOTHER PART OF THE ZOO, THE MAN WHO HAD THREE ARMS, FINDING THE SUN, MARRIAGE PLAY**, and **FRAGMENTS - A CONCERTO GROSSO**.

He has also directed many of his own plays, including the world premiere of **THREE TALL WOMEN** at the English Theatre in Vienna. He is a member of the Dramatist's Guild, PEN American, The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, International Theatre Institute USA (President), and the Edward F Albee Foundation (President). Mr Albee was awarded the Gold Medal in Drama from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1980. As well as the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, **THREE TALL WOMEN** has received Best Play awards from the London Evening Standard, the New York Drama Critics' Circle and the Outer Critics' Circle, and the Lucille Lortel Award.

Edward Albee has also received an Obie Award for Sustained Achievement. Currently he is working on a revival of **A DELICATE BALANCE** for Broadway.

RAYMOND HAWTHORNE - Director



Raymond Hawthorne trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (R.A.D.A.) London from 1957-59. Prior to R.A.D.A. he served his apprenticeship as an actor with the New Zealand Players for 2 1/2 years. From 1959 to 1971 he worked in the UK as an actor, singer, director and tutor, frequently returning to R.A.D.A. to teach and direct.

In 1971 Raymond returned to New Zealand and worked at the Mercury as an actor/director. He played Andrei in Chekhov's **Three Sisters**, Jacques in **As You Like It**, and Sir Thomas Moore in **A Man For All Seasons**.

In 1973 he formed Theatre Corporate and was Artistic Director for 8 years. In 1993 he played Sonia Davies' father in Gaylene Prestons mini-series **Bread and Roses**, directed **Angels in America** for ATC and played with great success the role of Michael in

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me (ATC 1994) and John in **Oleanna** (ATC, 1995).

Raymond runs his own Acting Studio "The Actors Space".

JOHN HARDING - Designer

John's set designs include **MACBETH, HAMLET, VIA SATELLITE** (Mercury), **CABARET** (Watershed), **WEED** (Mercury), **THE CRUCIBLE** (Mercury), **THE MERCHANT OF VENICE** (Mercury), **OLEANNA, BRAINDEAD - THE MUSICAL** and **OTHELLO**. As well as stage productions, John designs for television and teaches stage design and prop construction.

LESLEY BURKES - Costume Designer

Trained in England in design, couture, and historical costume, Lesley has been combining costume and fashion design since the mid-seventies. She ran the Mercury Theatre wardrobe until 1989 and during this time was responsible for the creation of many of the most beautiful costumes seen in this country, including **MADAM BUTTERFLY, LES LIASONS DANGEREUSES, TALES OF HOFFMAN, TWELFTH NIGHT**, and many other operas, musicals and plays. During her freelance career, she has designed for film, television, and theatre, including the costumes for the first two years of **SHORTLAND STREET**, setting up the original "STREET" look. Her last team up with John Harding was **HAMLET** for the Watershed Theatre directed by Michael Hurst. Since 1991, Lesley has been running her own company, La Sposa Design, one of the few truly Couture Design houses in Auckland specialising in high fashion, evening gowns and bridal wear for both men and women, including private commissions for many of New Zealand's "stars".

LEE GRANT



Lee is one of Auckland's foremost actresses. In 1991 she was recognised with an MBE for her contribution to the arts. Since the closure of the Mercury, Lee has been involved in a variety of television productions including the Kurt Vonnegut Theatre and The Ray Bradbury Theatre. In 1992 Lee performed in the hugely popular Aotea Centre production of **MY FAIR LADY**. In 1993 Lee played the character Bridget O'Malley (the housekeeper) in the critically acclaimed ATC production of Michelanne Forster's **DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN**. Also in 1993 Lee had a core cast role in the American television production **WHITE FANG**, filmed in Queenstown. Last seen on stage in New Zealand in ATC's **ANGELS IN AMERICA** (1993), we welcome Lee back from her new home in Perth.

ILONA RODGERS



Ilona trained at the Bristol Old Vic. Theatre appearances include **THE SON OF OBLOMOV** (with Spike Milligan on the West End), **HEDDA GABLER** and **THE CHERRY ORCHARD** at Theatre Corporate, and **THREE SISTERS**, **MACBETH**, **AGNES OF GOD**, **WILD HONEY** and **THE RIVALS** at the Mercury Theatre. Ilona has appeared in two one-woman shows, **KID STUFF** (Theatre Corporate) and more recently, **SHIRLEY VALENTINE** (Mercury Theatre). Television appearances include **THE AVENGERS**, **THE SAINT**, **THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES**, **DR WHO**, **1915** (Winner: Best Actress: Logie Award) and **GLOSS** (Twice winner: Best Actress: NZ Film and Television Awards). Ilona has just completed the television directors course at South Pacific Pictures and looks forward to furthering her career behind the cameras.

THERESA HEALEY



Theresa graduated from New Zealand Drama School in 1986 and has since worked at the Fortune Theatre (Dunedin), Court Theatre (Christchurch), Circa, Bats, and Depot Theatres (Wellington) and the Mercury Theatre in Auckland. Favourite roles include Katherine in **THE SECRET RAPTURE** (Circa), Aunt Rose in **BABY DOLL** (Circa) and Sybill in **PRIVATE LIVES** (Mercury). Her film appearances include **BREAD AND ROSES** and **THE KITCHEN SINK**. Theresa is best-known to television audiences as Carmen Roberts on **SHORTLAND STREET**, for which she was nominated for Best Actress at the 1995 NZ Film and Television Awards.

NIC BERRY



Nic makes his professional acting debut in this production of **THREE TALL WOMEN**. Nic was educated at Avondale College, Auckland. From College he went straight to Performing Arts School and graduated at the end of 1995. During his course at P.A.S. he performed the roles of Creon in **OEDIPUS REX**, Lysander in **A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT DREAM**, Mr Van Daan in **THE DAIRY OF ANN FRANK**, both (directed by Raymond Hawthorne) and Bernie Litko in **SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO**. We wish him all the best in his career.

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

EDWARD ALBEE THREE TALL WOMEN

World Premiere - English Theatre, Vienna, 1991.

Auckland Theatre Company Premiere - Herald Theatre - 7 March, 1996

Winner 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

CAST

A Lee Grant

B Ilona Rodgers

C Theresa Healey

The Boy Nic Berry

DIRECTOR *Raymond Hawthorne*

SET DESIGNER *John Harding*

COSTUME DESIGNER *Lesley Burkes, La Sposa*

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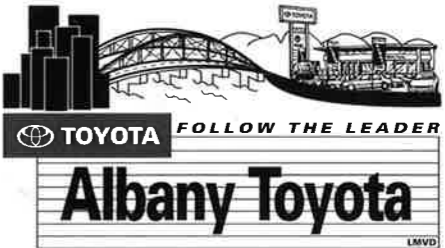
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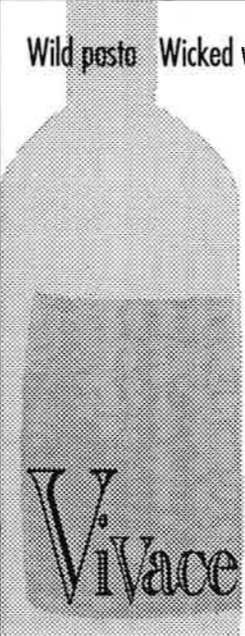
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