

# A Buoyant "Seascape" at Profile

By Bob Hicks

...*"Virginia Woolf"* [at Portland Center Stage] is the larger half of an Edward Albee mini-festival in Portland. It opened officially Friday night, the same evening that Profile Theatre Project opened its buoyant production of *"Seascape,"* Albee's reflective, lovely string quartet of a 1975 Pulitzer Prize-winner.

The chance to see the plays back to back is both unusual and cause for celebration, because *"Virginia Woolf"* (Albee as Beethoven) and *"Seascape"* (Albee as Mozart) are remarkable works of theater. Together, they're like — well, like marriage, which is at the heart of both plays....

A stubborn American optimism, glinting through the dark, connects *"Virginia Woolf"* and *"Seascape."* For all their menace, the sense of hope after hitting bottom gives Albee's plays a humane, deeply civilized resonance. He believes in history, and he believes — even with deep qualifications — in a future.

If *"Virginia Woolf"* is emotion unleashed, *"Seascape"* is intellect set to music. Albee is in a reflective, if still gently comic, mood in this play — once again about the relationship between men and women, but also about



Tobias Anderson (*Charlie*) and JoAnn Johnson (*Nancy*) in Profile's production of Edward Albee's *Seascape*

the grand march of evolution.

His thoughts take absurd, fantastic shape when old married couple Nancy and Charlie (JoAnn Johnson and Tobias Anderson) confront two large, talking, long-tailed reptiles who have just emerged from the ocean onto a secluded beach.

It's a shock, of course, to both couples. Green-scaled Leslie (Tony St. Clair) and Sarah (Kimberly Howard) are just as surprised and suspicious as Nancy and Charlie. Both males growl and threaten and protect; both females leap into the adventure with curiosity and wonderment.

Which at least gets Charlie on his feet. Adaptation is the theme, and Charlie would rather

not. He's had a good life, he's tired, and he'd just as soon lie down and watch the world go by.

Albee's language is delicious as Nancy tries to needle him into activity, and Act 1 goes by almost too much in a reverie, all poetic as opposed to interactive: Anderson takes unresponsiveness to an extreme, and Johnson gets a lilt in her voice. Then the talking lizards show up, and the show shifts into lively, sparkling banter in spite of its sad undercurrent of mortality.

But then, what's mortality without a little life beforehand? *"Seascape"* is smaller and quieter than *"Virginia Woolf,"* but a pleasure is still a pleasure. Enjoy both while you can.