



Southampton Cultural Center's "A Delicate Balance" Pairs Dramatic Fashions with a Provocative Production

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by Pat Rogers

Fans of Edward Albee have plenty of reasons to head to the Southampton Cultural Center to see the production of his drama "A Delicate Balance." Directed by Joan M. Lyons, this production reveals a director whose hit her stride and has the cast to prove it. Lyons's direction has an additional layer of interest that makes the production easy on the eyes: an acute fashion sense that adds panache to every scene of the nearly two-and-a-half hour play. Tapping into the talent of actress Kirstin Whiting for costume design, the pair cloaked in the cast in vintage or designer clothing that seems to be as much a mover and shaker in the play as the alcohol imbibed by the characters.



Set in the sixties, "A Delicate Balance" opens with a slice of life for wealthy middle-aged couple Agnes and Tobias, whose household includes Agnes's live-in alcoholic sister Claire who always has something to say and brings the comedy with her. The play quickly moves into disruption mode when longtime friends Harry and Edna arrive and start moving in their things, after declaring they are fleeing their home from an ambiguous terror.

On their heels arrives Julia, the bitter 36-year old daughter of Agnes and Tobias, who seeks her childhood bedroom as her fourth marriage collapses. Julia simmers in resentment about many things (including being denied her expected refuge) and agitates at every turn. The now-expanded family changes the dynamics of all their lives with each dramatic scene moving the characters closer to unexpected events.

The cast features Bonnie Grice, John Leonard, Joanna Mincarelli, Tamara Salkin, Kristin Whiting and Scott Wilson. Performances are heading into its final weekend with productions offered on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m. and on Sunday at 2 p.m. on the stage of The Levitas Center for the Arts of the Southampton Cultural Center, located at 25 Pond Lane, Southampton, NY, across from Agawam Park.

A fan of Edward Albee, Lyons picked the play because of the characters and the opportunity to direct a drama that is challenging for the audience, the actors and the story's recreation on stage.

"A Delicate Balance" is a three act play—and a long one—which engaged Lyons and allowed her to stretch out as a director, she said. Character-driven, a lot of work was done in the early days to develop each one so they could take the back and forth forces that intensifies when adversity shows up.

"The characters are very rich," Lyons said. "The language is rich. Albee is all about character...Claire is a foil for her sister Agnes. They are so different and so similar. We did a lot of character work to help with the development and gain an intimacy from the ground up."

In addition to coaching the actors, Lyons did two other things. She created a stage home with careful details to create a mid-century modern look and asked Whiting, who also appears in the play, to head the costume design. Well-versed in clothing and fashion, Whiting was happy to oblige, she said.

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Delving head first into the fashions of the sixties that would have appealed to each character, Whiting hit estate sales, thrift shops and her own extensive collection of vintage clothing to create the look of all the actors.

Whiting took things a step further and decided to use color to visually cue to the connections of the characters, she said. For instance, husband and wife team of Agnes and Tobias (played by Bonnie Grice and John Leonard) are paired in black or blue. Gold accents are frequent choices for sisters Agnes and Claire to show their innate familial similarities with their differences distinguished through the clothing choices.

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Bonnie Black Kimona and Husband in gold overcoat

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Agnes donned a different ensemble in each scene with her fashion choices designed to impart classical elegance, Whiting said. There are black kimonos detailed in gold, a Zara black tunic with embroidered brocade, a lush blue velvet dress paired with gold fringe and a teal blue gown for dinner.

Fashion was also used to heighten the drama of scenes, Whiting said. When Julia springs into the

living room holding a revolver, she is dressed in vibrant red peignoir set. Whiting selected a red one to signify passion, danger and drama. Later on, when a cooler head prevails, Julia appears in an orange and butternut squash print shirt dress (fit and flair) paired with go-go boots that was “true vintage,” according to Whiting. Cued to Julia’s demeanor, she also appears in a smart beige suit and a glittering Zara black cocktail dress—all which allude to her life-in-progress outside of her childhood home.

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Fashions making appearances throughout the play included a Brioni cashmere coat, boiler hats, Salvatore Ferragamo shoes, St. John’s suit, Hermes, a vest coat and other fashion accessories and clothing. Including an array of fashion was a stagecraft decision that enhanced Albee’s stellar writing and the cast’s performance, said Lyons and Whiting separately.

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Continue scrolling to see some of the fashions appearing on stage in the Southampton Cultural Center’s rendition of Edward Albee’s “A Delicate Balance.”

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BASIC FACTS: Edward Albee's "A Delicate Balance" is performed at Southampton Cultural Center (SCC) from January 10 to 26, 2020. Performances take place on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7 p.m. and on Sundays at 2 pm. Admission is \$25 for Adults; \$15 for students or Brunch/Dinner Packages ranging from \$47 to \$70 and include admission. [Click here](#) to reserve a ticket or call 631-287-4377.

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