



Edward Albee: A Singular Journey: A Biography

Mel Gussow

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In 1960, Edward Albee electrified the theater world with the American premiere of *The Zoo Story*, and followed it two years later with his extraordinary first Broadway play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Proclaimed as the playwright of his generation, he went on to win three Pulitzer Prizes for his searing and innovative plays. Mel Gussow, author, critic, and cultural writer for *The New York Times*, has known Albee and followed his career since its inception, and in this fascinating biography he creates a compelling firsthand portrait of a complex genius.

The book describes Albee's life as the adopted child of rich, unloving parents and covers the highs and lows of his career. A core myth of Albee's life, perpetuated by the playwright, is that *The Zoo Story* was his first play, written as a thirtieth birthday present to himself. As Gussow relates, Albee has been writing since adolescence, and through close analysis the author traces the genesis of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Tiny Alice*, *A Delicate Balance*, and other plays. After his early triumphs, Albee endured years of critical neglect and public disfavor. Overcoming artistic and personal difficulties, he returned in 1994 with *Three Tall Women*. In this prizewinning play he came to terms with the towering figure of his mother, the woman who dominated so much of his early life.

With frankness and critical acumen, and drawing on extensive conversations with the playwright, Gussow offers fresh insights into Albee's life. At the same time he provides vivid portraits of Albee's relationships with the people who have been closest to him, including William Flanagan (his first mentor), Thornton Wilder, Richard Barr, John Steinbeck, Alan Schneider, John Gielgud, and his leading ladies, Uta Hagen, Colleen Dewhurst, Irene Worth, Myra Carter, Elaine Stritch, Marian Seldes, and Maggie Smith. And then there are, most famously, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, who starred in Mike Nichols's acclaimed film version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The book places Albee in context as a playwright who inspired writers as diverse as John Guare and Sam Shepard, and as a teacher and champion of human rights. *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey* is rich with colorful details about this uniquely American life. It also contains previously unpublished photographs and letters from and to Albee. It is the essential book about one of the major artists of the American theater.

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