



Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Theater Time

A sneak preview of **the next season of expat theater**

▶ With spring just around the corner, there's been a flurry of activity in the local theater scene. Where in past years there were only a handful of groups around, each with varying degrees of activity, the entire scene is picking up now. "There are more and more groups active in Shanghai doing exciting things," remarks Fiona Pollard of Shanghai's longest-running English theater group, East-West Productions. *City Weekend* takes a look at what will be happening onstage during the season.

The first production set for the year is Urban Aphrodite's (www.urbanaphrodite.nl) adaptation of the classic Edward Albee play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Popularized by the 1966 film starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, the play looks at two couples sharing drinks and the volatile exchange that follows. "The play goes so much into the psychological drama of relationships," explains director Ann James. In addition, James promises a twist; "The set in the show is going to be a character. We're going far out of the box and no one has seen a play done in this way." Following the show's run (March 21 to 30), Urban Aphrodite will put on Noël Coward's comic *Hay Fever* around May. "It's very British and it's happening in spring, which is the perfect time for a comedy," James says.

The Brits have a tradition of comedic theater that East-West Productions (eastwesttheatre.com) will also explore for their early spring show, *Lend Me a Tenor*. The two-time Tony award-winning play has been an international success since its 1986 debut. "It's a great script that appeals to both Eastern and Western audiences," explains director Dave Earl. "It borders on farce and is an immensely funny play, full of miscommunication and mistaken identity." Additionally, the group plans a summer production of Sophocles' *Antigone* that will feature a large cast including a Greek chorus.

For Shanghai theater lovers, spring is the time for Shanghai Repertory Theater's (SRT, www.shanghairep.com) annual Creative Collaborators Competition. "It's open to anyone to submit a one-act play that's between ten to twenty minutes long," explains founder Rosita L. Janbakhsh. "We pick the top eight, and then we have a public table reading. We choose the top three that we perform at the Ke Center. We receive submissions from all over the world, and last year a student from BISS in Pudong actually

made the top eight." In addition to the competition, the group will also hold their annual Shakespeare production and Christmas show later on in the year.

Later on in the season, Tin Foil Hat Productions (www.tfhprojects.com) will be putting on their adaptation of the Michel Gondry film, *Science of Sleep*. For the group's Michael Beets, the goal is to create "transmedia theater where all of these platforms come

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together to tell one main story." While the film is memorable for Gondry's visual trickery, Beets and actress Carlijn van Ramsthorst are confident in their ability to successfully adapt it to the stage. "The love story is very

straightforward, simple and beautiful," says Ramsthorst. "The tricky part is the dreams." For that, Beets says, "We're going to use elements and styles of stage productions to replicate that idea."

It's setting up to be one of the busiest seasons on stage in recent memory. "There's a place for different kinds of theatrical endeavors, and the audience here is hungry for theater," beams Janbakhsh.

■ **Andrew Chin**