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THE CHERRY ORCHARD Anton Chekhov

**THE
CHERRY
ORCHARD**

by Anton Chekhov

**translation by
Jean-Claude van Itallie**

**directed by
STEPHEN HEATLEY**

**set design by
CHRISTINA POMANSKI**

**costume design by
KAREN MIRFIELD**

**lighting design by
HELINA PATIÈNCE**

**sound design by
MICHELLE HARRISON**

NOVEMBER 4 – 13, 2004

TELUS STUDIO THEATRE



theatre
at UBC

In the interest of promoting our creative work and encouraging theatre studies in our community, Theatre at UBC proudly presents this Companion Guide to *The Cherry Orchard*.





Anton Chekhov

All his life Anton Chekhov lived on his inner wealth, he was always himself, possessed inner freedom, and never took account of what some expected from Anton Chekhov, and others, more vulgarly, demanded from him.

MAXIM GORKY

CHEKHOV:

A REASON

TO CELEBRATE

by Amy Strilchuk
Editor

Europe. Nineteenth century. Typical theatrical fare includes melodrama, romanticism, and well-made plays. Character emotions are expressed through actors' grand gestures, events are spectacular (ranging from fires to floods occurring live on stage) and plots involve tightly constructed cause-and-effect developments. Artists knew what they were expected to portray on stage and audiences knew what they could expect to view when they entered the theatre.

Enter Chekhov. Stage left. Ibsen and Strindberg accompanying him.

And no one knew what to expect anymore. Chekhov's arrival to the stage marked one of the greatest shifts in theatre history and initiated some of the most creative developments ever known. Audience members were confused by his writing style, actors were required to master a new acting approach, and debate was sparked with one of the world's most renowned directors, Stanislavski. But they all adapted and they all were undoubtedly changed by his theatrical approach.

And here we sit – moments away from encountering the effects of those changes. Realistic acting styles, random sentences dispersed among seemingly fruitless actions, and events unfold in a manner you may not expect. Such activities may seem fresh to some, but others may get the sense that they've seen this type of play before. You may mutter under your breath: "Realism. Certainly not cutting edge anymore, is it?"

For those of you who consider yourself a part of this group, we have compiled this companion guide to catch you before uttering such words and remind you of a couple things. Chekhov and his plays were "cutting edge" in his time and a reason to go to the theatre, beyond staying involved with what's "new and hot", is to revel in drama that was "new and hot". Not merely for the sake of nostalgia but to start discussing why certain plays have affected us in such profound ways. We invite you to absorb the work of a dramatist who took risks and endured critiques in order to create artistic change. We bring you *The Cherry Orchard* in the spirit of commemoration of a monumental play, a remarkable man, and the impact he has made on the theatre. Please join with us in celebrating his courage, strength, and vision.

Exit Chekhov. Stage right. Applause.



Stephen Heatley

**SOME
PERSONAL
THOUGHTS
ON CHEKHOV**

**by Stephen Heatley
Director**

Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans. - John Lennon

“Really, in life people are not every minute shooting each other, hanging themselves, and making declarations of love. And they are not saying clever things every minute. For the most part, they eat, drink, hang about, and talk nonsense; and this must be seen on the stage. A play must be written in which people can come, do, dine, talk about the weather, and play cards, not because that’s the way the author wants it, but because that’s the way it happens in real life.” - Anton Chekhov

Apparently, Anton Chekhov and Konstantin Stanislavsky, the famous Russian director and founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, could never agree on the tone of Chekhov’s plays when they were first produced. Chekhov vowed that he had written delightful comedies; Stanislavsky presented them as serious dramas.

My first exposure to this playwright, apart from my performance in *The Marriage Proposal* in my first year of university, which is truly worth forgetting, and this debate, was studying *The Three Sisters* in a theatre history class. My first reading of the play left me entirely baffled. It just seemed like a lot of non-sequiturs strung together; sound and fury, signifying nothing as far as this second year student was concerned. My professor was an inspiring woman who found delight in almost everything dramatic. We were walking together soon after I had read this conundrum. “I read that *Three Sisters* play,” I ventured, expecting, for some reason, for her to commiserate with me. “Isn’t it delightful?!” she chirped. “It’s so funny.” I was even more baffled. She thought this m el e about three miserable women moaning on about going to Moscow and how unhappy they were and crying at the drop of a hat to be funny? I was willing to entertain the idea because I knew how smart she was but I certainly didn’t get it on my own.

That same year I saw a production of *The Three Sisters* in Toronto – not very funny. We worked on the last act of *The Cherry Orchard* that year in an acting class – not very funny. I was in a production of *The Sea Gull* in my graduating year – not very funny. It wasn’t until I had the good fortune to see *The Three Sisters* at the Stratford Festival in 1976, starring Maggie Smith, Marti Maraden and Martha Henry and directed by the late, great John Hirsch that I finally got it. The play lasted three and a half hours. We were transported. We hoped their hopes. We revelled in their dreams. We cheered for them to get to Moscow. We lived their passions. We laughed with them and we cried with them and when act four was finished I was more than willing to come back for act five and act six, it was that exhilarating. On that evening, I fell in love with the idea of directing one of Chekhov’s plays myself. Here we are, 28 years later, and I finally have the opportunity for which I am truly grateful.

The object lesson of the Stratford production was that these people are funny because life is full of ironies and we humans are replete with foibles. We do things that are funny without even trying. We can’t help ourselves. I recall my own experience of being dumped on a hot day in summer by what was, of course, the great love of my life. Amidst my tears and anguish, sweat pouring down my face, seeking solace with a dear friend, I blurted out, “Oh, it’s so uncomfortable to lose a lover on a hot day!” There was a pause and then we both fell about laughing. There is no denying how tender I was, emotionally, but somehow in that moment I also knew that I was ridiculous. So did my friend, who has never let me forget it. Puck said it best in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; “O, what fools these mortals be.”

This is the 100th anniversary year of the first production of *The Cherry Orchard*. Many people feel that this play presaged the end of Czarist Russia. Perhaps. But to me, its importance today is that it still speaks of human experience. It has resonance because it holds universal truths, not because of its place in history. I am sympathetic to the plight of Lyubov and Gayev as they struggle to reconcile their memories and their family history with their financial difficulties around the cherry orchard and their ancestral home. My ageing parents still live in the house that my sister and I were raised in. Although the old crabapple tree is gone (the crabapples were wormy anyway), the sense of our family’s culture still lives there – the rooms, the clutter, the memories, our history. I have no idea what it will be like to give that up when the time comes. This is the important stuff of *The Cherry Orchard*. It is a play about our resistance to change, about holding on to some thing or an idea even when we know it doesn’t make sense any more, about the folly of living and the joy we find in simple things. At the time of this writing, we have not even begun rehearsals, but these are the things that are guiding me in our attempt to uncover the delight in *The Cherry Orchard*. I dedicate my work in it to the woman who first taught me that it was funny; Janet Dolman. She left us too soon but I hope she would find this production to her liking.

Let everything on the stage be just as complex and at the same time as simple as in life. People dine, merely dine, but at that moment their happiness is being made or their life is being smashed. - Anton Chekhov

VISHNEVYI SAD:

CHEKHOV'S

PARADISE GARDEN

by **Errol Durbach**
Department of Theatre,
Film & Creative Writing

It is entirely possible, of course, to regard Chekhov's Cherry Orchard as a national symbol of the bankrupt state — rather like Hamlet's mournful political vision of Denmark as a garden that has run to seed.

The idea of a “Paradise garden” is one of the many pervasive images that link the drama of Chekhov to a late Nineteenth Century vision of a lost or uprooted world — once a landscape of absolute value, and now an Eden from which the protagonists have been irrevocably driven. Trapped in the world outside Paradise, mired in what Ibsen calls the “chasm” of failure and mortality and human fallibility, the protagonists of these plays continue to long for that lost Edenic world. In the intensity of their Romantic yearning, they attempt once again to achieve the impossible: to re-enter the forbidden or devastated garden in order to redeem themselves from degradation and disappointment.

This Romantic/Tragic theme is most clearly apparent in Chekhov's *Vishnevyyi Sad* (*The Cherry Orchard*) where the concepts of “garden” and “orchard” become interchangeable. It is entirely possible, of course, to regard Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* as a national symbol of the bankrupt state — rather like Hamlet's mournful political vision of Denmark as a garden that has run to seed. But the social-realist context of *The Cherry Orchard* cannot displace Chekhov's primary creation of the garden as an echo-chamber of all the protagonists' yearning after time that remains unrecoverable — like the lost childhood, hinted at in the nursery-setting of Act One. Madame Ranevskaya's discourse is suffused with Romantic nostalgia (what Richard Gilman calls “feeling frozen in time”) for a world no longer recoverable from the flow of change and the unfolding of consequence. But she remains adamant in her refusal to acknowledge alteration, and desperate to revert to a Paradisaal state in which the personal attributes of innocence and spiritual purity prevail as if in some impossible realm of perfection before the Fall: “Oh, my childhood, my innocent childhood! I used to sleep in this nursery; I used to look on to the orchard from here, and I woke up happy every morning. In those days the orchard was just as it is now, nothing has changed. [Laughs happily.] All, all white! Oh, my orchard! After the dark, stormy autumn and the cold winter, you are young and joyous again; the angels have not forsaken you! If only this burden could be taken from me, if only I could forget my past!” (347-48)

Like Madame Ranevskaya, all the protagonists in Chekhov's plays passively collaborate in the processes of entropy and meaninglessness that sweep them away. Desperately longing for a vanished Paradise of meaning and significance, where life's tragic enigma will find an answer, and where the soul will recover its satisfaction, they are powerless against the harsh realities of the world that demands decisions and choice. Olga, in *The Three*

Sisters, longs for Moscow as a garden of the mythic imagination, a world of eternal summer light, where the trees are always in bloom — just as Irina longs for a Moscow of the wish-dream, a projection of all her romantic longings into an realm of infinite possibility. All of Chekhov's women, like Madame Bovary, express a similar homesickness for an unknown country, or for a world out of time where the past may be redeemed and the pain of the present assuaged. It is perfectly clear why Madame Ranevskaya cannot cope with *The Cherry Orchard* crisis, or why she cannot make the simple and obvious decision to repair her losses by chopping down the trees and building summer cottages. One does not take an axe to the Garden of Eden. One does not devastate the last remaining location of pure and absolute value — her dream of the lost purity of a life now wasted, and the deathless kingdom of eternal hope. It is irrelevant that her symbolism is inappropriate: that the cherry trees are barren, or that the white-blossomed orchard with the singing starlings is subject to natural process, or that the meaning of the orchard is specific to the yearning of the beholder. (Trofimov's political symbolism of the orchard as a microcosm of the Russian State is vastly different!) The mythic gardens in Chekhov are loci of emotional energy, Kingdoms never to be entered or possessed, a mirage on the edge of experience carefully protected against reality. Just as Madame Ranevskaya could solve the problem of the orchard pragmatically by wielding the axe, so Olga and Irina could quite easily hop on the train to Moscow. It's not that one doesn't do that sort of thing. It's that one can't.

The Paradise garden in the drama of Chekhov is a Romantic mirage in a post-Romantic world — a dream of existential significance that defies reality so long as one can keep it at bay. But the garden is powerless against those forces of modernity that can no longer accommodate that late Nineteenth-Century myth of transcendence to the iron-hard world of the Twentieth. Chekhov was the last of his generation to record this clash; and his image of Modern Tragedy was that of the indifferent forces of History — radical political change, the rapid momentum of progress, and the merciless passage of time — sweeping away the lovely but impractical dream of *The Cherry Orchard*. The Gods of his tragic universe are the combined forces of arbitrary Change and Luck in league with a paralyzing Romantic yearning that cannot sustain its myths and make them viable any longer. What remains for Madame Ranevskaya when reality smashes through her defenses? The curtain falls on the thudding of axes chopping down her Paradisaal garden; and what we take out of the theatre is the poignant tonality of a snapping string — a cosmic sorrow for all those who must go on living without the consolations of the Romantic wish-dream.

His image of Modern Tragedy was that of the indifferent forces of History — radical political change, the rapid momentum of progress, and the merciless passage of time — sweeping away the lovely but impractical dream of The Cherry Orchard.



Olga Knipper

THE CLASH OF ECONOMIC VALUES

by Allen Sinel
Professor Emeritus,
History Department

The play dramatically reveals the clash of two fundamentally different economic value systems, the one rooted in the Russian institution of serfdom, the other drawn from western, profit-seeking capitalism.

A century ago, as *The Cherry Orchard* was being created, Russia was in the midst of one of its periodic crises of transition. Powerful forces for change battered Russia's traditional, agrarian-based government and society. Educated Russians led by the intelligentsia demanded a share in government and relief for the oppressed masses; ethnic minorities fought against the state's attempts at Russification and for greater national self-expression; women challenged traditional gender roles and joined the ranks of revolutionaries and professionals. But most relevant for Chekhov's audience was the profound upheaval in Russia's socioeconomic structure. While the emancipation of the serfs had occurred over forty years earlier, two of its most fundamental consequences reached critical proportions only at the turn of the century: the land hunger and increasing impoverishment of the peasants and the growing impoverishment of the land-owning gentry. Equally crucial, as the rural economy declined, capitalism and industrialization made great strides; Russia experienced one of Europe's most rapid surges of industrial growth in the 1890s.

It is, of course, these last two developments – the decline of the gentry and the rise of entrepreneurial capitalism – that figure most prominently in *The Cherry Orchard*. Chekhov brilliantly portrays the landed gentry's failure to cope with the economic realities of early twentieth-century Russia, their inability, literally, to understand the language of the new economic forces, given such clear expression in the play by Lopakhin, the peasant turned businessman. To be fair, he understands them no better. It is as if they live in two different worlds and belong to two different paradigms of economic thinking — they talk past one another and

never truly converse. The play dramatically reveals the clash of two fundamentally different economic value systems, the one rooted in the Russian institution of serfdom, the other drawn from western, profit-seeking capitalism. A significant portion of the landed gentry, epitomized in the play by Ranevskaya, her brother Gayev and their neighbour Simeonov-Pishchik, grew up on estates where serfs, through labour or quit-rent, provided a steady, if not always sufficient, income and a host of other domestic services. Serfdom, because one rarely paid for peasant labour and often took its costs for granted, minimized and obscured the need for rational economic calculation. Thus, Chekhov's landowning family could plant its cherry orchard in a far too northerly locale and even "lose" the recipe that gave the orchard some fiscal viability. The "perpetual" student and gently satirized member of the intelligentsia, Trofimov, quite rightly sees a serf behind each cherry tree. The cherry orchard is a luxury that only serfdom made possible.

Dependent on others for their well-being, never having learned the "value of money," the gentry are like children. They expect their financial salvation to come in the form of a windfall: a gift from a wealthy relative, a winning lottery ticket, the marriage of Anya to a rich husband, a loan from a friend. Indeed, Simeonov-Pishchik is saved by outside intervention, the discovery of porcelain-suitable clay on his property, a resource, of course, to be developed by others. Lopakhin stands in stark contrast. The archetypal entrepreneur, a self-made man whose family actually were serfs on the Ranevskaya estate, he knows exactly how to maximize profits, to take advantage of the new economic opportunities in Russia and is most willing to offer his expertise to his impoverished gentry friends. Recognizing the potential of the estate's riverside property now made easily accessible to the nearby town's growing population by that great symbol of modern industrialization, the railroad, Lopakhin sets out a comprehensive plan of real estate development that should solve the gentry's fiscal problems for decades. This "perfect" solution meets with disdain and incomprehension. The gentry cannot adapt to these new economic forces and may well not really understand them. On the other hand, one must also remember that Lopakhin's so-called solution entails the destruction of exactly what the gentry wanted to save: the cherry orchard, the last powerful symbol of a value system not based on bottom-line economies.

But before one joins Lopakhin in dismissing these outmoded values and their "feckless" proponents, one should note that the cherry orchard won the region a place in the Encyclopedia and that Lopakhin's obsession with profit distracts him from what seems an optimal match with Varya and even leads him to begin cutting down the orchard before its previous owners have left. A century ago, Chekhov knew that the choice between even an unproductive but still beautiful and renowned cherry orchard and tawdry if profitable real estate development was not simple. With the full-scale triumph of the "bottom liners" today, how much more meaningful is his humanist portrayal of this fundamental conflict of values for the present-day audience.

On the other hand, one must also remember that Lopakhin's so-called solution entails the destruction of exactly what the gentry wanted to save: the cherry orchard, the last powerful symbol of a value system not based on bottom-line economies.

ON THE

LIGHTING

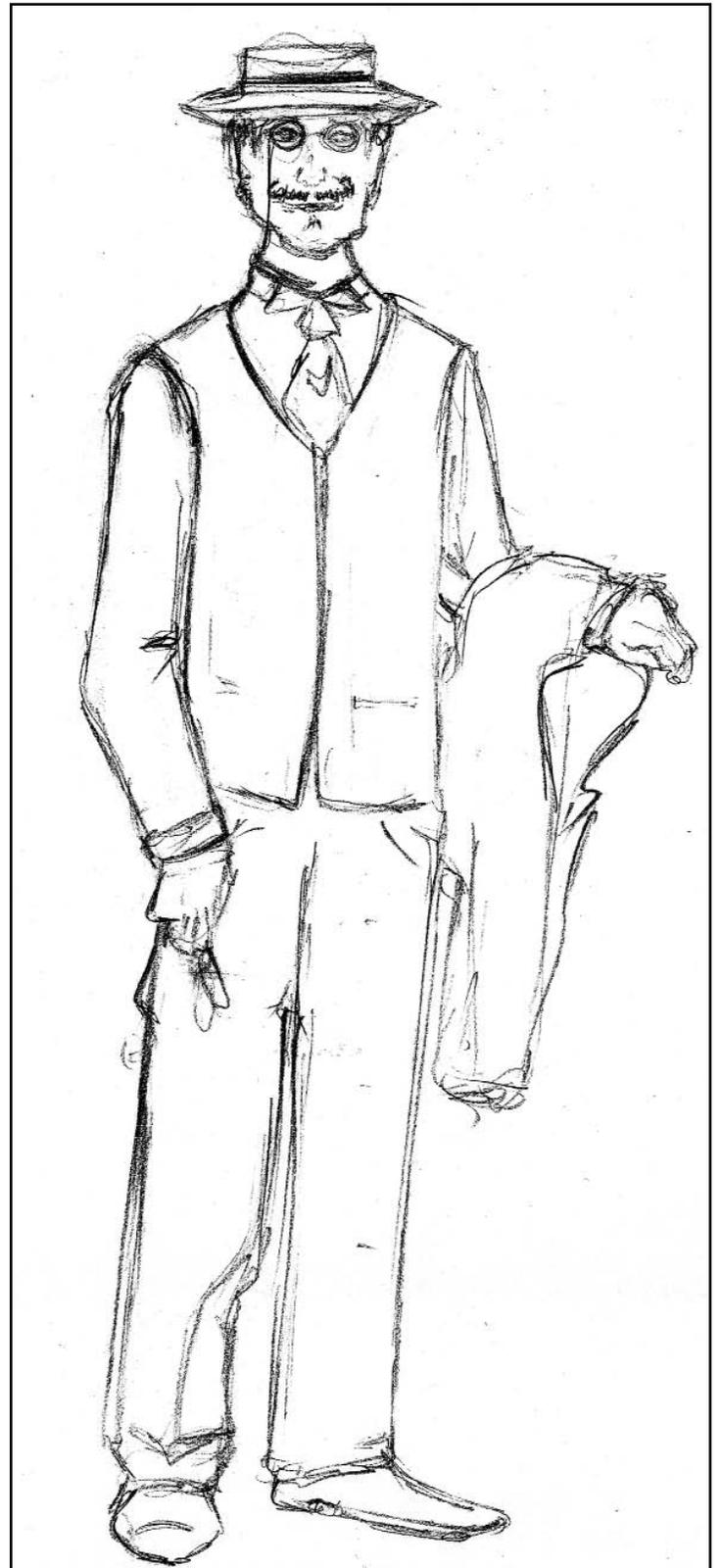
DESIGN PROCESS

by Helina Patience

After reading the script, I write down my preliminary ideas regarding themes, locations, moods, and images that have come to mind. Then I go through the script a second time marking down important details written in the script, such as settings and mood. These would be such things as the children's nursery for location, and the detail that the cherry trees are blooming but it is still cold — there is frost on the blossoms — for mood. These two pieces of information give me the sense of a cool, white room for the nursery. Then I look through books and magazines for images that convey the ideas I have for lighting. This way I have materials to share with my design team and director. Designing is a collaborative process in the theatre. Finally, but certainly not the last step, it is important to research the play and the period to better understand the world for the characters in it.



Anya, Act I, preliminary drawing



Gayev, Act II, preliminary drawing

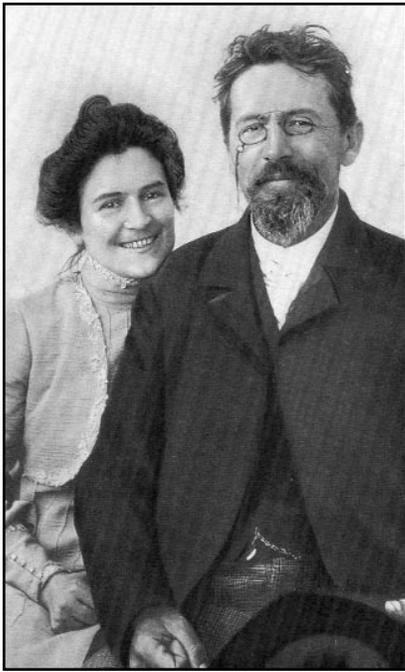
set design by CHRISTINA POMANSKI
costume design by KAREN MIRFIELD
lighting design by HELINA PATIENCE
sound design by MICHELLE HARRISON



Mme. Ranevskaya, Act II, preliminary drawing



Lopakin, preliminary drawing



Chekhov and Olga

**CHEKHOV'S
CHERRY
ORCHARD:
A PLAY
FOR ALL
SEASONS**

by Peter Petro
Department of Central,
Eastern and Northern
European Studies

Chekhov may have been dying as he wrote his play, but his handiwork still speaks to us with verve, vitality, and the freshness of the cherry blossom.

Anton Chekhov, born in 1860, lived his life with zest, humour, and unbounded energy, witnessed by his prolific output of stories and plays. However, in 1904, as he was completing his last play, *The Cherry Orchard*, he was dying of tuberculosis. His relationship with his actress wife, Olga Knipper, also became complicated, raising interesting questions with regard to the play. What are we to think of the fact that he wanted Olga to play Madame Ranevskaya at the premiere? She certainly is a character that he ridicules in his play. Was some of that ridicule aimed at his wife? Beyond the fact that certain characters are ridiculed, why did Chekhov insist that his play was a comedy? A family loses its estate – is that supposed to be funny? But let's look at it another way: who regrets the passing of the old order in the play? Only the funny old servant Firs, and they forget about him when the house is sold. Are we to think that in the modern era tragedy is no longer what it used to be?

Perhaps the way out of such puzzles offered by the play is to put aside the heavy overlay of symbolism and meaning attached to it by generations of critics and interpreters and try to enjoy it without such preconceived notions as the passing of the old order, or of the symbolism of the orchard that changes according to each character who talks about it. After all, Chekhov taught us that it

was not the role of an artist to preach to his audience, but to capture the essence of the time in which he lived.

This, Chekhov did brilliantly. In *The Cherry Orchard*, he reveals that a new era is dawning: the era of the common man. His noblemen are far from noble and his servants are claiming a place among the masters, so that the masters are not quite masters and servants are no longer servants. It is a reversal heralded by Lopakhin who, while generally underestimated, is the only character talking sense and the only one with a plan to save the Cherry Orchard estate, even though he does not really need it. Lopakhin is a man of the new Russia: a nation that is making her presence felt in the world through encroaching industrialization. Factories, railways, and business overshadow the cherry blossoms that used to make such a lovely backdrop for the parties of the nobility.

We can also look at the young men and women for interesting commentary on Chekhov's era. They seem to be so caught up in the tenor of the time that they fail to succeed in what the young always do best: fall in love, wallow in romance, or be irresponsible. They talk about it, wish for it, but their actions lead nowhere.

Chekhov denies us the comfort of a satisfying finish: the marriage that comedies crave. Yet it is with this sense of discomfort that we make a connection with the play and appreciate its newness and revolutionary quality. Watching the play, we are not surprised that Chekhov has been called one of the fathers of the new theatre, including the theatre of the absurd. There is something comforting in the dilemmas of his confused and lost characters. Do we not recognize them? Are they not our contemporaries? Are their problems not timeless? Thus Chekhov invites us to reflect on our lives and to reconsider what we take for granted. Chekhov may have been dying as he wrote his play, but his handiwork still speaks to us with verve, vitality, and the freshness of the cherry blossom.

Chekhov taught us that it was not the role of an artist to preach to his audience, but to capture the essence of the time in which he lived.



Nicola Cavendish as Madame Ranevskaya
Vancouver Playhouse, 1995

**TWO
VANCOUVER
PRODUCTIONS
OF THE
CHERRY
ORCHARD**

**by Malcolm Page
Theatre Critic**

The many difficulties of performing Chekhov's plays start with casting at least ten actors who can rapidly create an ensemble while communicating – in translation – not only Russia a century ago but what seems the strangely emotional 'Slav soul.' Nevertheless, actors love to perform a Chekhov play.

Vancouver has seen two major productions of *The Cherry Orchard* in the last thirty years, by West Coast Actors at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, 9 September – 8 October 1977, and by the Playhouse, 18 February – 18 March 1995. Robert Graham directed the West Coast Actors; Christopher Newton directed at the Playhouse. Both productions had superlative casts, and most of the names would be familiar to regular Vancouver theatregoers.

From my own review of the West Coast Actors' production, I note: "Bernard Cuffling supplied perhaps the richest characterization as a mincing Gayev, a man who knew his own insipidity and had come to enjoy it, incapable of even one day's work in a bank. Jim McQueen was a smart, polished Lopakhin, a strong and energetic challenge to the declining gentry, though finally too exultantly cruel in his third act triumph. Terry Waterhouse as Trofimov said all the right things in such a feeble voice that we knew nothing could come of his sentiments. As Madam Ranevskaya, Trish Grainge looked beautiful and spoke beautifully, oozing with such charm that I couldn't understand why everyone didn't rush to ensure her posterity."

Colin Thomas, in *The Georgia Straight*, wrote of the Playhouse production: "Newton's appreciation of the character's unmediated passions is largely what makes this production so enjoyable. Responding to the challenge of making extreme feeling credible, the actors flourish... When the whole stage is suddenly still and Nicola Cavendish shows us how Mme Ranevskaya's heart breaks, it's devastating. Cavendish's Ranevskaya is a remarkable piece of work, at once childlike, licentious, gracious and terrorized... Newton's production is vivacious in its physical conception as well. Scenes that could have been static are kept alive by wide, sweeping blocking."

John Hirsch wrote that "If Chekhov doesn't make you laugh, it's a bad production. If Chekhov doesn't make you cry, it's a bad production." *The Cherry Orchard* involves at least ten characters who matter: to follow each of their journeys I went to see the play ten times.



Kelli Fox as Varya
Vancouver Playhouse, 1995

**CRITICS DIFFER
ON 1957 UBC
PLAYERS' CLUB
PRODUCTION
OF CHEKHOV'S
CHERRY ORCHARD**

**Compiled by the
Editorial Board**

The review which appeared in the *Province* on February 19, 1957 was not kind to either Chekhov or the production. Mike Tytherleigh wrote: "If anyone has helped to close up theatres and turn them into supermarkets it is the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. Last night the UBC Players Club alumni staged "The Cherry Orchard" at the Fredric Wood theatre and once again confirmed in my own mind that Chekhov is best left alone. Read him in bed or at play readings but keep him off the stage. For his messages and truths are too out of-date to have any impact today... Frankly I think the time has come for a moratorium on Chekhov and the *Orchard* should not only be chopped down but be buried for I fear that some drama students may catch something from it and we'll be even further from pulling today's theatre out of the doldrums."

Martha Robinson's review which appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* two days later saw the production in a much more favorable light. The headline read, "Actors in UBC Play Perform Like Orchestra". The reviewer wrote: "The latest and greatest of the Russian novelist's plays, it has no 'plot' in the traditional sense of the word. Its effectiveness rests on the actors' ability to infect an audience with subtle contrasts of mood... the Fredric Wood Theatre Workshop cast proved equal to the author's challenge. They carried the subject to its logical conclusion like players in an integrated orchestra."

If Chekhov doesn't make you laugh, it's a bad production. If Chekhov doesn't make you cry, it's a bad production.



Barbara Poggemiller and Peggy Ashcroft

The experience of Peggy Ashcroft had a marked influence on all the actors involved.

**THE CHERRY
ORCHARD
ON CBC
RADIO**

**From notes by
Robert Chesterman
compiled by the
Editorial Board**

CBC's radio production of *The Cherry Orchard* was undertaken in September, 1979. The distinguished British Actress, Dame Peggy Ashcroft, was invited to play Madame Ranevskaya, partly because of her past association with the producer, Robert Chesterman, and the opportunity of her being in BC to visit her son, Nick Hutchinson, the founder of the Caravan Farm Theatre in Armstrong. The other characters were all played by Vancouver actors, most of whom were members of what was, in effect, a radio repertory company. Many of these actors had worked for the CBC from the late 1950's. Included were Dermot Hennelly, Peter Brockington, Lillian Carlson, Walter Marsh, Jimmy Johnston, Susan Chappell, Babara Poggemiller, Micki Maunsell, Derek Ralston, Sam Payne and Eric Schneider.

The arranger of the incidental music was the British composer Harrison Birtwistle. The text used was the adaptation by Jean-Claude Van Itallie. There was little changed in his final text when the program went to air. The music had to be pre-recorded in another studio prior to the actual drama production itself. This was undertaken with an ensemble of Vancouver musicians.

The length of time in the studio was 5 days, commencing with a four-hour readover. On the second and third days, because the production was in stereo, guided by the sound engineer Gerry Stanley, the placement of the actors' exits and entrances had to be planned across what is, in effect, a 'soundstage'. There is a similarity to a stage production in that the play is blocked. What is different is that the actor's projection is into a microphone and the intimacy required for a radio studio is different from that required in a theatre. By the fourth and fifth days, the actual recording began, usually in long complete Act sequences to retain continuity and dramatic flow. If any particular errors occurred they would be corrected by short inserts, but in general this was avoided due to the preferred desire for complete takes. Often a whole Act would be re-taped.

"The experience of Peggy Ashcroft had a marked influence on all the actors involved. Her long experience of working with a microphone at the BBC in London showed in the force and intelligence of her voice. As with any production, its power to move us is due to the collaborative efforts of all the actors, technicians, and director. They endeavour to reproduce the playwright's expression faithfully – which is not to say they are 'correct' in their reading!" - Robert Chesterman

THE CHERRY

ORCHARD

RESOURCE

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The Companion Guide to *The Cherry Orchard* is sponsored by
Theatre at UBC
and generously supported by
The Faculty of Arts

ISBN 0-88865-627-0

1. Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich, 1860-1904. Cherry orchard.

I. Durbach, Errol, 1941- II. Marshall, Hallie, 1975- III. Smith, Annie, 1952- IV. Strilchuk, Amy, 1981-. Theatre at UBC.

PG3456.V53C5 2004

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C2004-905710-3