

Photo by Nina Landey

Bennington Drama presents

The Seagull by Anton Chekhov

translated by Richard Nelson, Richard Pevear, and
Larissa Volokhonsky
directed by Jean Randich



Lester Martin Theater

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, 4, 5, and 6 May 2018 at 7:30 PM

For reservations, email: tickets@bennington.edu

The great-grandson of a self-emancipated serf, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born the third of six children in Taganrog, Russia, on January 29th, 1860. He spent his early years struggling through school exams, sneaking off to the theater, and withstanding the abuses of his tyrannical father Pavel. By 1879, he and his family relocated to Moscow, where Anton soon enrolled in medical school. It was in their meager home on ‘Rip-Off Alley’ that he began his lifelong ‘affair’ with literature: he supplemented the family income by writing satirical short stories (some of which based on his family) under the name ‘A Chekhonte.’ He quickly worked his way into the literary scene, once musing about himself, “Who would have thought that such genius would come out of an earth closet?”

As he gained success as a writer and doctor, his health began to fail: at the age of 25, he wrote for the first time about the consumption that would eventually kill him; the same illness that would kill his brother a few years later. Undeterred by physical ailment, in 1890 Anton set off to the penal colony on the isle of Sakhalin, Siberia, to observe the conditions its prisoners endured. There he witnessed floggings, prisoners laboring in mines, children in wretched conditions, and public executions: his experience on Sakhalin imbued him with a grim determination to help others. He wrote to his publisher that “God’s world is good. Only one thing in it is vile: ourselves. What we must do is work, and let everything else go to the devil. Above all we must be just, and everything else will follow.”

With the money he earned from his writings (namely a little known melodrama *Ivanov* and a collection of dramatic skits and farces), Anton bought his family a country home, or *dacha*, in Melikhovo, fifty miles outside of Moscow. The family dacha—with its traipsing fleet of irregulars, like the young and ambitious actress Lidia “Lika” Mizinova, ‘the great bungler’ Aleksandr Ignatievich Ivanenko, or the caddish writer Ignati Nikolaevich Potapenko—inspired many of Anton’s plays, *The Seagull* in particular. In 1985, Anton wrote the first draft of *The Seagull* in the cottage built for guests on the property, which provided easy access to the estate’s ponds and rivers in which Anton was fond of fishing. At its first production in Saint Petersburg at the Imperial Aleksandrinsky Theatre the next year, *The Seagull* flopped—so badly that Anton ran from the theater between acts. He wrote to his brother that the performance “was a complete disaster... The moral is: don’t write plays.” Of course, he couldn’t resist; throughout the final eight years of his life, he wrote three more four-act plays, each one defining modern drama as it is known today.

The Seagull received its first successful production under the guidance of artistic director Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko and the direction of now-world renown actor and director Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavsky as the premiere production for the Moscow Art Theater—to this day the MAT uses a seagull in flight as their emblem and crest. Though Anton wasn’t pleased with all of Stanislavsky’s choices (the production was too romantic and melodramatic for his tastes, and Stanislavsky’s portrayal of Trigorin too limp), he was taken by the woman playing Arkadina—his future wife Olga Leonardovna Knipper. The two married in 1901 (to the grave upset of Anton’s many suitors), though their relationship was more partnership than tryst. They hardly spent any time together: Knipper was in Moscow acting at the MAT, and Anton relocated himself to the warmer climate of Yalta.

After the duo returned from a vacation in Perm, Anton’s illness gravely worsened: he began to cough uncontrollably, and he hired a massage therapist to soothe his pained limbs--a sign that the consumption had entered his spine. A friend of his noted that Anton “could hardly walk, [that] noises came from his chest. But he seemed not to notice. He was interested in anything but illness.” One of his final public appearances was during the intermission of the premiere of his play *The Cherry Orchard*: the audience was shocked to see the once robust and handsome Anton reduced to a skeletal, gaunt, and wheezing old man. In a final attempt at healing her husband, Knipper took Anton to Berlin for a restorative vacation. In his final extant letter, he wrote to his sister mostly about the heat and the delicious German cuisine that repeatedly upset his stomach. On July 15th, 1904, around 2:00 am, Anton woke up from a bout of coughing, proclaimed in German that he was dying, and sipped from a glass of champagne. He noted, “I haven’t had champagne in a long time,” lay down on his left side as he always had, and died in his sleep. He was forty-four years old.

-Sam Levit, Dramaturg

LABS AND CREWS

Scene Shop Carpenters:

Adrian Hess
Ethan Koss-Smith
Evan Caldwell
Larry Dembski
Lillian Sexton
Lillie Brown
Madeline Shepardson
Sam Mistry
Shachi Mokashi

Scene Shop Lab Crew:

Alexandra Nordyke
Dabin Jeong
Eilish Rolfe
Holly Sherrer
Kemly Derby
Liliana Espanola
Nicholas Williams
Sona Markosyan
Willem Winter

First Hands:

Lecil James
Mira Darham
Atalya Boytner
Isabel Wing
Emma Castle
Alex Earle-Richardson
Kamaree Saldo

Stagehands

Aleyah Austin
Emma Castle

Electrics Crew
Lecil James
Sam Mistry
Shana Crawford
Nathaniel Guevin
Kaiya Kirk
Nathan Copperwheat
Uma Shannon
Imani Lewis-Shirley

Lighting Lab Crew

Julian Berstein
Katelynn Perry
Christiane Swenson
Adrian Hess
Martha Bennett
Brookes Hope
Colin Jones
Chase Spearance
Kari Ostensen
Akash Bhandari
Zoe Miner
Chloe Duckart

Light Board Operator

Tamar Giligashvili

Sound Board Operator

Maria Salim

Projection Operator

Marie Boucher

Wardrobe Crew:

Collette O’Brien
Annabel Rosario

“And joy suddenly stirred in his soul, and he even stopped for a moment to catch his breath. The past, he thought, is connected with the present in an unbroken chain of events flowing one out of the other. And it seemed to him that he had just seen both ends of that chain: he touched one end, and the other moved.”

“The Student,” by Anton Chekhov, April 1894

Chekhov had a gift. He taught himself how to touch one end of the chain so that the other would move. When we read his plays, and even more when we stage them, we hear, see, and feel the rhythms he crafted, his revolutionary use of imagery and montage (which would become the language of film), and the pull of the harmonies and dissonances of the characters. I cannot know what this world feels like in Russian, but I am thankful for this new, lucid translation by Richard Nelson, Richard Pevear, and Larissa Volokhonsky.

John Cage, another galvanizer of perception, observed: “Theatre takes place all the time -- wherever one is -- and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.” The more you read about Chekhov, the more you see Cage’s aphorism at work. “The Seagull” is so autobiographical it resembles performance art. Chekhov taught himself to be a writer, and what it takes to become a writer or an actor is one of the big ideas of the play. One woman, a writer, hoping to initiate an affair with Chekhov, gave him a locket with a suggestive inscription. Not only did Chekhov put this seductive ploy into his play, but he also gave the actress playing Nina the locket to use as a prop. He then invited the writer to come see “The Seagull” where her flirtation would be exposed on stage.

Chekhov was a writer, doctor, and an ecologist who observed nature in all its forms. When he evokes an image, like a seagull, he transforms it in a chain of events triggered by different characters. All these images slowly accumulate an irresistible power. Chekhov was living with tuberculosis. Perhaps that is how he struck his tenuous balance – one foot in life, one in art/eternity. All his characters hover there. He called “The Seagull” a comedy. Why? I think he wanted the actors to show resilience, toughness, a lack of sentimentality that one sees in life, but so rarely on the stage, especially in the late 1800’s. He was tired of overwrought melodramas or problem plays, so he put all the sensational events offstage. There’s a story about Chekhov visiting Tolstoy, concerned that the great old writer would die. Chekhov leaned over to hear what Tolstoy was whispering: “You know, I hate your plays.” But Chekhov wanted to show life, not drama. He famously observed: “People are sitting at a table having dinner, that’s all, but at the same time their happiness is being created, or their lives are being torn apart.”

-Jean Randich, Director



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Irína Nikoláevna Arkádina, an actress	Tristan Harness
Konstantín Gavrílych Treplyóv, her son, an aspiring writer	Sam Mistry
Pyotr Nikoláich Sórin, her brother, a retired state councillor	Sam Levit
Nína Mikháilovna Zaréchnaya, a young daughter of a local landowner	Erin Gildea
Ilyá Afanásyich Shamráev, a retired lieutenant, Sorin’s steward	Trevor Gibbons-Reich
Polína Andréevna, his wife	Alex Earle-Richardson
Másha, their daughter	Michaela Brown
Másha Understudy	Edie Salas-Miller
Borís Alexéich Trigórin, a successful writer	Cy Wolfe
Evgény Sergéich Dorn, a doctor	Joseph Woodard Murdock
Semyón Semyónych Medvedénko, a teacher	Louis Celt
Yákov, a workman	Joana Rita Santos
Cook	Burcu Seyben
Maid	Anyia Demchenko
Workers	Bíborka Béres, Delaney Hill, Akanchya Maskay, Amrita Newton

The action takes place on Sorin’s estate. Two years pass between Acts III & IV. There will be a brief intermission between Acts II & III.

Director
Assistant Directors
Dramaturg
Set & Lighting Designer
Costume Designer
Sound Designer
Projection Designer
Properties Assistant
Russian Language Consultant
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Production Manager
Assistant Production Manager
Technical Director
Master Electrician
Audio Technician
Posters and Programs

Jean Randich
Sam Levit, Joana Rita Santos
Sam Levit
Jiyoun Chang
Atalya Boytner
Teddy O’Mara
Sue Rees
Bella Wong
Anyia Demchenko
Abbey Starling
Michalina Aniol
Michael Giannitti
Lecil James
Mike Rancourt
Mark O’Maley
Curt Wells
Lucy Barcott



Sergey Ponomarev for the International Herald Tribune

A letter from Anton to the doctor Aleksei Kiselyov about the Melikhovo Dacha:

Did we ever buy ourselves a barrel-load of trouble with this pig in a poke! A huge, unwieldy estate which, if it were in Germany, would undoubtedly be the property of a duke. It has 576 acres divided into two sections. Strip farmed. There are more than 270 acres of woodland that in twenty years' time will be forest, but for the present looks more like scrubland. I'm told it will be good for producing shafts [for carts or sleighs], but at the moment it looks unlikely ever to produce anything more than birch rods...

We have an orchard. A park. Big trees, long avenues of limes. There are barns and granaries, quite new and handsome. There is a hen house built on the latest scientific principles. A well with an iron pump. This whole estate is barricaded off from the world by a wooden palisade-like fence. The courtyard, garden, park and barns are also fenced off from one another.

The house has both good and bad points. It is more spacious than a Moscow apartment, it's light and warm, the roof is iron, and the situation is good. It has a verandah that leads on to the garden, Italian windows and so on, but the bad points are that it is too low and too old, it looks extremely stupid and naive from the outside, while the inside is completely overrun by bedbugs and cockroaches, which you can only get rid of by setting fire to them; nothing else has any effect.

There are also some seed beds. In the garden, fifteen paces away from the house, there is a pond 35 feet long by 12 feet wide, with carp and tench in it, so you could fish out of the window if you wanted to. Beyond the yard is another pond, which I haven't yet seen. In another part of the estate is a river, probably not up to much. Two miles away, though, the river is wide and good for fishing. We have 38 acres sown with rye, and our intention is to sow oats and clover. We have already bought clover at 10 roubles for 36 pounds, but we can't afford oats at the moment. ... The enterprise has completely cleaned me out; I haven't a penny left.



A moment of happiness,
you and I sitting on the verandah,
apparently two, but one in soul, you and I.
We feel the flowing water of life here,
you and I, with the garden's beauty
and the birds singing.
The stars will be watching us,
and we will show them
what it is to be a thin crescent moon.
You and I unselfed, will be together,
indifferent to idle speculation, you and I.
The parrots of heaven will be cracking sugar
as we laugh together, you and I.
In one form upon this earth,
and in another form in a timeless sweet land.

-- Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

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gull
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Richard Nelson
Galina Nikitina
Jay O. Sanders
Jennifer Tipton

Drama Faculty Spring 2018

Shawtane Bowen
Maya Cantu
Michael Giannitti
Linda Hurley
Kirk Jackson
Dina Janis
Sherry Kramer
Richard MacPike
Mark O'Maley
Mike Rancourt
Jean Randich
Sue Rees
Jenny Rohn
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Curt Wells

