



The Cherry Orchard

Education Resource



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The Cherry Orchard

Anton Chekhov's final masterpiece is a gleaming and shattering drama about a family on the edge of ruin, and a nation on the brink of revolution.

The acclaimed English version by Trevor Griffiths, author of *Comedians* and *Party*, comes to London for the very first time in a major new production from Artistic Director Mehmet Ergen.



Synopsis

The play begins in the pre-dawn hours of a May morning in Russia. We learn that the cherry trees are in bloom even though it is frosty outside. Yermolay Lopakhin, a friend of the family, and Dunyasha a maid on the Ranevsky estate, wait for the estate's owner Ranevsky at the estate's main house, in a room called "the nursery". Lopakhin reveals that Ranevsky has been in Paris for the last five years. Lopakhin is a local businessman in his mid-thirties, dressed in a fine white suit (with gaudy yellow shoes), who has mixed feelings towards Ranevsky. His feelings consist of affectionate gratitude for past kindnesses, and resentment at her condescension toward him because of his humble, peasant origins. Also on the estate is Simon Yephikodov, nicknamed "Simple Simon" because of his frequent and ridiculous accidents.

Soon, Ranevsky arrives from Paris, along with her daughter Anya, who has been with her there since Easter of that year; Yasha, a young manservant who has accompanied her on her travels; and Charlotte, Anya's governess, who brings along her dog. Also accompanying her are Firs, her 87-year old manservant; her elder, yet still infantile, brother Leonid Gayev; and her adopted daughter Varya; these last three have stayed in Russia but went to the station to greet Ranevsky on her return

Ranevsky expresses her joy and amazement to be home again, while Anya reveals to Varya the relative poverty in which she found her mother when she arrived in Paris and the way in which she continues to spend money. Varya reveals that the family's estate is to be sold at auction on the 22nd of August, in order to pay their debts. Anya reveals that Ranevsky's departure for Paris was caused by her grief over two deaths: that of her husband six years before and that of her son, Grisha, who drowned a month thereafter.

Anya departs for bed, and Lopakhin brings up the issue of the upcoming sale of the orchard. He proposes a solution; Ranevsky should parcel out the land on her estate, build cottages on the parcels, and lease them out to summer cottage-holders, who are becoming increasingly numerous. Gayev and Ranevsky dismiss the idea, because it would mean cutting down the family's beloved cherry orchard. Before he leaves, Lopakhin offers them a loan of 50,000 rubles to buy their property at auction if they change their minds, and

predicts there will be no other way of saving the orchard. Ranevsky then lends some money to a fellow impoverished landowner, Boris Simeonov-Pischik. Peter Trofimov arrives; he was Grisha's tutor before the drowning, and thus he brings back painful memories for Ranevsky. Before the end of the act, after complaining about Ranevsky's inability to curb her spending, Gayev outlines three alternatives to Lopakhin's plan: a financing scheme involving some banker friends of his, Ranevsky borrowing some money from Lopakhin (without the condition that they then cut down the orchard), and a wealthy aunt in Yaroslavl who might provide a loan.

In the Second Act, we are introduced more closely to the young servants on the estate, Dunyasha, Yasha, and Yephikodov, who are involved in a love triangle: Yephikodov loves Dunyasha, Dunyasha loves Yasha, and Yasha is very much in love with himself. Soon, Lopakhin, Ranevsky, Gayev, Anya and Varya appear, and they are again debating over Lopakhin's plan to turn the orchard into cottage country. Lopakhin becomes frustrated with Ranevsky's reluctance; she, in turn, thinks his plan is vulgar, and says that if they plan to sell the cherry orchard, she wants to be sold along with it. Ranevsky reveals that she has a lover in Paris who has been sending her telegrams, asking her to return, and who robbed her, left her, and as a result drove her to a suicide attempt.

Trofimov arrives, and gives several speeches about the importance of work and the laziness and stupidity of Russian intellectuals. In a quiet moment, the sound of a snapping string is heard, and no one knows where it came from. A drunken person appears, asking for directions, and then money; Ranevsky ends up giving him several gold pieces. Disturbed, most of the group leave, except for Anya and Trofimov. They discuss Varya's growing suspicion that Anya and Trofimov are having an affair, which they are not; Trofimov declares that they are "above love". The act ends with Yephikodov sadly playing his guitar and Varya calling out, in vain, for Anya.

In the Third Act, Ranevsky throws a party on the day of the auction. The guests consist of several local bureaucratic officials. Charlotte entertains the guests with a series of magic tricks. Ranevsky worries about why Gayev and Lopakhin have not yet returned. Ranevsky fears that the orchard has been lost, that the aunt in Yaroslavl has apparently not given them enough money to buy it, and that Gayev's other sources have failed to come through. She and Trofimov get into an argument; Trofimov accuses her of not being able to face the truth, and she accuses him of being unusual for never having fallen in love. Lopakhin and Gayev soon return from the auction. Lopakhin reveals to everyone that he has bought the estate and intends to carry out his plans for the orchard's destruction. Anya tries, in vain, to comfort her mother.

In the last act, it is October, and the trees in the cherry orchard are already being cut down. All the characters are in the process of leaving; Lopakhin will depart to Kharkov for the winter, Varya to the Ragulins', another family that lives fifty miles away. Gayev plans to live in the town and work at a bank, Anya will go off to school, and Ranevsky will return to Paris with Yasha, to rejoin her lover. Charlotte has no idea what she will do, but Lopakhin assures her he will help her find something. Trofimov and Lopakhin exchange an affectionate if contentious farewell; Yasha leaves Dunyasha, weeping, without a second thought; and Anya tearfully says goodbye to her mother. Anya worries that Firs, who has taken ill, has not been sent to the hospital as he was supposed to be, but Yasha indignantly assures Anya that he has. Ranevsky encourages Lopakhin to propose to Varya; but the proposal is never made—Lopakhin leaves Varya alone, and in tears. Finally, Gayev and Ranevsky bid a tearful farewell to their house. Everyone leaves, locking the doors behind them.

But Firs is, in fact, accidentally left behind, having fallen ill and being forgotten in the rush of the departure. He walks onstage after everyone else has left, quietly muttering about

how life has left him by. He lies on the couch, and silently expires as two sounds are heard; again, the sound of a string snapping, and the sound of an axe cutting down a cherry tree in the orchard.

Characters

Mrs. Lyuba Ranevsky - Mrs. Ranevsky is a middle-aged Russian woman, the owner of the estate and the cherry orchard around which the story revolves. She has faced tragedy and has tried to escape from it many times. Her first name, "Lyuba," means "love" in Russian, and she seems to exemplify love with her generosity, kindness and physical beauty, and sexual nature; she is the only character in the play with a lover. But her feelings of love often cloud her judgment, and she is also unable to control her spending, a sign of her disconnection from her present status as an impoverished aristocrat.

Yermolay Lopakhin - A businessman, and the son of peasants on Ranevsky's estate. He is middle-aged, but somewhat younger than Ranevsky. His grandparents were in fact owned by the Ranevsky family before freedom was granted to the serfs. Lopakhin is very self-conscious, especially when in the presence of Ranevsky, constantly complaining about his lack of education and refinement, which he attributes to his upbringing as a peasant on Ranevsky's estate. His memories of the brutality of a peasant child's life on the estate contrast with Ranevsky's idyllic memories as a child of the landowning class.

Leonid Gayev - Gayev is Ranevsky's brother. He has several intriguing verbal habits; he frequently describes tricky billiards shots at odd and inappropriate times. He also will launch into overly sentimental and rhetorical speeches before his niece Anya stops him, after which he always mutters "I am silent" at least once. Gayev is kind and concerned to his brother and nephew, but he behaves very differently around people not of his own social class. He is fifty-one years old, but as he notes, this is "difficult to believe", because he is in many ways an infant. He is constantly eating sweets and insulting people (such as Lopakhin) with whom he disagrees, and has to be reminded to put on his jacket by Firs.

Varya - Varya is Ranevsky's adopted daughter, who is twenty-four years old. She is in love with Lopakhin, but she doubts that he will ever propose to her. Varya is hard-working and responsible and has a similar work ethic to Lopakhin. She is also often in tears with people labelling her as a cry baby. This may reflect her sense of powerlessness, as she is the one character in the play who may be most affected by the loss of the estate. She is the estate's manager, so she will lose her job if Ranevsky loses the estate, but, without money or a husband, she has no control over its fate or her own.

Anya - Ranevsky's biological daughter, Anya is seventeen years old. She seems to have lived a sheltered life. She greatly enjoys the company of Trofimov and his lofty idealism, and is quick to comfort her mother after the loss of her orchard. Anya and Trofimov become so close that Varya fears they may become romantically involved.

Peter Trofimov - A student at the local university, he knows Ranevsky from being the tutor to her son Grisha before he died. Lopakhin refers to Trofimov as the "eternal student," for he has been in university most of his adult life. He serves as a foil for both Lopakhin and Ranevsky; Trofimov's ugliness, belief that he is "above love", and forward-looking nature contrasts with Ranevsky's beauty, her idealistic vision of love, and her

obsession with the past, while his utopian idealism contrasts with Lopakhin's practicality and materialism.

Boris Simeonov-Pischik - A nobleman, and fellow landowner, who is, like Ranevsky, is having financial difficulties. Pischik has boundless amounts optimism—he is always certain he will find the money somehow to pay for the mortgages that are due—but also by his continual borrowing money from Ranevsky. Pischik is something of a caricature; his name, in Russian, means "squealer," appropriate for someone who never stops talking.

Charlotte - Anya's governess. Charlotte travelled from town-to-town performing tricks such as "the dive of death" when she was very young, before her Father and Mother both died. Charlotte is a clown, often performing tricks for the amusement of the elite around her, while at the same time, subtly mocking their pre-occupations.

Firs - Ranevsky's eighty-seven-year-old manservant. Firs is always reminiscing about how things were in the past on the estate, when the estate was prosperous, and the master went to Paris by carriage, instead of by train; most importantly, he frequently talks about how life was before the serfs were freed. He is possibly senile, and is constantly mumbling. He is the only surviving link to the estate's glorious past and therefore symbolizes that past.

Simon Yephikodov - Yephikodov is a clerk at the Ranevsky estate. He is a source of amusement for all the other workers, who refer to him as "Simple Simon". Yephikodov provides comic relief, with his self-conscious pose as the hopeless lover and romantic, often contemplating suicide. He loves Dunyasha, to whom he has proposed.

Yasha - Yasha is the young manservant who has been traveling with Ranevsky ever since she left for France. He is always complaining about how uncivilized Russia is when compared to France, exploits Dunyasha's love for him for physical pleasure, and openly tells Firs that he is so old he should die. Most of the characters besides Ranevsky regard him as repulsive and obnoxious. He has a strong taste for acrid-smelling cigars.

Dunyasha - A maid on the Ranevsky estate. She functions mainly as a foil to Yasha, her innocent naïveté and love for him emphasizing and making clear his cynicism and selfishness. She is also the object of Yephikodov's affections, a status about which she is very confused.

Themes Motifs and Symbols

Themes

The Struggle over Memory

In *The Cherry Orchard*, memory is seen both as source of personal identity and as a burden preventing the attainment of happiness. Each character is involved in a struggle to remember, but more importantly in a struggle to forget, certain aspects of their past. Ranevsky wants to seek refuge in the past from the despair of her present life; she wants to



remember the past and forget the present. But the estate itself contains awful memories of the death of her son, memories she is reminded of as soon as she arrives and sees Trofimov, her son's tutor. For Lopakhin, memories are oppressive, for they are memories of a brutal, uncultured peasant upbringing. They conflict with his identity as a well-heeled businessman that he tries to cultivate with his fancy clothes and his allusions to Shakespeare, so they are a source of self-doubt and confusion; it is these memories that he wishes to forget. Trofimov is concerned more with Russia's historical memory of its past, a past which he views as oppressive and needing an explicit renunciation if Russia is to move forward. He elucidates this view in a series of speeches at the end of Act Two. What Trofimov wishes Russia to forget are the beautiful and redeeming aspects of that past. First, finally, lives solely in memory—most of his speeches in the play relate to what life was like before the serfs were freed, telling of the recipe for making cherry jam, which now even he can't remember. At the end of the play, he is literally forgotten by the other characters, symbolizing the "forgotten" era with which he is so strongly associated.

Modernity vs. the Old Russia



A recurrent theme throughout Russian literature of the nineteenth century is the clash between the values of modernity and the values of old Russia. Modernity is here meant to signify Western modernity, its rationalism, secularism and materialism. Russia, especially its nobility, had been adopting these values since the early eighteenth

century, in the time of Peter the Great. But much of late nineteenth-century Russian literature was written in reaction to this change, and in praise of an idealized vision of Russia's history and folklore. Western values are often represented as false, pretentious, and spiritually and morally bankrupt. Russian culture by contrast—for example, in the character of Prince Myshkin in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, himself a representative of the old landowning nobility, or Tatyana in Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*—is exalted as honest and morally pure.

The conflict between Gayev and Ranevsky on the one hand and Lopakhin and Trofimov on the other can be seen as emblematic of the disputes between the old feudal order and Westernization. The conflict is made most explicit in the speeches of Trofimov, who views Russia's historical legacy as an oppressive one, something to be abandoned instead of exalted, and proposes an ideology that is distinctly influenced by the Western ideas such as Marxism and Darwinism.

Motifs

Nature

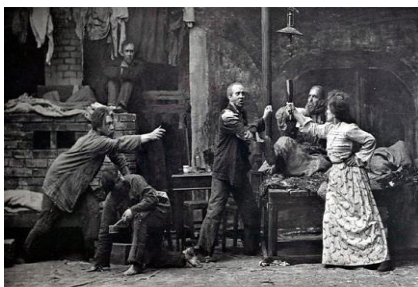
Nature, as represented by the orchard has significant value in *The Cherry Orchard*, both as something of inherent beauty and as a connection with the past. Ranevsky is overjoyed in the presence of the cherry orchard, and even Lopakhin, who destroys it, calls it the "most beautiful place on earth". And though he doesn't save the orchard, he talks with joy about 3,000 acres of poppies he has planted and looks



forward to a time when his cottage-owners will enjoy summer evenings on their verandahs, perhaps planting and beautifying their properties.

Nature is also seen as a source of both illusion and memory in this play. For example, Ranevsky's illusory sighting of her dead mother in Act One. In Nature, Gayev sees "eternity", a medium that joins together the past and present with its permanence. But the orchard is being destroyed, the idyllic countryside has telegraph poles running through it, and Ranevsky and Gayev's idyllic stroll through the countryside is interrupted by the intrusion of a drunkard. In fact, it is the very permanence ascribed to Nature that, through the play, is revealed to be an illusion.

The Union of Naturalism and Symbolism



The Cherry Orchard is on one level, a naturalistic play because it focuses on scientific, objective, details. It thus is like realism, in that it attempts to portray life "as it really is". Of course, these details are selected, sketched and presented in a certain way, guided by the author's intent. It is not actually science we are dealing with here. But throughout his career, Chekhov frequently stated his goal as an artist to present situations as they actually were, and not to prescribe solutions. And this is revealed in the way Chekhov's selection and presentation of details. Whenever we feel a desire to overly sympathize with one character, whenever we feel a desire to enter the play, so to speak, and take up their side (and their perspective), Chekhov shows us the irony in it-for example, when Lopakhin, when Lopakhin gloats about how far he has come from his brutal peasant origins, he does it in a brutal manner, thus betraying those origins. Chekhov's irony takes us out of the play and put back in our seats. This is how he creates his "objectivity".

Symbols

The Cherry Orchard

The orchard is the massive, hulking presence at the play's center of gravity; everything else revolves around and is drawn towards it. It is gargantuan; Lopakhin implies in Act One that the Lopakhin's estate spreads over 2,500 acres, and the cherry orchard is supposed to cover most of this. There were never any cherry orchards of nearly this size in Russia. And the fact that an orchard of this gargantuan size, which, by the estimate of Donald Rayfield, would produce more than four million pounds of cherries each crop, cannot economically sustain Ranevsky is an absurdity.



But it is absurd for a reason. After all, the orchard used to produce a crop every year, which was made into cherry jam. But, as Firs informs us, now the recipe has been lost. It is thus a relic of the past, an artifact, of no present use to anyone except as a memorial to or symbol of the time in which it was useful. And its unrealistic size further indicates that it is

purely a symbol of that past. In a very real sense, the orchard does not exist in the present. It is something that is perceived by the various characters and reacted to in ways that indicate how these characters feel about what the orchard represents: which is some aspect of memory.

What "memory" means for each character and what it represents varies. Each character sees—sometimes literally—a different aspect of the past, either personal or historical, in the orchard. Ranevsky, for example, perceives her dead mother walking through the orchard in Act One; for her, the orchard is a personal relic of her idyllic childhood. Trofimov, on the other hand, near the end of Act Two sees in the orchard the faces of the serfs who lived and died in slavery on Ranevsky's estate; for him, the orchard represents the memory of their suffering. For Lopakhin, the orchard is intimately tied to his personal memories of a brutal childhood, as well as presenting an obstacle to the prosperity of both himself and Ranevsky.

Though each character has their own perspective, there is a rough division between the old and the young, with the age cut-off being between Lopakhin and Ranevsky; the young tend to view the orchard in a negative light and the old view it more positively. This further reinforces the orchard's symbolic identification with the past. The one exception to this may be Varya. But this exception proves the rule, for though Varya often talks about the estate, she never mentions the orchard itself at all. For her, it is irrelevant, and the estate is what is important, for she is its manager, and its ownership is directly connected to her livelihood.

Breaking String



No one knows what it is when we first hear it in Act Two, and when we last hear it, the only character onstage is in no position to comment. It is the sound of breaking string, an auditory symbol of forgetting. It first is heard in the play after Gayev gives a soliloquy on the eternity of nature; Firs tells us it was heard before, around the time the serfs were freed (a seminal event in Russian history). It is last heard just as Firs, the old manservant who functions as the play's human connection to the past, passes away, and is juxtaposed against the sound of an axe striking a cherry tree. With its simple image of breaking line, the sound serves to unify the play's social allegory with its examination of memory, providing a more graphic counterpart to the Cherry Orchard's hovering, off-stage presence.

Creative Team

Text

Anton Chekhov, in an English version by Trevor Griffiths from a translation by Helen Rappaport

Direction

Mehmet Ergen

Design

Iona McLeish

Lighting

Design David Howe

Sound Design

Neil McKeown

Production Manager

Ian Taylor

Stage Manager

Tamsin Withers

Production Electrician

Ed Locke

Costume Supervisor

Emma Lynch

Assistant Stage Manager

Bethan McKnight

Cast: Jude Akuwudike, Pernille Broch, Jim Bywater, Barış Celiloğlu, Abhin Galeya, Robin Hooper, Jack Klaff, Simon Scardifield, Sian Thomas, Nick Voyia, Ryan Wichert, Jade Williams, Lily Wood

Anton Chekhov



Anton Chekhov was born on January 29, 1860, in Taganrog, Russia. Through stories such as "The Steppe" and "The Lady with the Dog," and plays such as *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*, the prolific writer emphasized the depths of human nature, the hidden significance of everyday events and the fine line between comedy and tragedy. During the mid-1880s, Chekhov practiced as a physician and began to publish serious works of fiction under his own name. His pieces appeared in the newspaper *New Times* and then as part of collections such as *Motley Stories* (1886). His story "The Steppe" was an important success, earning its author the Pushkin Prize in 1888. Like most of Chekhov's early work, it showed the influence of the major Russian realists of the 19th century, such as Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Chekhov also wrote works for the theatre during this period. His earliest plays were short farces; however, he soon developed his signature style, which was a unique mix of comedy and tragedy. Chekhov wrote many of his greatest works from the 1890s through the last few years of his life. In his short stories of that period, including "Ward No. 6" and "The Lady with the Dog," he revealed a profound understanding of human nature and the ways in which ordinary events can carry deeper meaning. In his plays of these years, Chekhov

concentrated primarily on mood and characters, showing that they could be more important than the plots. Not much seems to happen to his lonely, often desperate characters, but their inner conflicts take on great significance. Their stories are very specific, painting a picture of pre-revolutionary Russian society, yet timeless. From the late 1890s onward, Chekhov collaborated with Constantin Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theater on productions of his plays, including his masterpieces *The Seagull* (1895), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *The Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). While staying at a health resort in Badenweiler, Germany, he died in the early hours of July 15, 1904, at the age of 44.

Interview with the Director Mehmet Ergen

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, why is *The Cherry Orchard* so relevant in marking this anniversary?

It predicts a massive change, it's quite a symbolic play and it's quite a naturalistic play. There's a cherry Orchard with an estate and the owners and the occupants of the house are hoping that they will be able to save it from demolition but they are in debt and it goes to an auction. However the play symbolises not just the regular sale of an old estate but it also symbolises the collapse of an entire generation of aristocracy and it signals a new wave of life. For example the Caretaker of the play used to be a server and his father was a server and basically you end up having a new class of people having ownership of the estate. It's a fantastic ending with the old aristocrat staying all by himself, and probably dying away, and then the cherry orchard being chopped down.

What is the significance of *The Cherry Orchard* in the revolution season at Arcola?

We chose two plays, *The Lower Depths* and *The Cherry Orchard*, which were both written before the revolution, 1902 and 1904. They were performed together by the Moscow Arts Theatre which was seen as a new wave of new writing at the time and they all have a sense of change in these plays and also a sense of warning. *The Lower Depths* has such degradation, where you think something catastrophic could happen if you have a massive change and that people of the lower depths are not looked after. *The Cherry Orchard* has that as well. You have the serving classes and the aristocrats. They sense that there is a change in the air that they can't quite put their finger on. I thought this would be reflective of our time as well, we are living in times where there is a massive right wing movement in Europe and [Donald] Trump and Brexit and we sort of would like to see that something will happen but we don't know what it is.

Is the play relevant to today's Russia?

Russia today is a very different society, but the power struggles remain. On a simple level, having property, desiring property, and then losing it - that's always relevant. And it's the massive contradiction in revolution: we want an equal society and for everyone to have

everything, but we also want things just for ourselves, and we want things that are better than what everyone else has. There's also the added burden of acquiring things from your past. 'I don't want to leave this house because it was my grandfather's.' People imbue things with their own histories and their own heritage, and they attach a kind of nostalgic longing. I think it's always there, and always relevant.

What are the main themes you are seeking to bring out in *The Cherry Orchard*?

Change; change in society. What's fascinating about Chekhov is that he's writing about major change in his own time, but in the subtlest of ways. The Russian Revolution is some way off, and the biggest changes are yet to be fully realised or defined, but you can feel change in the air. I think that chimes with the mood now.

Describe the significance of the *Cherry Orchard* in Russian History.

A huge importance! If you say Russian theatre the first person you think of is Chekhov, and he wrote only a very few plays and always emphasises the need to work, the need to do something and also dream about greater things without making it Agitprop theatre, so a huge significance.

Can the play teach us anything about today?

I think both *The Cherry Orchard* and Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, the other Russian play in our Revolution season, have a real salience today. They show the pressures placed on people by the direction of their society, and the risks of people being left behind. The characters in *The Lower Depths* are impoverished in a shelter in Nizhny, but it could just as easily be a homeless shelter in London, or the Calais Jungle. Today we're paying hundreds of thousands of pounds in wages to CEOs while there are more and more people in homeless shelters, begging on the street, displaced in refugee camps, in the most desperate situation. For how much longer can that be sustained? Revolutions take a huge toll, but every so often, people seem to conclude that the toll of the status quo is greater. Perhaps that explains Brexit. It's what comes next that's vital, however - and Chekhov and Gorky knew that. Their plays herald the last straws, and the new beginnings. Be it hopeful or dreadful, change is in the air.

How are women portrayed in the play and in this production?

Working women are very strong. It's a common theme in Chekhov's plays, that people survive by busying themselves with work that is worthy. That provides a constancy and stability. The men change more, but they're shown up as quite weak. Like Lopakhin - after becoming the owner of the estate, after coming into money, he just cannot bring himself to propose to Varya. I think Chekhov writes fantastic parts for women, and we're very fortunate to have Sian Thomas, Jade Williams, Pernille Broch and several other fantastic actors in our Revolution Ensemble to play those parts.

What is the style of the play?

Usually it's done with a lot of furniture, a lot of doilies, lace and wood, but in my production we strip it all off. We make it very minimalist. There will be like four chairs and a bookshelf

and that's it. We shy away from traditional Russian realism and we have modern costumes. This production will be starker and more minimal in style, because I think that will help reveal the play for what it is, and put focus on the characters and relationships and the drama. We are also very lucky to be using a Trevor Griffiths adaptation. Trevor makes Lopakhin who buys the estate, and Trofimov who is a student, (which is associated with the revolution itself) their parts are a little bit more prominent with the way they speak than the whinging family worrying about losing their estate.

What should the students take from the drama?

Inevitably they will see one of the best plays ever written. It's on everyone's top ten list of the past thousand years of playwriting. It's so subtle and clever, and yet it works everywhere - every nation, every culture, every religion. The scene where Varya knows Lopakhin is supposed to propose to her: she comes in, pretends she's looking for something, and they talk about the barometer being broken and the distances between villages. They talk about everything except their relationship, and yet everyone in the audience knows that it's a scene about their relationship. That is just masterful writing. So for one thing, students can take away the idea that a scene might not be about the things people are saying - but the things they're not saying, or something else entirely. In *The Cherry Orchard*, the repercussions of that are wide-reaching and incredible.

Why is it important that we invite our schools to come and see *The Cherry Orchard*?

Wherever you look at it *The Cherry Orchard* is one of the most important plays ever written in modern history. It signals a new wave of playwriting, everything you see on television from TV dramas to cinema and any of the new modern writing owes a lot to two particular people; Chekhov and Ibsen. You can also see how someone who wrote a play in 1902 writes about the environment, the change, nature, the behaviour of people, how things never change and how significant it is that someone can foresee this, he was a doctor with a fantastic observation. Also anyone who is interested in literature, how you can write a scene that is about something, and you don't even mention that something and you talk about something else... this shows how Chekhov is a master of subtext. There are also great scenes and each one is a study in itself. It is also very, very entertaining! Chekhov thought it should be a comedy and it was overly dramatized for generations so we are trying to catch that funny element as well.

Is there anything in particular you want your audience to come away with from watching the play?

That I should read more Chekhov!

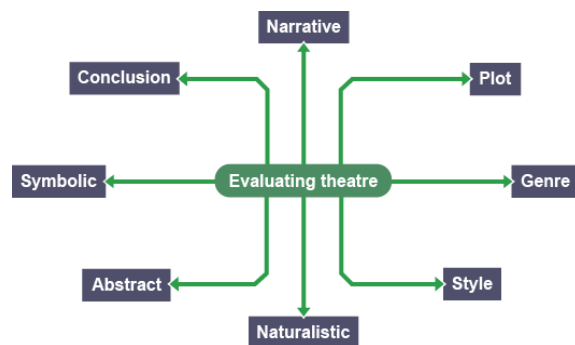
How to Write a Theatre Review

To evaluate something is to measure its worth. It demands considered judgement and analysis. To evaluate drama and theatre you must be able to recognise what was and wasn't successful onstage and recognise all the elements that contribute to the impact of a production. If you're writing about theatre it may be to evaluate your own work or that of others in a production you've seen. A review is generally an opinion and its job is to advise others about how good (or bad) something is.

People all have different tastes so opinions must always be **justified**. This means backed up with a clear example to support every argument. You must say **why** you did or didn't like a particular aspect of the work. If you just give your opinion without a good reason others might not trust it. You would also need a thorough knowledge of drama elements, the drama medium and explorative strategies so you can note how they're used in the work you're writing about.

Steer clear of phrases like 'I thought it was terrible' or 'I found it boring'. Not only will you sound unintelligent but arrogant too. Remember that you're writing about the work of professionals who may have much more experience and understanding of theatre than you do.

Make sure that you refer to production personnel in your review. Give names of actors, director, designers etc when you refer to their work. If you don't, it will seem vague and lazy to the reader. Consider the **themes** of the play and detail how they were brought out by design, direction or acting choices.



You should have drafted the content of your review in note form before writing in earnest. You must also make sure that you've structured your work so that it makes sense. For example, discuss lighting in one paragraph; don't spread comments about it throughout the work.

It's important that you write a good introduction to your review. This is how you set the scene for the reader and it determines if your work is worth reading in its entirety or not! So you need to provide details about the production, its genre, its main actors and any interesting background information.

Avoid telling the story as part of your review. You're evaluating how well it worked, not explaining it. However, for your work to make sense you need to put your evaluation into context. This means a brief explanation of the basis of the story and its themes, the main ideas or issues explored.

Handy terms to keep in mind when writing your review

cliff-hanger
climax intention
purpose
rationale reason **aim**
tension **objective**
anti-climax

dynamic
energy non-linear
contrast **pace**
episodic
juxtaposition scene
linear **structure**

moving emotional
memorable dynamic
powerful unusual
ambitious **exciting** tense
thought-provoking

creation
communication
characterisation
interpretation
representation **portrayal**
embodiment

Theatre Review Template

Play Review Instructions & Format

Play Review: Play Title

By: First/Last Name

Typed, double-spaced, about 1 page in length, Font: Times New Roman, 12pt.

Paragraph 1: Introduction & Preview

A. What you plan to write about: Play, _____, by _____ at _____ Theatre. Choose 1-2 **characters** to describe & comment upon (don't try to cover them all!).

B. Discuss the **Text, Direction**

C. Choose 2 **Production Values** to discuss: How do they enhance/detract from production:

- a. Costumes
- b. Scenery
- c. Lighting
- d. Sound Effects
- e. Music
- f. Special Effects

Paragraph 2-5 Review Body

Par. 2: Favourite **Actor/Character**: Characters & Conflict

Par. 3: Discuss **Text**: Genre, playwright's Purpose

Par. 4: Discuss **Director**: Director's concept, enhance or detract from story & message

Par. 5: **Production Value** #1 & #2

Last Paragraph: Summary & Conclusion: Pretend you're Roger Ebert: What's the best/worst bits about this play. Do you recommend it? For whom?

The Revolution Season

Arcola Theatre announces REVOLUTION season, marking centenary of the Russian Revolution



100 years ago, a neglected majority shook the world order with socialist revolution, disempowering the rich and demanding equality.

100 years on, a neglected majority have chosen Brexit and Donald Trump.

Arcola's new season, **REVOLUTION**, investigates a world on the brink of profound change. It explores the causes and the colossal impact of the Russian Revolution 100 years on, and considers the people and ideas which could shape the next century.

Change is in the air in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, directed by Artistic Director **Mehmet Ergen** and Oladipo Agboluaje's new play *New Nigerians* directed by **Rosamunde Hutt**. Join us in our season of revolution which explores nations on the brink of transformation.

Artistic Director Mehmet Ergen said: "Arcola Theatre's vision is of a genuinely radical theatre, constantly reinventing itself to respond to, interpret and have relevance to an ever-changing world. We look forward to sharing our REVOLUTION season with audiences old and new."



For more information and to book tickets, visit www.arcolatheatre.com/revolution

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

15 February - 25 March 2017

By **Anton Chekhov**, in a new version by **Trevor Griffiths**

Directed by **Mehmet Ergen**

Madame Ranevsky has come home to her family estate, and the cherry orchard is just as glorious as ever. But debts are beginning to pile up, and a momentous change is brewing...

Anton Chekhov's final masterpiece is a gleaming and shattering drama about a family on the edge of ruin, and a nation on the brink of revolution.

The acclaimed English version by **Trevor Griffiths**, author of *Comedians* and *Party*, comes to London for the very first time in a major new production from Artistic Director **Mehmet Ergen**.

Praise for director **Mehmet Ergen's** *Clarion* at Arcola:

★★★★★ "Hugely recommended." - *Morning Star*

★★★★★ "Sparkling performances by the cast under Mehmet Ergen's taut direction" - *Daily Telegraph*

★★★★★ "Fabulous central performances ... highly recommended" - *The Times*

★★★★★ "Mehmet Ergen's energetic production is full of faithfully drawn figures ... highly effective" - *The Guardian*

NEW NIGERIANS

14th Feb - 11th March 2017

By **Oladipo Agboluaje**

Directed by **Rosamunde Hutt**

Nigeria: 'the Giant of Africa'. Conservatives rule over the biggest economy on the continent, and one of the largest and youngest populations in the world. What if the people wanted something different? What if they got it?

Hackney-born writer **Oladipo Agboluaje** (winner of the Alfred Fagon award for *Iya Ile/The First Wife*) and director **Rosamunde Hutt** (*Love, Bombs and Apples*) weave a gripping tale of conflict and compromise, setting the scene for a political revolution in 21st century Nigeria.

As time runs out to build a coalition which can challenge the ruling party, can progressive forces overcome their personal and political differences, or will their troubled pasts define an even more troubling future?

Praise for director **Rosamunde Hutt's** *Love, Bombs and Apples* at Arcola:

★★★★★ "A lesson in how to stage powerful, political theatre" - *Islington Gazette*

★★★★★ "A truly exceptional performance" - *LondonTheatre1*

About Arcola Theatre

Arcola Theatre is one of London's leading off-West End theatres. Locally engaged and internationally minded, Arcola stages a diverse programme of plays, operas and musicals. World-class productions from major artists appear alongside cutting-edge work from the most exciting emerging companies. Arcola delivers one of London's most extensive community engagement programmes, creating over 5000 opportunities every year. By providing research and development space to diverse artists, Arcola champions theatre that's more engaging and representative. Its pioneering environmental initiatives are internationally renowned, and aim to make Arcola the world's first carbon-neutral theatre.

Box Office

020 7503 1646 (12.30pm - 6pm, Mon-Sat)

www.arcolatheatre.com

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