

STATE ED

# The Seagull

BY ANTON CHEKHOV

*In a new adaptation by Hilary Bell*



STATE SA  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

**21 FEBRUARY - 16 MARCH**

*State Theatre Company Scenic Workshop*

**DURATION APPROX:** *2 hours & 20 mins (including interval)*

**SUITABLE FOR** *Years 9 - 12*

*DWS performance followed by a 20 - 30 min Q&A session*

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*State Theatre Company in association with Adelaide Festival presents*

# The Seagull

**BY ANTON CHEKHOV**

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## CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

**ARKADINA**

*Rosalba Clemente*

**KONSTANTIN**

*Xavier Samuel*

**SORIN**

*Paul Blackwell*

**NINA**

*Lucy Fry*

**SHAMRAYEV**

*Chris Pitman*

**POLINA**

*Lizzy Falkland*

**MASHA**

*Matilda Bailey*

**TRIGORIN**

*Renato Musolino*

**DORN**

*Terence Crawford*

**MEDVEDENKO**

*Matthew Gregan*

**DIRECTOR**

*Geordie Brookman*

**SET DESIGNER & LIGHTING DESIGNER**

*Geoff Cobham*

**COSTUME DESIGNER**

*Ailsa Paterson*

**COMPOSER/MUSICIAN**

*Matthew Gregan*

# Playwright

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ANTON CHEKHOV (1860 – 1904)



Born in 1860 in Taganrog in southern Russia, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was the son of a grocer and the grandson of a 'serf' Russian slave. He was a physician, dramaturge and author and is considered to be among the greatest writers of short stories in history, producing four classics and several short stories.

When his father's business failed the family fled to Moscow where he entered medical school at Moscow University. To support his family and pay his tuition fees, he wrote daily short, humorous sketches of contemporary Russian life. His subjects were silly social situations, marital problems, farcical encounters between husbands, wives, mistresses, and lovers and the whims of young women.

At the beginning he had many harsh critics, but he became known for his wit and satire combined with tragic subjects. His first volume of stories, *Motley Tales* was published in 1886 and his second collection, *In The Twilight* was published in 1887

Chekhov completed his medical studies in 1884, and practiced medicine until 1893, while continuing to publish his stories. He worked out in the country providing his services regardless of class and in 1892 – 1893 he ran a free medical clinic during Russia's Cholera epidemic. Chekhov's years as a doctor helped him develop his subtle treatment of tragic events in his stories. "*Medicine is my lawful wife, and literature is my mistress.*"

In 1890 he travelled across Siberia to the remote prison island Sakhalin, where he conducted a detailed study of the outcast colony there. From this his book, *The Island: A Journey to Sakhalin* (1893-94) was written. Chekhov wrote incredible amounts of short fiction, some of which gained him praise from critics, as well as fame. In all, he wrote around a dozen plays, several novels and over 200 short stories.

His first play *Ivanov* was produced in 1887. In 1889 he wrote *The Wood Demon* where he dispensed with most of the then, theatrical devices. The critics accused him of reproducing a slice of life on stage. Chekhov withdrew the play and refused to have it printed or produced until around eight years later under the new title of *Uncle Vanya*.

From 1896 to 1904 he wrote the four plays for which he would be known throughout the world: *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*.

In a letter to his friend he described finishing *The Seagull*,

*"Well, I have now finished the play. I began it forte and finished it pianissimo, against all the rules of dramatic art. It came out like a story. I am more dissatisfied than satisfied with it, and, reading over my newborn piece, I become once more convince that I am not a playwright at all."*

*The Seagull's* first performance in 1895 was greeted with jeers, hissing, laughter and cat calls. As a



*Clockwise from top: Birth house of Anton Chekhov; Chekhov family and friends in 1890, Young Chekhov (left) with brother Nikolai in 1882.*

result, Chekhov removed the play from the program, but the failure of this show shook his confidence. It was only with great reluctance that he allowed it be published.

*The Seagull* was revised in 1898 by Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre, where he gained fame as a playwright. Chekhov described *The Seagull* as a comedy, but it is also a tragedy, ending with the suicide of a young writer. The idea for the play partly emerged from a day's hunting trip Chekhov had made with his friend Isaac Levitan, who shot at a woodcock, which did not die. Disgusted, Chekhov smashed the bird's head in with his rifle butt.

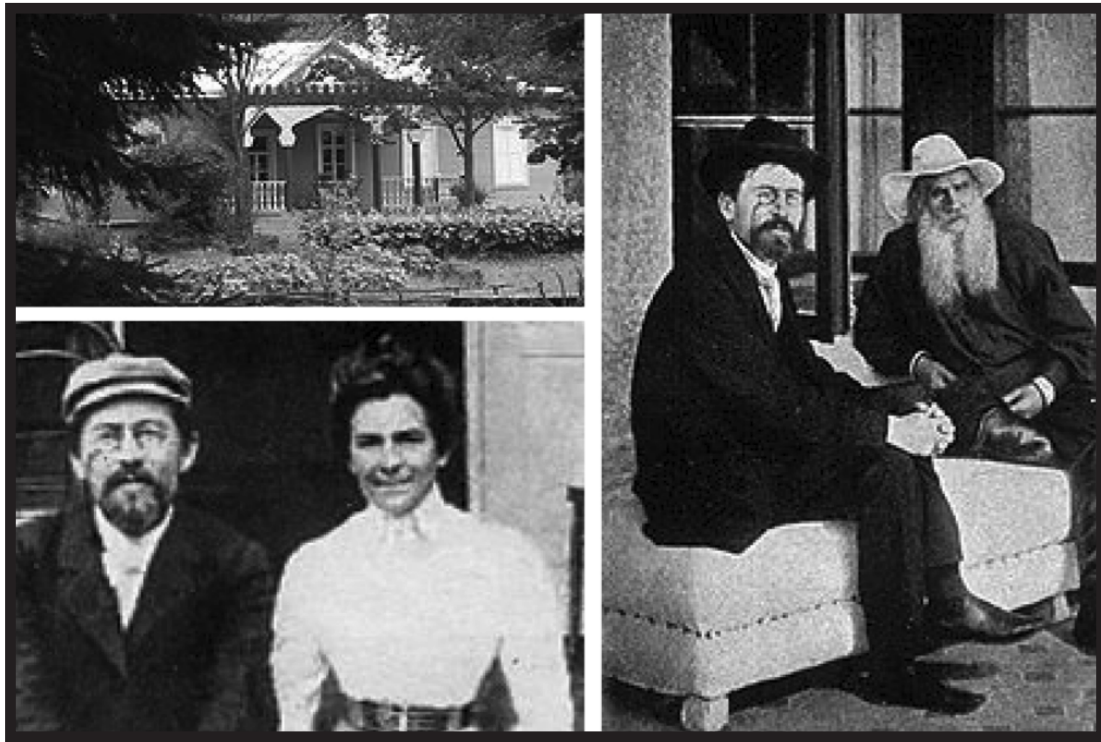
*The Wood Demon* was re-worked to become *Uncle Vanya* (1890), it is a melancholic story of Sonia and his brother-in-law Ivan (Uncle Vanya), who see their dreams and hopes passing in drudgery for others. Next was *Three Sisters* (1891), set in a provincial garrison town. The talented Prozorov sisters, recognize the uselessness of their lives and cling to one another for consolation.

*The Cherry Orchard* (1904) reflected the larger developments in Russian society. Mme Ranevskaias returns to her estate and finds out that the family house, together with the adjoining orchard, is to be auctioned. Her brother Gaev is too impractical to help in the crisis, the businessman Lopakhin purchases the estate and the orchard is demolished.

In these plays Chekhov blended humour and tragedy, portraying life in small Russian towns, where tragic events occur as part of the everyday texture of life. His characters are passive by-standers in their own lives, filled with the feeling of hopelessness and the fruitlessness of their efforts. Surprise and tension are not key elements in his plays, as the dramatic movement is subdued. His characters do not fight, they merely endure their fate with patience and monotony.

*"Man has been endowed with reason, with the power to create, so that he can add to what he's been given. But up to now he hasn't been a creator, only a destroyer. Forests keep disappearing, rivers dry up, wild lives become extinct, the climate's ruined and the land grows poorer and uglier every day."*  
(*Uncle Vanya*, 1897)





*Clockwise from top: His home in Melikhovo, now a museum; Chekhov with Leo Tolstoy at Yalta, 1900, Chekhov and Olga, 1901, on honeymoon*

In 1892 Chekhov bought a country estate in the village of Melikhovo, where his best stories were written, including *Neighbours* (1892), *Ward Number Six*, *The Black Monk* (1894), *The Murder* (1895), and *Ariadne* (1895). In 1901 Chekhov married actress Olga Knipper (1870-1959), who often performed in his plays. It was a happy marriage, despite frequent separations due to her work in the city and his busy lifestyle, and the disappointment of not having children.

Chekhov himself battled illness, contracting tuberculosis in 1887, coughing up blood, which continued with breathing troubles until his death in 1904. It is said that he called for the doctor and a glass of champagne, knowing that he was about to die. His last words were, “*I haven’t drunk champagne for a long time.*”

He was buried in the cemetery of the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow. Though a celebrated figure by the Russian literary public at the time of his death, Chekhov remained rather unknown internationally until the years after World War I, when his works were translated into English.

### CHEKHOV’S PLAYS

- *That Worthless Fellow Platonov* (1881)
- *On the harmful Effects of Tobacco* (1886)
- *Swansong* (1887)
- *Ivanov* (1887)
- *The Boor or the Bear* (1888)
- *A Marriage Proposal* (1888)
- *A Reluctant Tragic Hero* (1889)
- *The Wedding* (1889)
- *The Wood Demon* (1889)
- *The Festivities* (1891)
- *The Seagull* (1896)
- *Uncle Vanya* (1899)
- *Three Sisters* (1901)
- *The Cherry Orchard* (1904)

# Adaptation

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HILARY BELL



## BIOGRAPHY

Hilary Bell is an Australian writer for stage, radio and screen. She is a member of playwrights' company 7-On and a graduate of the Juilliard Playwrights' Studio, NIDA, and AFTRS. She was the Tennessee Williams Fellow 2003-04 and is currently the Patrick White Playwrights' Fellow at the Sydney Theatre Company.

Hilary's play credits include *Wolf Lullaby*, *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Ruysch*, *The Falls*, *Memmie Le Blanc*, *The Bloody Bride*, *The Splinter*, *The White Divers of Broome*, *The Mysteries: Genesis* (with Lally Katz) and Paul Capsis' *Angela's Kitchen* (associate writer). Libretti for opera, song-cycles and musicals: *Mrs President* (comp. Victoria Bond), *Talk Show* (Elena Katz-Chernin) and *Do Good And You Will Be Happy* (Phillip Johnston). *The Seagull* is Hilary's second adaptation for State Theatre Company, having collaborated earlier with Jim Sharman on a Strindberg double-bill.



# Director

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**GEORDIE BROOKMAN**



## **BIOGRAPHY**

Geordie is the Artistic Director of State Theatre Company. Since graduating from Flinders University Drama Centre in 2001 Geordie has directed work around Australia, the UK and Asia. His credits include *Maggie Stone*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Speaking In Tongues*, *romeo&juliet*, *Ghosts*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *Ruby Moon* and *Hot Fudge* (State Theatre Company), *Spring Awakening: The Musical* (Sydney Theatre Company), *Baghdad Wedding* (Belvoir), *Toy Symphony* (Queensland Theatre Company & State Theatre Company), *Knives In Hens* (Malthouse & State Theatre Company), *Metro Street* (Arts Asia Pacific, Power Arts, Daegu International Musicals Festival and State Theatre Company), *The City and Tender* (nowyesnow), *Marathon*, *Morph*, *Disco Pigs* and *The Return* (Fresh Track), *Tiny Dynamite* (Griffin), *Macbeth* and *The Laramie Project* (AC Arts).

His productions have won or been nominated for Helpmann, Greenroom, Sydney Critics Circle, Adelaide Critics Circle and Curtain Call awards. In 2010 Geordie was one of only five recipients nationally of the British Council Realise Your Dream Award which allowed him to embark upon a three month study of UK national theatre models.

He has been the assistant director for directors including Neil Armfield, Benedict Andrews, Kate Champion, Robyn Nevin, Ariette Taylor and Scott Graham and Steven Hogget (Frantic Assembly) and has also worked as a producer, dramaturg, teacher, event director and curator for organisations including the Adelaide Festival, The National Play Festival, University of Wollongong, Australian Theatre for Young People, Australian Fashion Week and Queensland Theatre Company.

## **NOTES**

*There passes before one a long file of men and women, slaves of their love, of their stupidity and idleness, of their greed for the good things of life; there walk the slaves of the dark fear of life; they straggle anxiously along, filling life with incoherent words about the future, feeling that in the present there is no place for them.*

Maxim Gorky on Chekhov's writing.

What a discovery a great playwright can be and what a gift to a director. The Seagull is my first step into the world of Anton Chekhov and a joyous immersion it's been.

Chekhov does something strangely similar to playwright Samuel Beckett; he removes his characters from the immediate effects of the wider world. What Beckett did through tectonic stylistic leaps, Chekhov achieves through his seemingly innocuous country settings that are in fact slowly turning their inhabitants inwards on themselves in series of repeating patterns that only the strongest and, often most heavily scarred, can escape. It's in this space, floating, unconnected, that we're able to view human relationships, their absurdity, beauty and passion in all their minutiae and mess.

Often unfairly boxed in as the ultimate example of naturalism, I've found Chekhov inherently theatrical, messy (in the best sense of the word) and profound. His co-joined discussion of art and love stitches itself through the play, bouncing off other literary sources, being treated with gravity one moment and brevity or cynicism the next. He's a chameleon, always encouraging you down new paths. Over the last few weeks we've been undergoing a process one of the cast likened to sedimentation, a slow sifting and settling of layers into a shared understanding and communal history. It can mystify one moment and seem utterly clear the next. But in many ways Chekhov encourages the simple, the loving and the absurd. His writing is perhaps the perfect target for the saying 'The play's the thing'; it's all too true, very little else is needed. In our case, and to paraphrase the man himself, the equation is very simple: ten characters and a little hope.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE DIRECTOR

### ***1. Why did you decide to program this play and what attracted you to this particular Chekhov piece?***

One of the issues I'm always interested in is isolation. Why people become isolated, what stops human beings from relating to each other truthfully and why we find it so hard to deal with disappointment? Chekhov examines this thematic ground in *The Seagull* with great rigour, humour and heart. Also, in simple terms, it's a great piece for actors.

### ***2. Have you previously directed any other Chekhov plays?***

No, this is my first.

### ***3. What are the challenges in directing a Chekhov play?***

Getting the tricky balance of comedy and tragedy right. He's very good at showing us how absurd we can be in our saddest moments. Finding the flow and rhythm of the text and using this to craft the particular brand of naturalism required to make his writing work.

### ***4. What was the attraction in choosing Xavier Samuel to play Konstantin and have you worked with him before?***

I've known Xavier for almost ten years. We've worked together on a few small things like play readings and have been actively looking for something to do together for a while now. I think he's fantastic casting for the part, he brings such gravity and soul to everything he does and has the fierce intelligence required to play a role like Konstantin.

### ***5. Rosalba Clemente returns to the stage to play Konstantin's mother Arkadina. Why was she the obvious choice for this role?***

Again Rosalba's involvement in the piece came out of a long term conversation between us about working together. She's a formidable actress and has the power and passion necessary to breathe life into the character of Arkadina.

### ***6. The Seagull has had many different versions and adaptations. Why did you get Hilary Bell to do a new adaption? And what does this process involve?***

I've been a fan of Hilary's writing for a long time. One of my big theatre experiences when I was at high school was Hilary's play *Wolf Lullaby*. I think she has a precision and gentle humour that aligns itself very closely with Chekhov's qualities.

The adaptation process is usually unique to each project. In this case it was a matter of me briefing Hilary as to the setting that I was interested in for the piece (1950s Russia) and the style of language that I was after. We talked a lot about how to sharpen some aspects of some character arcs, but our focus was always predominantly on getting words on the page that sounded great coming out of actors' mouths!

**7. Can you tell us about the concept for the design and how you work with the Designer to make this concept a reality?**

Again this is something that differs from project to project and from designer to designer. In this case I'm working with two designers, Geoff Cobham (set and lights) and Ailsa Paterson (costumes). My discussions with Geoff always start with what kind of theatrical space we want to create and we decided very early on that we wanted to stage this production in traverse and give it an almost rehearsal room feel with minimal amounts of furniture and effects. As Geoff is also the lighting designer we conceive both elements at once and each act of the play is defined by a unique lighting 'look'.

With Ailsa, the costume designer, our main job is to locate the production into the chosen period and to use the costumes to give a sense of the characters differing classes etc.

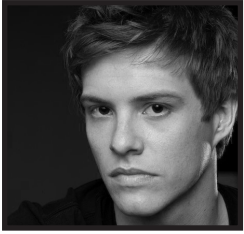
**8. What would you like school audiences to take away from this production?**

That's for the audience to find out! I don't really like to pre-empt anyone's experience of a piece of theatre. I hope they'll laugh and be moved.



# Actor Profiles

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## **XAVIER SAMUEL (KONSTANTIN)**

Xavier Samuel has worked extensively in theatre and film since graduating from the Flinders University Drama Centre in 2005. This is Xavier's second performance for State Theatre Company following his role in the 2006 production of *Two Weeks With The Queen*.

Xavier had his international break when he scored a pivotal role in the third instalment of the *Twilight Trilogy Eclipse*. One of the most successful franchises to date, his character Riley Biers appeared opposite Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson and the film had a worldwide release. Since then, his international film credits include Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous* opposite Rhys Ifans and Vanessa Redgrave; *Adoration*, opposite Robin Wright-Penn & Naomi Watts (Sundance); Catherine Hardwicke's feature, *Plush*, opposite fellow Australian Emily Browning; and *Fury*, the war-drama with Brad Pitt and Shia LeBeouf.

His work in Australia has been extensive and diverse, some of which include the comedy *A Few Best Men*, directed by award winning filmmaker Stephan Elliot, of *Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* acclaim, the horror film *Bait*, coming of age surf drama, *Newcastle*, *The Loved Ones*, *September* with Mia Wasikowska, *Drift* with Sam Worthington and most recently the drama *Healing* with Hugo Weaving, due for release this year.



## **ROSALBA CLEMENTE (ARKADINA)**

Rosalba graduated from NIDA (Acting) in 1985 and also from Adelaide CAE with a Drama Major in 1981. She is a former Artistic Director of State Theatre Company and has worked as an actress and director for many Australian theatre companies and festivals, including Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, New Stages, Griffin, Malthouse, Performance Space, Bay Street Theatre, The Australian Theatre for Young People, Entracte, Vitalstatistix, Rokato Productions, Teater

di Migma, Melbourne Comedy Festival, Adelaide Festival, Sydney Festival and many others. This is Rosalba's first time on stage as an actor in over a decade.

Rosalba engages in a high level of service to the theatre industry, most recently completing her turn as Chair of the Theatre Board at Australia Council. She is presently Head of Acting Flinders University Drama Centre.

Over the years Rosalba has been nominated for and received many awards for her acting and directing, including the Sydney Theatre Critics Circle Awards, Victorian Green Room Awards, MO Music Industry Entertainment Awards, Helpmann Awards, St Kilda Film Festival Awards and the Adelaide Critics Circle Awards. Her first play, *Helly's Magic Cup*, received a workshop at The Kennedy Centre in Washington DC and won the Rodney Seaborn Award in 2007, which was produced by Windmill Theatre and Adelaide Festival Centre. Her second play was co-commissioned by PlayWriting Australia and HotHouse Theatre and was produced at HotHouse in March 2011

Rosalba's new play *Silvanna's Garden* was one of three new Australian plays just chosen to receive a workshop at Playwriting Australia in September 2013.





### **RENATO MUSOLINO (TRIGORIN)**

Renato Musolino is a graduate of the Centre for the Performing Arts (now AC Arts). His State Theatre Company credits include *The Comedy Of Errors*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *IN THE NEXT ROOM or the vibrator play*, *Three Sisters*, *The Zoo Story*, *The Misanthrope*, *King Lear*, *Mnemonic* and *Blue/Orange*.

In 2003 he undertook a mentorship/observership at The Actors Studio in New York City. Credits include *Amadeus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* and *Carboni* (Urbino Italy, Canberra Multicultural Festival and Eureka Week Ballarat). For Holden Street Theatres, credits include *What I Heard About Iraq*, *The Homecoming* and *Bash* (The Advertiser Oscart Award – Best Actor 2006).

Renato appeared in *Rust and Bone* for Griffin Theatre. For Flying Penguin Productions, credits include *Assassins* and *True West* (Adelaide Theatre Guide Best Actor Professional 2009, The Advertiser Award for Performer of the Year). Windmill Theatre credits include *Helly's Magic Cup*. Feature film credits include *The Caterpillar Wish*. ABC National credits include *Clark in Sarajevo*, *The Ruby*, *The Death of Napoleon*, *Blood on My Hands*, *Clerk Ascending* and *Joshua's Book*.



### **LUCY FRY (NINA)**

Lucy graduated from the Flinders Drama Centre in 2013. *The Seagull* is her first production for State Theatre Company. In her second year of training at Flinders, Lucy was then given the challenge of playing the five female characters in David Hare's *The Blue Room* co-directed by Kym Begg and Anne Thomson. At the end of the same year, Lucy played Evelyn in *The Shape of Things* directed by Rosalba Clemente. In her third year, Lucy played Yvonne in *A Mouthful of Birds* directed

by Rosalba Clemente. At the beginning of fourth year Lucy played the role of the Marquise de Merteuil in a production of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* directed by David Meador. Lucy recently played the role of Cissy in her Graduating show *Punk Rock* directed by Tom Healy. Earlier in 2012 Lucy played the role of Pigeon in the short film *River Water* directed by Sara Jane West for which she was nominated for best performance at the 2013 SASA Awards.



# Synopsis

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The family and friends of the retired Petr Sorin gather at his country home, intending to ease into another summer of bickering, drinking and basking in the glow of his sister, the actress Irina Arkadina. But Arkadina has brought along her lover, the famous populist writer Trigorin, a quiet aloof presence who immediately gets on the nerves of Arkadina's son, Konstantin. Somewhat unfortunately Konstantin has chosen this summer to make his debut as, in his mind, a revolutionary symbolist playwright whose aim is to tear down everything that Arkadina's generation of artists stand for. With the help of farm manager Shamrayev, his wife Polina, their daughter Masha and the local school teacher Medvedenko, Konstantin has constructed a rough stage on the edge of the lake on which to stage his new work, starring his girlfriend (and neighbour) Nina. Also in attendance is Dr Dorn, Arkadina's old friend and the family physician. The group gather, the play begins.

Unrequited and unsatisfied love is rife. No one has quite what they want and yet none of them are quite sure how to get it. The reverberations of the staging of Konstantin's play are felt throughout the following fortnight as we intersect twice more with our dissatisfied group. Threats are made, promises are broken as self interest takes over with all of the trouble culminating in Arkadina and Trigorin's return to the big city.

In Act 4 we return to Sorin's home two years later during midwinter. Melancholy and disappointment hangs over the small community. Sorin's health is failing bringing Arkadina back again for the first time since her conflict ridden departure two years earlier, Trigorin follows close behind. Konstantin, now gaining a small level of success as a fiction writer seems to have put the pain and frustration of the past behind him but when Nina returns once again to the house by the lake the past rears its ugly head one last time.

# Plot

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*The Setting: A rural estate surrounded by the tranquil countryside.*

## ACT I

Takes place outdoors on Sorin's estate, next to a beautiful lake. The estate is owned by Sorin and managed by Shamrayev. The play begins with Masha, the estate manager's daughter, strolling along with Medvedenko. Their opening lines set the tone for the entire play:

Medvedenko: *"Why is it you always wear black?"*

Masha: *"I'm in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy."*

Medvedenko, a poor schoolteacher, believes he would be a happier man and a more attractive suitor to Masha if he had more money. However, Masha cannot return his affection. She loves Sorin's nephew, the brooding playwright Konstantin, but he is oblivious to Masha because he is madly in love with his beautiful neighbour Nina. Nina arrives, ready to perform in Konstantin's new play. They kiss, but when he professes his love for her, she does not return his adoration.

Konstantin is nervous and busy as he gets ready for the first performance of his play. His mother, Irina Arkadina, a famous actress visiting from Moscow, is the primary source of his misery. He does not like living in the shadow of his successful mother and is jealous of her boyfriend, a famous novelist named Boris Trigorin. Arkadina performs traditional melodramatic works on stage, but Konstantin wants to create dramatic works that break away from tradition.

Polina and Dr Dorn enter and we learn that they are involved in a romantic relationship, but he is mostly apathetic about her affection. Arkadina, Trigorin and their friends arrive to watch Konstantin's play. The play begins with Nina performing a very long and surrealistic monologue:

*"Humans and lions, eagles, quail, Antler'd deer, geese, spiders frail,  
Soundless fishes dwelling deep, All that swim and fly and creep –  
All are ended, all have past. Life itself has breathed its last.  
Two hundred thousand barren springs: Earth has borne no living things.  
In vain the pale moon shines her light. No more the cranes cry in the night.  
No more the May-bugs' buzzing riot:  
Now the linden groves are quiet. All is cold. Cold. Cold.  
Empty. Empty. Empty. Dread. Dread. Dread."*

Arkadina rudely interrupts several times, *"It's that kind of play,"* until her son stops the performance altogether saying, *"My deepest apologies, I forgot that only the Select Few are allowed to make theatre, how dare I imagine for one second that I had any right to."* He leaves in an indignant fury.

Afterwards Nina mingles with Arkadina and is swept off her feet by Trigorin's charm and fame. Nina's parents don't approve of her associating with artists and bohemians, so she quickly leaves for home. The rest go inside, with the exception of Arkadina and Dr Dorn. He reflects upon the positive qualities

of her son's play and praises Konstantin on his return, encouraging him to continue writing. Although he appreciates the compliments, he runs off to find Nina.

Masha takes a pinch of snuff, which Dorn criticizes her for. She admits to him that she's in love with Konstantin, *"Please help me. Help me, or I'll do something stupid, I mean really disastrous, and ruin my life. I'm desperate."* Dorn sighs over the abundance of unrequited love and the bewitching lake.

## **ACT II**

A few days have passed. Konstantin has become more depressed and erratic. He is upset by his artistic failure and Nina's rejection.

Masha, Arkadina, Sorin, and Dr Dorn are chatting with one another. Sorin complains about his health, but Dorn offers no relief, merely suggesting sleeping pills. Nina wanders in happy because her parents have gone away, allowing her to spend time with them all.

Shamrayev enters arguing with Arkadina about the use of horses. She wants to use them later in the day to go to town and stubbornly, Shamrayev will not allow her to use them. She threatens to leave the estate, *"Right, we're leaving. I'm not staying here another minute. Back to Moscow. Order me a carriage from town, or I'll walk to the station."*

Konstantin enters from the woods with a rifle and a dead seagull in his hands. He places the dead bird at Nina's feet and then claims that soon he will kill himself. Nina can no longer relate to him, *"You talk in symbols – this seagull's another one. How am I supposed to know what you mean?"* Konstantin believes that she does not love him because his play was a failure. He compares Nina's faded love for him to the lake disappearing into the ground. He exits bitterly when he sees her fondness for Trigorin.

Trigorin tells Nina that he and Arkadina are leaving the estate to go back to town. He explains that he documents everything he observes for future use in a story. He sees the seagull that Konstantin shot and writes down a note about Nina, saying that she has inspired him to write a story about a girl who is ruined by a man, just like the seagull that Konstantin destroyed. Arkadina interrupts their conversation to announce that they are extending their stay. Nina is delighted.

## **ACT III**

*The Setting: The dining room at Sorin's house.*

A week has passed. During that time, Konstantin has attempted suicide, which left him with a mild head wound and a distraught mother. He has challenged Trigorin to a duel.

The scene opens with Trigorin eating lunch surrounded by luggage. Masha announces to him her decision to marry Medvedenko in order to stop loving Konstantin. Nina enters lamenting, *"I can't decide if I should become an actress. I wish someone would tell me."* She gives Trigorin a parting gift of a medallion, inscribed is a page and line number of his book. He goes off to find the book.

Arkadina argues with her brother, Sorin about his joining them in town. Sorin tries to convince her to pay for Konstantin to travel abroad, but she claims that she has no money, even though she is a successful actress. Sorin begins feeling faint.

Konstantin enters with his head bandaged from his suicide attempt. He asks his mother to change his bandages and there is an unusually tender moment between mother and son. For the first time in the play, Konstantin speaks lovingly to his mother, fondly remembering their past experiences. However, they soon begin to fight when talk turns to Trigorin. *"Why do you let him control you?"* Konstantin ends up crying about losing Nina's affection and Arkadina convinces him to call off the duel with Trigorin.

Trigorin enters musing over the inscription on the medallion that Nina gave him, *"Should you ever need my life, take it, it's yours."* Trigorin asks Arkadina to set him free so that he can pursue Nina. Arkadina is hurt and insulted and begs him not to leave, *"I won't survive if you leave me even for an hour – I'll go insane or die."* Seeing her so desperately pathetic he agrees to maintain their passionless relationship. *"I have no will, I never did. Spineless and gutless. How can women want that? Do what you*

*like with me. Just make sure you never let me out of your sight."*

However, as they prepare to leave the estate, Nina tells Trigorin that she is running away to Moscow to become an actress, *"I've made up my mind: I'm going on the stage! Leaving my father, my whole life here, starting fresh in the city. I'll see you in Moscow."* Trigorin gives her the name of his hotel and kisses her.

#### **ACT IV**

*Two years later.*

Medvedenko pleads with Masha to go home with him to their baby. She refuses as she is bored with her husband and family life. She still longs for Konstantin. Masha tells her mother that Medvedenko has been offered a teaching job in another district and they are to move away in a month.

We learn that Konstantin has gained some success as a writer. Sorin comes in looking frail and he laments the things he wanted to achieve, yet not achieved, *"When I was a young, I wanted to become an author. I never did. I wanted to be a great orator – bathed in sweat, etceter-ing away till I was booed off the stage. I wanted to marry – I didn't. And I always imagined I'd live in the city, now here I am about to croak in the country."* Dorn quickly dismisses Sorin's dismay, *"Pretty shabby, whining about your life at sixty-two."*

Dorn asks Konstantin about Nina and he explains that Nina and Trigorin's love affair soured. She became pregnant, but the child died and Trigorin lost interest in her. He recounts how she became an actress, starring in plays outside Moscow, but that she wasn't very successful. He used to see her perform, but she refused to see him, although she would send letters signing her name as The Seagull. Medvedenko mentions having seen her in town recently, but that her parents want nothing to do with her, even locking her out of her home.

Trigorin and Arkadina arrive from the train station. Trigorin carries a copy of Konstantin's story in a magazine. He tells him that he has many admirers in Moscow and St. Petersburg, *"They all imagine you're much older than you are. And because of your nom de plume they can't find out anything about you. You're a thrilling mystery."*

Medvedenko is still trying to get home, but Shamrayev won't lend him a horse. He heads out into the storm, *"I didn't mean to trouble you all, it's just, you know, the baby..."* He leaves while Arkadina and the others play a parlor game, all the while discussing Konstantin's work. Arkadina says, *"Can you believe it, I haven't yet read anything of his – I never have time!"*

Shamrayev tells Trigorin that the seagull that Konstantin shot long ago has been stuffed and mounted, just as Trigorin wished. Konstantin returns to work on his writing and the others leave for supper. Nina enters through the garden. Konstantin is surprised and happy to see her. Nina deliriously reflects about becoming an actress and her affair with Trigorin, *"I became small-minded and boring and couldn't act with any spirit."*

Konstantin once again declares his undying love for her, but still she does not return his affection. She calls herself 'The Seagull' and says that she loves Trigorin more than ever. She remembers how young and innocent she and Konstantin once were. and she repeats part of the monologue from his play. Then, she suddenly embraces him and runs away, exiting through the garden. Konstantin pauses a moment before tearing up all of his manuscripts and exiting.

Arkadina, Dr Dorn, Trigorin and others re-enter the study to continue playing lotto. A gun-shot is heard in the next room, startling everyone. Dorn says it is probably nothing. He peeks through the door, but tells Arkadina it was merely a burst bottle from his medicine case. Arkadina is greatly relieved. However Dorn takes Trigorin aside and delivers the final lines of the play: *"Get her out of here. He's shot himself."*

# Characters

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## **MASHA**

Is the daughter of the estate manager, Shamrayev on Sorin's farm. She wears black all the time because she is depressed and hates her life, *"I'm mourning my life."* She drinks heavily and is a snuff addict. She claims to be profoundly in love with Konstantin, however he pays no attention to her devotion. *"You don't know what it's like to love pointlessly, for years and years, waiting for something that will never come."*

She is pursued by the poor school teacher, Medvedenko, but she is critical and unsympathetic to him. Eventually, she begrudgingly marries him, but even though she has his child, she exhibits no motherly compassion, only boredom to the prospect of raising a family. Medvedenko pleads, *"Poor little thing, three nights without his mother,"* to which she replies, *"Boring!...now all I ever hear is home, baby, home, baby."*

She continues to love Konstantin, but concedes that she and her husband should move away so that she can forget. Ultimately Masha gives in to the disappointments in life and hopes of change by moving and forgetting.

## **PETER SORIN**

Is the frail sixty-year-old landowner of the estate where the play takes place. Sorin is wistful, nostalgic and wise. A former government employee, he lives a quiet and rather dissatisfying life in the country. He is Arkadina's brother and the uncle to Konstantin. He is disappointed in his own life as he never found love, or became a successful writer. He looks after Konstantin and asks his sister Arkadina to be easier on her son by giving him some praise and some money to help him.

As the play progresses his health begins to fail, falling asleep during conversations and suffering from fainting spells. Several times he mentions how he wants to hold onto life, but his doctor offers no remedy or sympathy. Sorin wants to go to the city, but never manages to leave his residence, and it seems clear he will soon die.

## **KONSTANTIN TRÉPLEV**

Is a tortured, young idealistic writer in his twenties. His mother, Arkadina is a famous actress who performs in melodramas, a form of theatre he despises. He believes in playwriting that expresses philosophy and an observation of mankind. His father was a working-class shopkeeper, but Konstantin reminds them he was also an actor. He desperately wants to be accepted by his mother, but lives in her shadow and that of her lover a successful writer, *"I am the nonentity at her soirees, all those famous artists tolerating me only because I was her son. Beyond that, who am I? I'm nobody."*

When we first meet him he is about to show his first play and he is anxious for it to be a success. However, his play is daring and abstract and his mother talks through the performance irritating and upsetting him. When he storms off she says, *"We're forced to sit here in the cold, being fumigated with sulphur, so we can learn about real theatre. I'm sick to death of his sarcasm and snide put-downs. He's a narcissistic, bad-tempered child."*



When Dorn tells Konstantin that he enjoyed the play and that he is a gifted writer, Konstantin bursts into tears and embraces him, Dorn brushes it off as ‘artistic temperament.’

Konstantin is in love with his neighbour, Nina and casts her in his play and introduces her to his mother and her boyfriend, Trigorin. Nina does not return his love, instead she is fascinated by Trigorin. Tortured by his unrequited love for Nina, and the ill-favoured reception of his play, he shoots a seagull and presents it to Nina. Between acts we discover that he attempted suicide.

By Act Four he has become a published writer, but he still pines for Nina’s affection, having followed her career. Even when she has lost Trigorin’s affections, she still doesn’t accept his advances, and this is the final catalyst for him to take his life.

### **IRINA ARKADINA**

Irina is a famous Russian actress who stars in grand, melodramatic plays. She is a middle-aged woman whose beauty and fame have passed their prime. She is the mother of Konstantin, the lover of Trigorin and the sister of Sorin. Konstantin says of her, *“I love my mother, I really do, but the life she lives makes me sick. Dragging her novelist-boyfriend around, her name in the socials pages, it’s disgusting. I know it’s selfish but I’ll admit it: I wish my mother were a normal woman rather than a famous actress – I’d be happier.”*

Arkadina’s arrival at Sorin’s country estate is the highlight of the year for the workers there and she theatrically demands her needs to them.

She is selfish, hypocritical, and self-serving and is skeptical, unsympathetic, noisy and demeaning when watching Konstantin’s play. She does nothing to support her son’s writing, admitting in Act Four that she has never read one of his stories. Knowing that Konstantin is obsessed with breaking away from traditional drama, she torments him by quoting Shakespeare.

She is incredibly vain, bragging about her youth and beauty, *“Masha’s twenty-two and I’m nearly twice that, who looks younger?”* Despite her vanity, she ends up begging her lover, Trigorin to stay. She flaunts her success, but claims she has no money to help her son or brother and she seeks contact attention and love from admirers, but not her own son. Arkadina is also a jealous character. She does not want her son to outshine her and does not want anyone to compliment Nina commenting, *“You’ve put on your sweetest dress and done your hair, just for us. But not too much praise, we’ll spoil you.”*

Arkadina only shows compassion a few times in the play, once to her son when she cares for his head wound; when she encourages Nina to be an actress; and at her brother Sorin’s dizzy spell and declining health.

### **NINA**

Is the beautiful nineteen year old neighbour of Konstantin. She is infatuated with famous people, such as Arkadina and novelist Trigorin and she desires to become an actress. Nina’s mother died when she was young and left her fortune to her husband. He remarried and put all of the money into her step-mother’s name and they treat Nina with contempt. She needs to wait until they are out of the house before she can venture out to be in Konstantin’s play.

Nina isn’t in love with Konstantin, only with the idea of fame, *“I wouldn’t care if my family and friends disowned me. I’d endure poverty, disillusionment; I’d live on bread and water; suffer the torture of knowing I’m not good enough. But in return, I’d demand fame, real resounding fame!”*

Trigorin captures her heart and takes her away to the city to be an actress. During the two years that pass between acts three and four, Nina becomes pregnant, loses the child, and is discarded by Trigorin who has grown bored of her. *“With our affair and all its worries, jealousies, constant fear for the baby, I became small-minded and boring.”* She continues to work as an actress, but is neither good nor successful.

She returns to home to discover that she is locked out of her home by her father and step-mother and she is wretched and confused. She begins referring to herself as ‘The Seagull’, the innocent bird that Konstantin shot and killed. Despite Konstantin professing his un-ending love for her, she still loves Trigorin and is heading back to the theatre. *“Now I’m a real actress. And when I act, I’m transported, alive with joy, and I know I’m magnificent.”*

### **BORIS TRIGORIN**

Is an esteemed Russian writer of fiction stories and novels. He is Arkadina’s lover and a member of the elite Russian intelligentsia and artistic community. He begins as a dutiful lover, but becomes tempted by the youthful beauty, optimism and flattery of Nina.

He is an obsessive- compulsive writer, aloof to the family and friends on the estate, preferring to observe his surroundings and go fishing. *“My moon is writing. It’s all I can think about. I’ve barely finished one story when I have to start a second, then a third, a fourth. I’m possessed.”*

Nina reminds him of his youth and invigorates him, but when he tells Arkadina that he’s leaving her, he finds her pathetic. *“Don’t you want me to be happy? I had no time for love when I was young, focused on my career, I thought I’d missed out, but finally here it is, within my grasp.”* Eventually he concedes to her wishes, *“I have no will, I never did. Spineless and gutless....I’m yours. Do what you like with me. Just make sure you never let me out of your sight.”*

He gives Nina his number in Moscow where they begin an affair, but he quickly tires of. He returns in Act IV with Konstantin’s play in a magazine, but its clear that he’s only read his own work. Konstantin says, *“He’s read his story – hasn’t even cut the pages of mine.”*

### **SEMYON MEDVEDENKO**

Is a local schoolteacher who is poor and must support his family at home. He is a boring conversationalist because he spends most of his time complaining about his poverty. Medvedenko pursues the melancholy Masha, eventually winning her hand in marriage, out of convenience, not love, and he sticks around even though she constantly criticises him.

Interestingly Chekhov’s writes about school teachers;

*“If you knew how badly the Russian village needs a nice, sensible, educated teacher! We ought in Russia to give the teacher particularly good conditions, and it ought to be done as quickly as possible. We ought to realize that without a wide education of the people, Russia will collapse, like a house built of badly baked bricks. A teacher must be an artist, in love with his calling; but with us he is a journeyman, ill educated, who goes to the village to teach children as though he were going into exile. He is starved, crushed, terrorized by the fear of losing his daily bread... It is ridiculous to pay in farthings the man who has to educate the people. It is intolerable that he should walk in rags, shiver with cold in damp and draughty schools, catch cold, and about the age of thirty get laryngitis, rheumatism, or tuberculosis.*

*We ought to be ashamed of it.”*

### **DR. EUGENE DORN**

Is a local country doctor and friend of Sorin and Arkadina. He was once popular with the ladies, including Arkadina, *“I’ve always got on well with women. You’ll remember that ten years ago, I was the only decent doctor around. They appreciated me. And I always behaved myself.”* Shamrayev’s wife, Polina is attracted to him, yet he neither encourages nor halts her pursuit. When Nina gives him a bouquet of flowers, Polina pretends to find them delightful, then jealously rips them to shreds.

Dorn often provides an outsider’s perspective to the audience by being an observer and commentator, confidant and witness. Unlike the other characters, he appreciates Konstantin’s writing style and tries to give him encouragement. He is one of the cheerful characters in the play, however exhibits a disturbing apathy with Sorin;

SORIN: *Am I not allowed to want to live?*

DORN: *Pointless. Everyone has to die.*

## **ILYA SHAMRAYEV**

Is the estate manager, but runs it as though he owns it and contradicts the owner's, (Sorin) authority. He is Masha's father and Polina's husband. He is cruel and unsympathetic to his daughter's admirer and later, husband, Medvedenko, and he is inattentive to his wife, Polina. Shamrayev constantly reminisces with Arkadina about theatre and deflates her ego when he asks about other actors and where they are now, *"How should I know? Who cares what's become of all those old farts"*, she says. His unending drone about how things used to be creates some comedic moments throughout the play.

## **POLINA ANDRYEVNA**

Is the mother of Masha and the wife of Shamrayev. She is extremely unhappy in her loveless marriage, and is often embarrassed by Shamrayev. *"Something like this happens every day. I can't take much more of his coarseness, look: I'm so upset I'm trembling."* She is in love with Dorn, but is jealous and unsatisfied by his aloof affection for her. *"Let's be together. We don't have much time left, let's spend our last few years free of lying and hiding... There are other women. Well, you can't have all of us, can you?"*

Polina sees her own misery in her daughter's unrequited love for Konstantin and how she's compromised by marrying Medvedenko. She encourages Konstantin to pay attention to Masha out of pity.

# Themes

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The themes in Chekhov's writing are so important that they become the driving force throughout his plays. He develops the emotions and outlooks of the characters, capturing the between moments in life.

Nicholas Moravcevic states,

*"Instead of encumbering his plays with an elaborate progression of events and piling up of external intrigue, Chekhov concentrates on revealing to the spectator the effect of a single theme upon the thoughts and emotions of a group of characters finely drawn and tightly inter-related. This theme or idea he usually introduces early in the play and then keeps it alive through the subtle utilisation of a particular symbolising device which, interwoven into the general stream of the everyday conversation, manages through association to imbue even the most trivial bit of dialogue with a deep and significant dimension far beyond its ordinary meaning."*

## UNREQUITED LOVE

*"Essentially the characters love too much in the wrong direction."* – Geordie Brookman

*The Seagull* is a play of hopelessly misplaced love or desire. Many of the characters want love from others, who are either indifferent or have emotional commitments elsewhere. There are no happy liaisons in the play, and so the characters are at times comically miserable. The amount of unrequited love in the play seems to entertain the idea that love for most people is unfulfilled.

Medvedenko loves Masha, but Masha loves Konstantin. Konstantin doesn't love Masha, but he loves Nina. Nina starts the play with Konstantin, but she falls madly in love with Trigorin. Arkadina loves Trigorin, but loses his affections to Nina returning to Arkadina out of routine. Polina loves Dorn, even though she is married to Shamrayev. Dorn enjoys Polina's attention, but doesn't return her affections.

These unrequited lovers represent different stages of life and love and as such serve as parallels or mirrors of others. The clearest parallel is that of Polina and Masha. Masha marries Medvedenko even though she's in love with Konstantin, mirroring her mother's unhappy marriage to Sharmrayev.

## HOPE

Nina begins the play with enthusiasm, hope, fear, and faith in Konstantin's ideas. However, after his play receives a poor reception she claims she did not understand the play. Meeting Arkadina boosts her confidence and she decides to become an actress. She falls for Trigorin and moves to Moscow to pursue her career and be with Trigorin. By the end of the play though, she loses her enthusiasm, hope, Trigorin, a baby and finds that her father and stepmother locked her out of their home.

Trigorin hopes that the attention of young Nina will invigorate him to experience his youth, as he feels that his writing has gotten in the way of his life and he missed these youthful experiences. However, he is fleeting in his feelings for Nina and soon discards her in Moscow.

Konstantin, on the other hand, cannot make writing do what he wants it to do. He cannot capture his hopes or his dreams. He feels he can write nothing but clichés. When Nina returns he hopes to capture her love, but unfortunately she is still pining for Trigorin and dismisses his affection.

## EVERYDAY LIFE

Chekhov emphasizes the ordinary experiences in life, including the mundane. The setting on Sorin's estate provides an inactive backdrop for the characters to explore their thoughts and opinions on life and themselves as they pass the time telling each other stories and dreams.

Life continues in its mundane manner for many of the characters. Konstantin, although becoming a successful writer is still gloomy, unfulfilled and in love with Nina. Masha married Medvedenko and had a child, but she finds this tiresome and boring. Polina is still in an unhappy marriage.

Although Nina has become an actress, she isn't happy in her career, she still pines after Trigorin and feels that she has no place in the world. Arkadina and Trigorin are still together, probably more out of familiarity than anything else.

Dorn expresses aggravation for spending his life as a doctor always on call, without a vacation, and at the mercy of others' need, but unlike the others, he expresses regret without self-pity.

## EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

Many of the characters question their life and whether it has any purpose or value. Masha hates her life and sniffs snuff and drinks heavily to hide from her pain and disappointment, "*I am mourning for my life.*" She sets the initial tone of the play, lamenting her life, as so many of the others do. She never breaks out of this lot in life, marrying Medvedenko out of boredom, not love, so she continues to be bored and depressed, and still yearns for the love of Konstantin.

An ill Sorin questions his life and its meaning, not having accomplished any of his passions for writing or in finding a wife. He debates the quality of his life with Dr. Dorn, who offers no sympathy. Because of his regrets, he understands Konstantin's frustration at not fulfilling his goals.

Konstantin thinks he is talented and creative, but does not have a precise goal in mind. He tries to win the affection of both his mother and Nina, but loses Nina to Trigorin and his works fails to impress his mother. Although he manages to become a published writer, he still isn't happy and feels that his life isn't worth living without Nina.

Nina pursues meaning in her life, believing she will find her identity by becoming an actress. She settles into a mediocre career believing that endurance is nobler than success and continues to pine after Trigorin, even though he has dismissed her.

Trigorin questions the meaning of his life at the prospect of an affair with Nina. The allure of a young woman forces him to think about how he's lost his youth by being preoccupied with his writing. He selfishly pleads with Arkadina to allow him to be with Nina so that he can relive his youth. He feels that his future will only have meaning if he has an affair with Nina, but unfortunately he quickly tires of this too.

## THE ARTIST IN LOVE

Chekhov doesn't write his characters as all good or all evil, instead he writes so that we sympathise and question their actions and words. He depicts all four characters, Arkadina, Trigorin, Konstantin and Nina as artists in love. They all pursue art because it boosts their ego by being admired and respected for their work. Konstantin longs for admiration for his talents, hoping that his mother and Nina will love him if he's successful. However, neither of them admire his work, with his mother later admitting that she's never read his writing.

Arkadina and Nina romanticize acting. Arkadina uses her identity as an actress to gain admiration and excuse her vanity. Nina endows acting with nobility, sacrifice and privilege.

Trigorin has the satisfaction of success in his writing, but he is never satisfied, always starting a new story once the old one is finished. He pursues Nina because he feels he might fill the void he felt missing out on his youth to pursue his career.

In some sense the satisfaction these characters obtain from being artists becomes equivalent with their feeling of being loved.



# Symbols

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‘Symbolism’ refers the use of an idea, person or object to represent an idea. Symbols may have meaning in themselves, but can also have a deeper hidden meaning. Chekhov uses symbolism to tell the audience something important, without spelling it out. This allows the audience to find the deeper meaning behind his characters’ speech and action.

## THE SEAGULL

The seagull is used as a symbol throughout the play, forming different meaning depending on the time and situation. In Act One, Nina uses a seagull to describe the way she is drawn to the lake of her childhood home, *“I’m drawn here like a seagull to the lake.”* In this case, the seagull represents freedom and security.

In Act Two, Konstantin makes his entrance carrying a seagull he has just shot and killed and gives it to Nina saying, *“I sank low enough to shoot this gull today. In tribute to you.”* He then mimes shooting himself in the temple saying that one day he’ll be dead in Nina’s honour, just like the seagull. She responds with, *“You talk in symbols – this seagull’s another one. How am I supposed to know what you mean? Sorry, I’m not clever enough.”*

Trigorin notices the dead seagull in Nina’s hand and almost predicting his liason with her, says *“Young girl who’s grown up on this lake, like you. Loves it, like the gulls do, and is as carefree as they are. Then one day a man comes and destroys her because he has nothing better to do – like this bird.”*

For both men the seagull is an object for their intellectual, emotional and artistic needs.

Later when Dorn asks Konstantin about Nina he mentions that she wrote her letters to him singed, *“The Seagull.”* When she returns to the estate she calls herself the seagull then corrects herself, *“I’m a seagull – yes, but – no.”*

The seagull initially means freedom and hope, but becomes a symbol of dependence and finally destruction at the hands of a loved one. The seagull foreshadows the characters and fulfills its prophecy destroying Nina’s hope and Konstantin kills himself at the end of the play when she still does not return his love.

## THE LAKE

*The Seagull* is set around a lake, which is spoken about by various characters. The lake means several different things. It is a place of reflection, respite and escape. It connects characters fondly to events in the past, but due to the inconsistency of memories things remembered weren’t exactly as they were, so the lake is also becomes a symbol of fantasy.

Nina is drawn to the lake as it reminds her of her childhood, and represents curiosity and exploration of her youth. *“I’ve spent my whole life by this lake. I know every one of those little islands.”* She feels secure and like a home it draws her back near the end of the play when she feels all is lost.

The lake also represents nature. Trigorin goes to the lake to fish, brood and reflect and is a way of getting back to nature. *“I love fishing. Nothing makes me happier than sitting on the shore, at sunset, watching my lure bobbing.”* And then later he says, *“I love all this: lake, trees, sky. Nature inspires me.”*

Konstantin uses the lake as a metaphor telling Nina, *“Your sudden coldness towards me is completely shocking, I can’t believe it – like waking up to find this lake had vanished into the ground.”* To him, losing

her affection feels like losing a recognizable place, a place of peace and renewal.

The lake is also mentioned in an ethereal way. Trigorin says, *“Look at that lake, isn’t it perfection? What a magical place to live.”* Dorn also mentions the lake when he tells Masha, *“The lake’s bewitching you all.”*

### **PLAY-WITHIN-A-PLAY**

Konstantin and Trigorin are rivals in writing. Konstantin’s play is full of symbolism and imagery and shows his beliefs; in theatre, himself, the world and other people. The point of his theatre isn’t to show real life, but the life we see in dreams. The disapproval of his mother and the need to break out of her shadow makes him write a different form of theatre from hers. In his play he uses images of the absence of animals, plants and the emptiness of the world, as well as a demon with horrific breath. The demon symbolises what Konstantin is fighting against – the old theatre verses the new. His heroine, Nina, rises above the decay of the material world.

Trigorin’s writing never satisfies him. Once he completes a story, he starts a new one. He is also constantly observing and noting the goings-on around him. Much like his character, he is fleeting with his feelings and is constantly trying to fill a void from his youth, which he thinks he’ll find with the youthful Nina.

### **OFF-STAGE ACTION**

Many of the major events take place off stage, including; marriage, birth, death, lovers uniting and breaking up. Masha’s marriage to Medvedenko and the birth of their son; Trigorin and Nina’s affair, the birth and death of their child, Nina becoming an actress, and Konstantin becoming a published writer.

If these events occurred onstage the play could possibly turn into a melodrama and would be another hour or so longer. Chekhov was more interested in the way these major events effected the characters and those around them.

When Konstantin professes his undying love to Nina, even though she still loves Trigorin, the audience empathise when she turns him down. Particularly as the audience know the events leading up to this moment including; how badly Trigorin treated Nina; and how much Konstantin loves her. The sound of the gun shot becomes meaningful to the audience, because we understand why he killed himself. The suicide becomes about his character’s inner thoughts, not a spectacle onstage.

# Style of Play

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## TRAGEDY

*“It is life itself on stage with all its tragic alliances, eloquent thoughtlessness and silent sufferings – the sort of everyday life that is accessible to everyone and understood in its cruel internal irony by almost no one, the sort of life that is so accessible and close to us.” - Anatoly Koni*

The central tragedy is that despite the events of the play and the affect this has on characters, life goes on. Unrequited love exists, but many of the characters settle for another. Their dreams are shattered, but they still go about normal life, and no-one seems to be able to break out of this tragic cycle of events.

Even when Konstantin commits suicide, it does not have a full dramatic force as they dispose of the body before his mother sees it. With Dorn telling Trigorin, “*Get her out of her. He’s shot himself.*” Then, the curtain falls and the play ends.

## COMEDY

Bang! A gunshot is heard from offstage. The characters on stage are startled, frightened. Their pleasant game of cards has come to a screeching halt. Dorn peeks into the adjoining room and calmly returns to whisper to Trigorin to take Arkadina away as her son has just shot himself. The audience know that the troubled young writer Konstantin has committed suicide, and that his mother will be grief-stricken by the end of the evening. But the curtain closes as they play cards, oblivious to tragedy.

Yet *The Seagull* is a comedy. How, why, did I miss something?

Even though *The Seagull* is a drama with realistic events, believable characters and unhappy outcomes, there is an undercurrent of humour beneath the surface of the play. The characters create their own misery, particularly in the absurdity of love, feeling desperate, lonely and self-absorbed, which is where much of the humour lies.

Masha’s in love with Konstantin, but we never see her flirt, enchant or seduce him, choosing instead to sulk. Despite all of the emotional harm Nina has received from Trigon, she still loves him. How can she love a man that has stolen her innocence and cause so much pain? The humour lies in her naivety and her terrible judge of character. Arkadina begs for Trigorin to stay with her, even getting down on her knees, needing the love of Trigorin to make her whole. Dorn the only character aware of the unrequited love simmering within the characters around him blames it on the enchantment of the lake.

In Act IV, Sorin decides that his life would make a worthy short story. He served in the Justice Department for twenty-eight years, which afforded him a large, beautiful estate by a lake, however he takes no pleasure in his country home. His own employee controls the farm and he is almost imprisoned by his own servants. This is Chekhov’s observation of the upper-class being at the mercy of the tyrannical working class.

Arkadina is a drama queen and her personality and comments lend themselves to comedy. She has an enormously inflated ego, yet is terribly insecure. She interjects in her son's play saying things like, *"It's that kind of play. What's that smell – sulphur? Oh, the production values!"* and then wonders why Konstantin runs off. She brags about her youth and beauty, but begs Trigorin to stay in their relationship by dropping to her knees dramatically saying, *"My joy, my life, my heaven! I won't survive if you leave me even for an hour – I'll go insane and die."* She flaunts her success, but claims to have no money to help her son or brother. She loves her son, yet won't even read his writing or give him a compliment. She is annoyed by Shamrayev talking about other actors retorting, *"Who cares what's become of all those old farts?"* This banter between them allows for many comedic moments as Arkadina responds.

It may not be a hearty laugh but the humour is bubbling away and Chekhov intends the tragedy and comedy to be balanced in the play.





# Design

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## DESIGNERS

### GEOFF COBHAM - SET & LIGHTING DESIGNER

Geoff is a State Theatre Company Artistic Associate (Design and Production) and has worked as a Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Set Designer, Event Producer and Venue Designer. Recent set & lighting designs include; For State Theatre Company: *Hedda Gabler*, *The Kruetzer Sonata*. For Force Majeure: *Never Did Me Any Harm*, *Not In A Million Years*, *The Age I'm In*, *Already Elsewhere*, *Same Same but Different*. For Tanya Leitke: *Construct*. For Slingsby: *Ode to Nonesense*, *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy*, *Wolf*, *Man Coverts Bird*. For Patch Theatre: *Fastest Boy*, *Emily loves to Bounce*, *Me and My Shadow*, For State Opera of SA: *The Flying Dutchman*.

Recent lighting designs include; For State Theatre Company: *Babyteeth*, *Speaking in Tongues*, *romeo & juliet*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *Metro Street*, *The Goat*, *Night Letters*. For Australian Dance Theatre: *G*, *Vocabulary*, *Nothing*. For Brink: *Beetle Graduation*, *Skip Miller*, *The Hypochondriac*, *Drums in the Night*, *This Uncharted Hour*, *The Duckshooter*. For Leigh Warren & Dancers: *Not according to plan*, *Impulse*, *Stayagraha*, *Einstein on the Beach Pt 1&2*, *Quick Brown Fox*, *Ahknaten*. For Restless Dance Theatre: *Salt*, *Landmark*, *Rebel Rebel*, *Starry Eyed*, *In The Blood*. For Windmill: *Pinocchio*, *Plop*, *Wizard of Oz*.

He has produced many outdoor events and clubs for Festivals and received a Churchill fellowship in 2010 to study outdoor theatre in Europe.

### AILSAL PATERSON - COSTUME DESIGNER

Ailsa completed the Bachelor of Dramatic Art in Design (NIDA) in 2003. Theatre design credits include *Seminar and Skylight* (Ensemble), *You, Me and the Bloody Sea* (Adelaide Cabaret Festival 2013), *Ode to Nonsense* (Costume Design, Slingsby/State Opera of SA), *Hedda Gabler*, *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*, *War Mother*, *The Ham Funeral*, *Three Sisters* (Costume Design), *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, *The Price and The Cripple of Inishmaan* (State Theatre Company), *Shining City* (Griffin Theatre Company), *Hansel and Gretel* and *La Sonnambula* (Pacific Opera), *Faustus* and *Madame Melville* (BSharp), *Vampirella*, *The Internationalist* and *Bone* (Darlinghurst Theatre), *A Couple of Blaguards* (Seymour Centre/Comedy Theatre), *Shifted* (Sydney Dance Company) and *Debris* (Old Fitz /Melbourne Fringe). Ailsa worked in costume on *The Straits* (ABC), *LAID* (ABC), *Underbelly – A Tale of Two Cities*, *Underbelly – The Golden Mile*, *Blue Water High*, *The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce*, *Ten Empty*, *The Boy from Oz* Arena Spectacular, *Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert The Musical* and *High School Musical*.

Ailsa received the 2011 Mike Walsh Fellowship.



## SET DESIGN

Designer, Geoff Cobham and Director, Geordie Brookman wanted to create an unencumbered space where the audience could be close and connect with the piece. They came up with the idea to use a traverse stage.

This design has a central runway with a world created partly from the existing workshop and using props from previous productions. Their ideal was to continue the feel of the raw rehearsal room experience where you were close to the action and felt the immediacy and theatricality of the piece. Although they have loosely based it on 1950s Russia, it is a time of transition, where everything has a worn and lived in feel.

At one end sits the lake with light bouncing off mirrors to create its effect. The floor is made of end grains of wood, like a cobblestone, giving a feeling of being hand made and worn. There is a stage at one end for the play within a play with a curtain.

Act I is set at sunset and a bank of 30 lights at one end of the stage help create the illusion of the sunset. Act II has a bench as scenery, with 35 ceiling lights that create the feel of the midday sun, bright and warm. Act III is indoors, again with minimal set pieces, just a card table and a rug, with lighting again creating a warm glow to the room.

Act IV is set in winter. We are in the same room as before, but it has been turned into a study for Konstantin. In the overhead lighting there are circular fluorescent globes, creating a cold wintery feel.

## COSTUME DESIGN

There is a clear distinction between the characters from the city, Arkadina and Trigorin, and those from the country. The characters from the country have a worn, lived in, not yet updated by 1950s styling. Arkadina dresses to impress and intimidate, where as characters such as Masha and Polina are poor and dressed more for comfort.

There are also differences from the beginning of the play, such as; Nina dressed as young and hopeful before returning in Act IV, destroyed and cynical. Essentially some of 'life' leaves everyone between Act II and IV and this is reflected in the costuming.

## TRAVERSE STAGE

Is a form of stage in which the audience is predominantly on two sides of the stage, facing towards each other, also known as an alley or corridor stage. Sometimes the stage may end in audience, making it similar to a thrust stage, particularly popular for fashion parades.

Although a traverse stage is intimate and uses the audience to create effect, there are many design and directing challenges. Actors need greater projection, particularly as they often turn their back on half the audience and every action needs to be visible to both sides of the audience. When designing the staging needs to be limited so as not to block sight lines across the stage, and lighting can cast shadows over the actors' faces.

# Interesting Reading

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## REALISM

*“Any idiot can face a crisis - it's day to day living that wears you out.”*

*- Chekhov*

Realism is the representation of real life, complete with complex nuances and trivialities, set upon the stage. Playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov were of the belief that the set should reflect real-life environments, allowing actors to behave as if their characters were real people and the script exposed human issues in a natural way.

Before Realism, plays had a simple plot structure and certain actors were repeatedly cast in the same role, which created predictable stereotypes and formulaic scripts. Creators of Realism strived to represent the life of common people and situations.

Realism began in the 19th Century and has been dominant for the last 120 years. It began as an experiment to make theatre more useful to society, as theatre up until this time consisted of melodramas, spectacle plays, comic operas, and vaudevilles.

Realism shows people moving and talking in a manner similar to that of our everyday behaviour and that the stage is an environment, rather than as an acting platform.

Realism's early phase was Romanticism, which had its roots in the 1790's with works by Goethe (*Faust*) and Schiller (*William Tell*). Romanticism in contrast, is known for exotic locales and swashbuckling heroes. As the 19th Century progressed elements such as social and political ideas and theatrical innovations helped bring Realism to the theatre.

Three major developments helped lead to the emergence of realism and helped open the door for theatre that would be different from what had come before.

1. August Comte (1798-1857) considered to be the “Father of Sociology.”, developed a theory known as Positivism, which encouraged understanding of the cause and effect of nature.
2. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published *The Origin of Species* in 1859. This suggested that life developed gradually from common ancestry and that life favoured “survival of the fittest.”
3. Karl Marx (1818-1883) started a political philosophy arguing against urbanization in favour of a more equal distribution of wealth.

By the end of the 19th century, science and technology had infiltrated the lives of ordinary people. Edison had discovered the electric lights so that stages that had been lit with gas, were now lit with the electric light.

Sigmund Freud had uncovered the unconscious mind and Chekhov drew on Freud's theories to expose the workings of the human mind and his characters took on a three dimensionality unseen on stage before.

The proscenium arch was used to frame the stage and capture a moment in time. Actors and their environment become ‘a slice of life’, similar to a photograph.

Realism involved the direct observation of human behaviour using contemporary settings and time periods, and dealt with everyday life and problems and led to the technique called 'method acting'. Truth and accuracy became the goals of many Realists.

Henrik Ibsen used props and set design as marks for a character's behaviour. His characters decorate Christmas trees, dust the mantel and crotchet. His child characters are often melancholy instead of cheerful, or have a disability.

Swedish playwright, August Strindberg demanded that his sets be real and that a door should be able to slam shut. His belief was that the audience should have a true experience of seeing, hearing and viewing the proper action of the play.

Chekhov used ordinary conversations, pauses, non communication, inaction and incomplete thoughts to reveal the truth behind trivial words and daily life. There is always a division between the outer appearance and the inner currents of thoughts and emotions. His characters belong often to the provincial middle class, petty aristocracy, or landowners of pre-revolutionary Russia. They contemplate their unsatisfactory lives, unable to make decisions or to help themselves when a crisis breaks out.

### **Suggested plays**

- *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand
- *A Doll's House, Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen
- *The Cherry Orchard, The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov
- *The Weavers* by Gerhardt Hauptmann
- *Ah Wilderness, Mourning Becomes Electra, Desire Under the Elms, The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O'Neill
- *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams
- *American Buffalo* by David Mamet

### **Features of Realism**

- Influenced by the emergence of psychology as a study.
- The most dominant form of theatre in the last 100 years.
- Sought to create drama without conventions or abstractions.
- Renounced idealised or pretty settings, contrived endings, stylised costumes and performances.
- Likeness to life is the general goal as is the creation of believable characters and situations in which they find themselves.
- Audience suspension of disbelief.

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY DRAMA AND THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

At the end of the 19th century, Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko wanted to reform Russian theatre from the melodramas that were dominant at the time to more naturalistic theatre. Outside of Shakespeare, melodrama was the primary form of theatre during the 19th century. Melodramas used music to increase emotions and portray characters, they presented a simplified moral universe; good and evil were embodied in stock characters and it exploited special effects such as; fires, explosions, drowning, and earthquakes.

Stanislavski and Nemirovich set about creating a private theatre over which they had total control. Stanislavski's approach to theatre revolved around the acting process, and Nemirovich was concerned with the literary, intellectual angle, which complimented each other well.

Their theatre, implemented Stanislavski's system and proved hugely influential in the acting world and in the development of modern theatre. His system enabled actors to perform realistically in any sort of role and situation, emphasising the psychological and emotional aspects of acting. The Stanislavski System held that an actor's main responsibility was to be believed—rather than recognised or understood.



He earned international acclaim as an actor, director, and coach and his theories are still the primary source of study for many actors.

The Art Theatre's first season included works by Aleksey Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, and William Shakespeare, but it wasn't until it staged Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in 1898, with Stanislavski in the role of Trigorin, that the theatre achieved fame. This production was so successful that the theatre adopted the seagull as its emblem and began a long association with Chekhov.

### RUSSIA'S HISTORY IN CONTEXT

Between the seventeenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century, Russia was divided into two major social classes. At the top were aristocrats and land owners. At the bottom were huge numbers of serfs, who were poor almost to the extent of being slaves. The majority of these serfs worked on the land and could be bought or sold just like property by their land owners.

The great revolutions in America and France in the late 1700s were uprisings of "common" men intent on throwing off hereditary rule and establishing freedom and equality. In Russia, this movement resulted in nominal freedom for the serfs in 1861. Though their status had changed, their lives remained desperate, with no financial resources at their disposal. Many serfs stayed and worked on the same land they always had; but now, rather than being housed and fed, they were faced with having to pay rent and living on the meagre income they earned farming.

At the end of the nineteenth century, over eighty percent of the people of Russia were classified as peasants. There was little mobility among the classes, unless you joined the military, where it was possible for someone of modest birth to rise in class.



Russian revolutionaries tried to use assassinations to provoke change and destroy the government and kill the tsar to end the monarchy. They succeeded in assassinating Tsar\* Alexander II in 1881, however, the assassination sparked a severe crackdown on all forms of revolution. When Nicholas II, the last of the Romanovs became tsar in 1894, the Russian people were poised for conflict. The majority of the population were unhappy slaves and overtaxed workers. The rest were the aristocracy, to which the tsar belonged and empathised. The old model of Russian society began to crumble and the voices of dissent





grew louder. Conditions became worse when crop failures resulted in country-wide food shortages.

During this tumultuous time in Russia's history, Anton Chekhov wrote *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Through his writing, he did what he could to express the attitudes and feelings of people with which he shared his country, his culture, and his life.

In 1904, the Tsar declared war on Japan, but unprepared for this type of engagement, they suffered a humiliating defeat. The war put an even larger strain on the country's economy and limited food resources.

On January 22, 1905, approximately 200,000 workers and their families followed Russian Orthodox priest Georgy

A. Gapon in a protest to the Winter Palace. Palace guards opened fire and killed around 300 people and as the crowd scattered, police pursued them on horseback, continuing to fire on them. Many in the crowd were trampled to death in the ensuing panic. Estimates of the total death toll range from a few hundred to several thousand. As the news of "Bloody Sunday" spread, the Russian people were horrified. They responded by striking, mutinying, and fighting in peasant uprisings. The Russian Revolution of 1905 had begun.

Tsar Nicholas II tried to end the revolution by making concessions, the most significant of which were granting personal liberties and the creation of a parliament. Although this appeased the majority of the Russian people, Nicholas II never gave up any power constantly undermining the parliament.

He also empowered his prime minister, Petr Stolypin, to eliminate the threat of terror by establishing quick military trials, promptly followed by public hangings. Thousands were executed over the next several years.

Nicholas's wife, Alexandra, began consulting with self-proclaimed monk, Rasputin in a desperate attempt to help her haemophilic son, Alexis. Rasputin gained political influence over the tsar. Nicholas drew Russia into World War I, causing inflation, and plunging the country into food shortage and cost the lives of nearly 5 Russian soldiers and civilians.

The war was the final straw for the Russian people. Rasputin was assassinated and within three months, Russia would be without a monarch for the first time in its history.

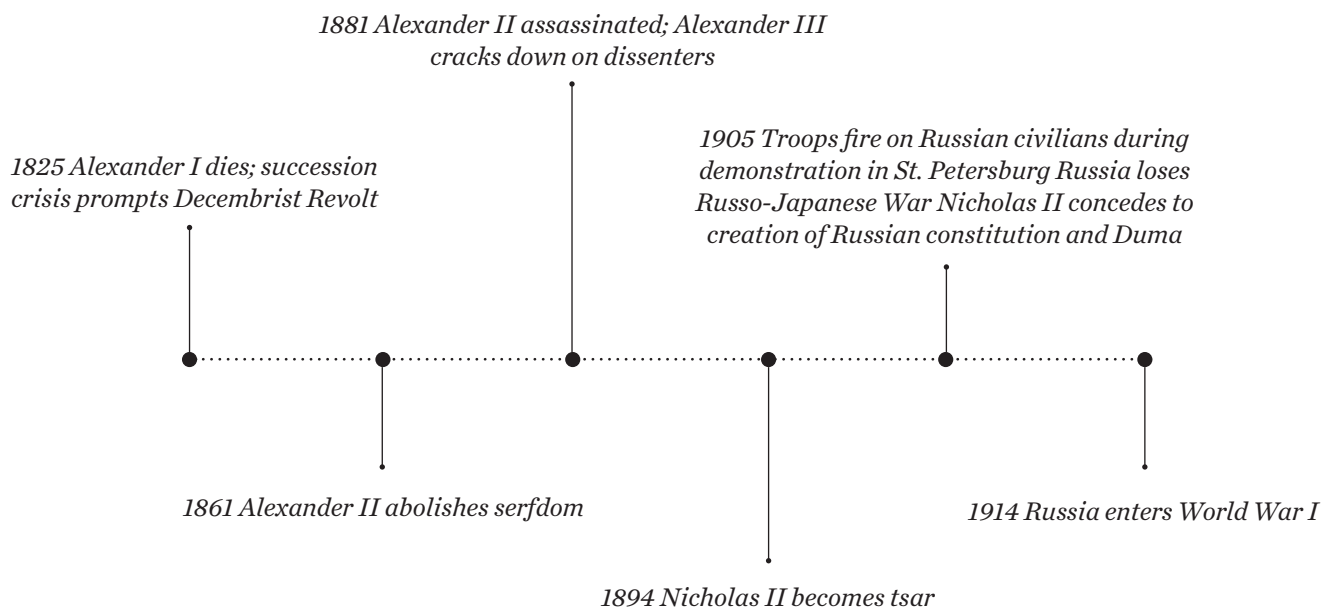
In 1917 the Tsarist autocracy was dismantled and the Russian SFSR was formed. Nicholas II was forced to abdicate and was replaced by a provisional government. In October, the Provisional Government was removed and replaced with a Communist government led by Vladimir Lenin. His party appointed themselves as leaders of various government ministries and seized control of the countryside, and ended Russia's participation in the First World War.

Nicholas II and his family were imprisoned first in the Alexander Palace, then in Tobolsk and finally in Yekaterinburg. The Bolsheviks feared that the tsar or any of his family members would be considered the legitimate rule of Russian and so Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, his children and several of his servants were executed in 1918.

(\*Tsar is a title used to designate certain European Slavic monarchs or supreme rulers.)



## TIMELINE



### 1950S LIFE IN USSR



The current production of *The Seagull* is loosely set in 1950s Russia. This was a tumultuous time in the country's history as there was political upheaval, starvation and destruction of property across the cities and countryside.

However, similarly to Beckett but with a different stylistic approach, Chekhov was able to remove his characters from a sense of literal space and time more effectively focussing the audiences' attention on the mess of personal relationships.

In terms of research, the director, designer and actors have read about Russia in the 1950s. The position of Arkadina and Trigorin is based on the *nomenklature*, in which some Russian artists and bureaucrats were afforded special status. Konstantin sits at the crest of a wave of ideological and intellectual change that is about to sweep the country.

The rest of the historical events whilst interesting, are not a major theme of the production.

### Below is a brief explanation of Post World War II under Stalin

At the end of the war, many people saw the Soviet Union as a mighty power, ambitious and ready for new conquests. In fact, the country had been devastated and its main goal was to reimpose discipline and order at home after millions of their citizens had been exposed to foreign influences.

The war stretched the resources of the country to the furthest limits. The human losses were huge, with estimates of around 26 – 27 million citizens dying. Of these, 8 1/2 million soldiers died on the battlefields, several million became prisoners of war and died, others died of enemy bombardment, starvation and cold, mass executions carried out by the Nazis, or were victims of Stalinist terror.

Recovery of the countryside was slow to rebuild, with many people starving due to disastrous harvests. Living standards also took a long time to improve, as entire cities had been destroyed and 25



*Stalin*

million people left homeless. Conversely, the recovery of industry was impressively quick with Soviet authorities assuming that giant sized industry was superior and modern. The secret police was established and encouraged people to inform on neighbours and work mates.

Stalin's control over Russia meant that freedom was lost. The people of Russia had to read what the state allowed, see what the state allowed and listen to what the state allowed. The state's control of the media was total. Those who attempted to listen or read anything else were severely punished. Stalin cultivated a surrogate ideology of hero worship, with pictures glorifying him and poems and novels written about him. This idealised image bore little resemblance to the historical figure, as he became isolated from Soviet reality.

Education was strictly controlled by the state, books were censored, children were taught how to be a good communists and Church leaders were arrested and churches shut down.

Artists were told not to focus on personal problems, such as love and jealousy, but depict the world as seen by the Stalin regime. Writing of novels and music was restricted and film-making was almost obliterated. Soviet cinemas showed earlier films 're-captioned' to make them suitable. The consequences of resisting were devastating with many of Russia's most talented people murdered or imprisoned.

The disciplines of sociology and political science did not exist, and modern history writing became distorted. Einstein's relativity theory was labeled as 'Jewish' science and dismissed.

Millions of Soviet citizens had seen the Western life and saw that the standard of living was better, so the Stalinists called for vigilance concerning any contact with the West. No citizen could travel abroad, and no one was allowed to marry a foreigner. They murdered many Jews, including several doctors and they claimed all major scientific achievements as their own.

When Stalin suffered a stroke and died in 1953, the uncertainty of Russia's future was frightening and people genuinely mourned the tyrant's passing. His body was put on display at the House of the Trade Unions in Moscow and hundreds of thousands of Moscovites came to take their last look at the body.

Immediately after Stalin's death Soviet intellectual life experienced a period that was called the 'thaw' led by Khrushchev. By the mid-1950s many of the old restrictions were lifted, however artists could still get into serious trouble if they offended the regime. Political prisoners in the camps were freed and millions returned to their homes. Agricultural reforms were made and Khrushchev worked on reducing the inequality between workers and peasants. The explosion of the first Soviet hydrogen bomb in 1952 demonstrated that the Soviet Union was a major power. However, they unwisely backed Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro placing intermediate-range missiles in Cuba, but the US was stronger and more defiant in their attack.

Unfortunately many of Khrushchev's reforms were ill considered, inadequately prepared and rushed, which ultimately created more problems than they solved. In 1964 he was freed from power.



*Nicholas II*

# Curriculum

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## ENGLISH QUESTIONS

1. Why does Chekhov reference Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*? Compare the similarities between the two plays.
2. Why do you think Chekhov presents ordinary characters in ordinary situations?
3. What does *The Seagull* say about Love? Fame? Regret?
4. Why do you think so many of the characters desire those they cannot have? Why do you think they don't act on their feelings?
5. Why do you think Chekhov ended the play before the audience is able to witness Arkadina discovering her son's death?
6. What does the dead seagull symbolize?
7. What major events happen offstage? Why do you think Chekhov chose to keep these events offstage?
8. Are the themes and values of this play relevant today or are they outdated?
9. Is Arkadina a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
10. How does Nina change over the course of the play?
11. Why is Masha in the play? What does her character contribute to the story and our understanding of the major characters?
12. What types of relationships are repeated in the play and why is this important?
13. Compare and contrast *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull*. How does Chekhov employ the symbol of the title in each of these plays? What themes and motifs resonate between the plays?
14. Is Trigorin a villain? Why or why not?
15. How is comedy used in this play and why did Chekhov choose to use comedy in this exploration of such bleak themes?

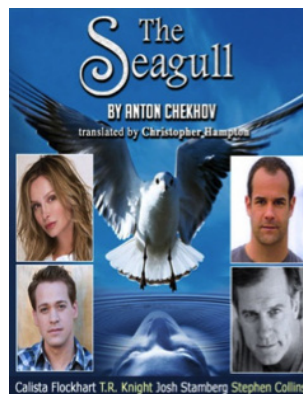
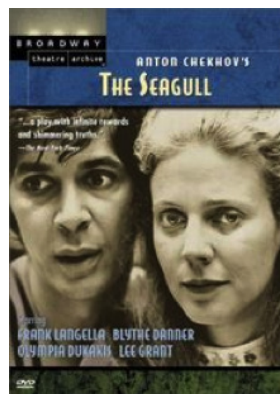
## DRAMA QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Chekov's notion to write major events off-stage. What effect does this create on the play's structure and its on-stage portrayal?
2. Choose one event or circumstance from the play and discuss how it furthers the emotional journey of the characters.
3. What choices did the designers make and how did you feel they added to the production? Think about set, costume & lighting
4. There have been many modern adaptations of *The Seagull* since it was written in 1900. What do you think would be lost or gained in a contemporary version of this play?
5. What are the challenges of Traverse staging? How did this design approach work in this instance?
6. How does the weather reflect the events of the play at the three different, specific moments?

## PERFORMANCE

1. Create a series of scenes that show what happens to each of the characters a year after the play has ended.
2. Take a scene from *The Seagull* and rewrite this with a contemporary slant in an Australian context.

## DESIGN TASK



Above are some of the images from past productions of *The Seagull*. Think about the story each poster presents and in your opinion how this relates to the show. Using your knowledge of the show, design a poster for a production of *The Seagull*. Write a journal of the challenges and inspirations behind your design.

# Immediate Reactions

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After viewing the play set aside time for class discussion. Consider the following aspects of the play, and record them into your journal.

	PRODUCTION ELEMENTS	PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS
STRENGTHS		
IMPACT ON AUDIENCE		
WEAKNESSES		



# Design Roles

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For each of the following design roles, explain using three specific examples, how each role added meaning to the action or your understanding of context, theme or other aesthetic understandings of the drama event.

DESIGN ROLE	TECHNIQUE	WHAT DID THIS CONTRIBUTE TO THE PERFORMANCE?
LIGHTING	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	
MUSIC	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	

# Further Resources

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*\*Web links were active when preparing this guide*

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