



ALBERTA THEATRE PROJECTS

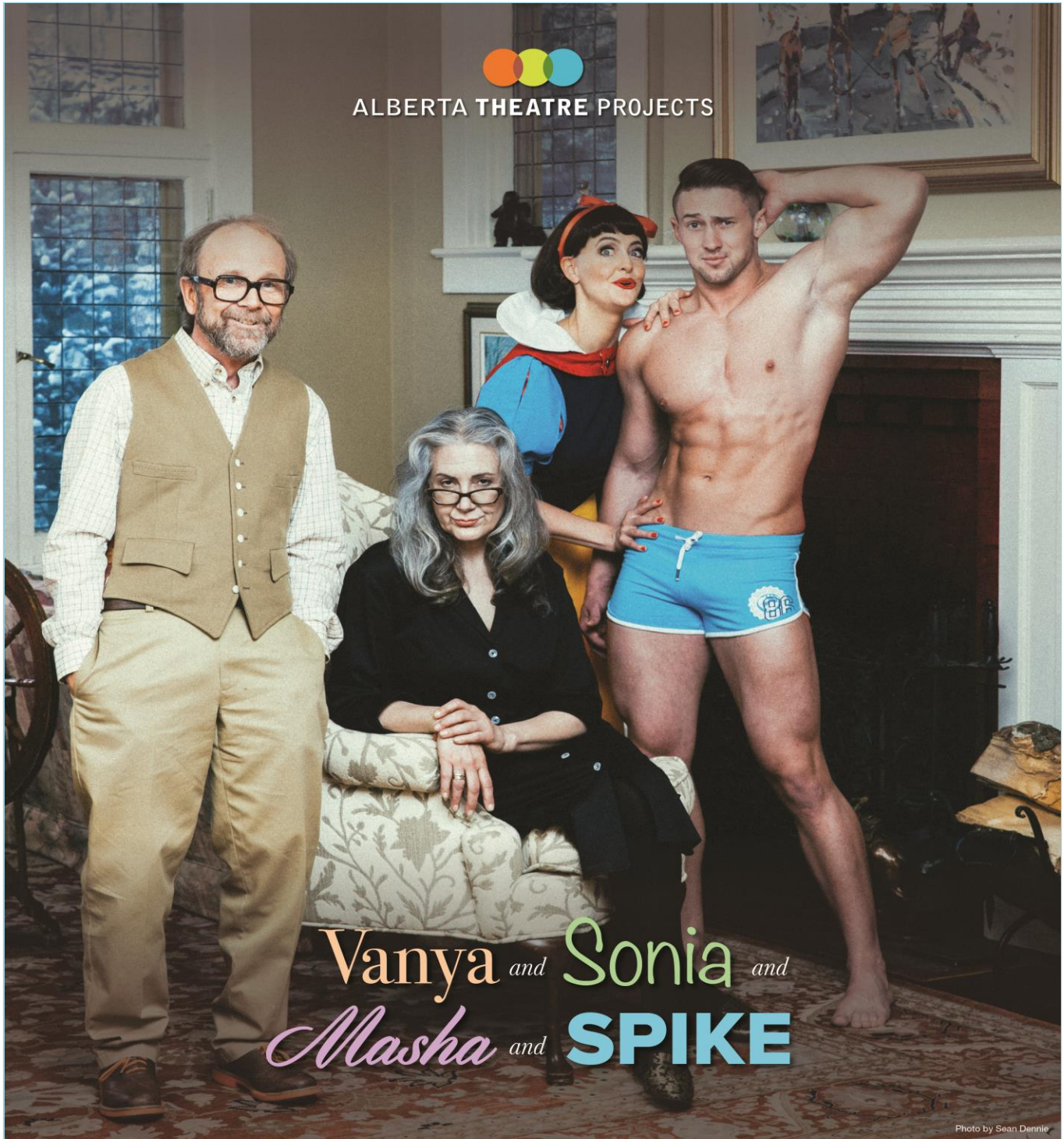


Photo by Sean Dennis

Vanya and Sonia and
Masha and SPIKE

VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE

BY CHRISTOPHER DURANG

DIRECTED BY GLYNIS LEYSHON



Wednesday, September 30, 2015 | 11:30am



Contact & Information

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CAST LOIS ANDERSON, NADIEN CHU, CHRISTOPHER HUNT, STAFFORD PERRY, LARA SCHMITZ, SONJA SMITS,
DIRECTED BY GLYNIS LEYSHON, SET/COSTUME DESIGN CATHERINE HAHN, LIGHTING DESIGN GERALD KING, COMPOSITION/SOUND DESIGN CHRISTIAN GOUTSIS,
LIGHTING DESIGN APPRENTICE: KALYNA CONRAD STAGE MANAGER KERRY JOHNSON, ASST. STAGE MANAGER EMMA BRAGER

CONTENTS

ALBERTA THEATRE PROJECTS BRAND STORY.....	3
HOW TO FIND THE THEATRE.....	4
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	5
THEATRE ETIQUETTE	6
CAST AND CREATIVE COMPANY.....	7
PLAY SYNOPSIS.....	8
PRODUCTION HISTORY	9
SETTING.....	10
CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS	10
CHRISYPHER DURANG INTERVIEW.....	11
DIRECTORS NOTES.....	12
ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES	13
ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES.....	14
DESIGNER SPOTLIGHT.....	15
COSTUME DESIGN	16
SET DESIGN.....	19
THEMES AND TOPICS	20
IN THE CLASSROOM / POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES	22
DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES.....	26
QUOTED LINES.....	25
GLOSSARY.....	28
CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS	31



OUR BRAND

What is art? What is theatre? Why is it important? To ask these questions would be like asking: *What is life? Why are we here? Does it matter what we do with it?* Theatre is a mirror of our lives, our struggles, our pain, our joys and our triumphs.

Theatre is this crazy person who has the courage, or the insanity (the jury is still out) to show up naked – sometimes literally, to stand in front of an audience and show their work and expose themselves, without the armor of editing or computer effects but with all the risks of mistakes and imperfections. They pour their art out and say...“What do you think?”

It's not that they are not scared, of course they are, terrified sometimes. But that's the price you have to pay to have the ability, the honour, the immense pleasure of touching us, perfect strangers, of moving us to tears, to laughter, to marvel. That's the price you have to be willing to pay to open hearts and minds.

In the end, that is why we do what we do.

We all live busy lives, with work, kids, family, chores, and bills. Things seem to move faster and faster around us. There is so much information, opinions, confusion. It's hard not to feel lost, scared, overwhelmed. How do we make sense of it all? How do we find ourselves and each other amongst all this noise? It's so easy to be distracted; from us, from what matters.

We're not here to tell you what to do, to lead you down the right path. Sorry to disappoint. We're in the same boat you are. We are here to tell you stories. Sometimes they are funny stories, sometimes sad or both. But they are all glimpses of us. It's like peeking at someone's bedroom, or reading their diary. These stories let us in; these very intimate, very personal and very honest slices of life. The funny thing is when we watch these stories, we can see ourselves but most of all, we can see others. We understand choices, we may not agree, but we can relate.

Theatre is where we see *us*, where we poke fun at ourselves and laugh at our shortcomings. It's where we marvel at the human spirit, where we start to see things from different perspectives. It's where we forget where we are for a couple of hours and get transported into stories that touch us, move us or simply delight us.

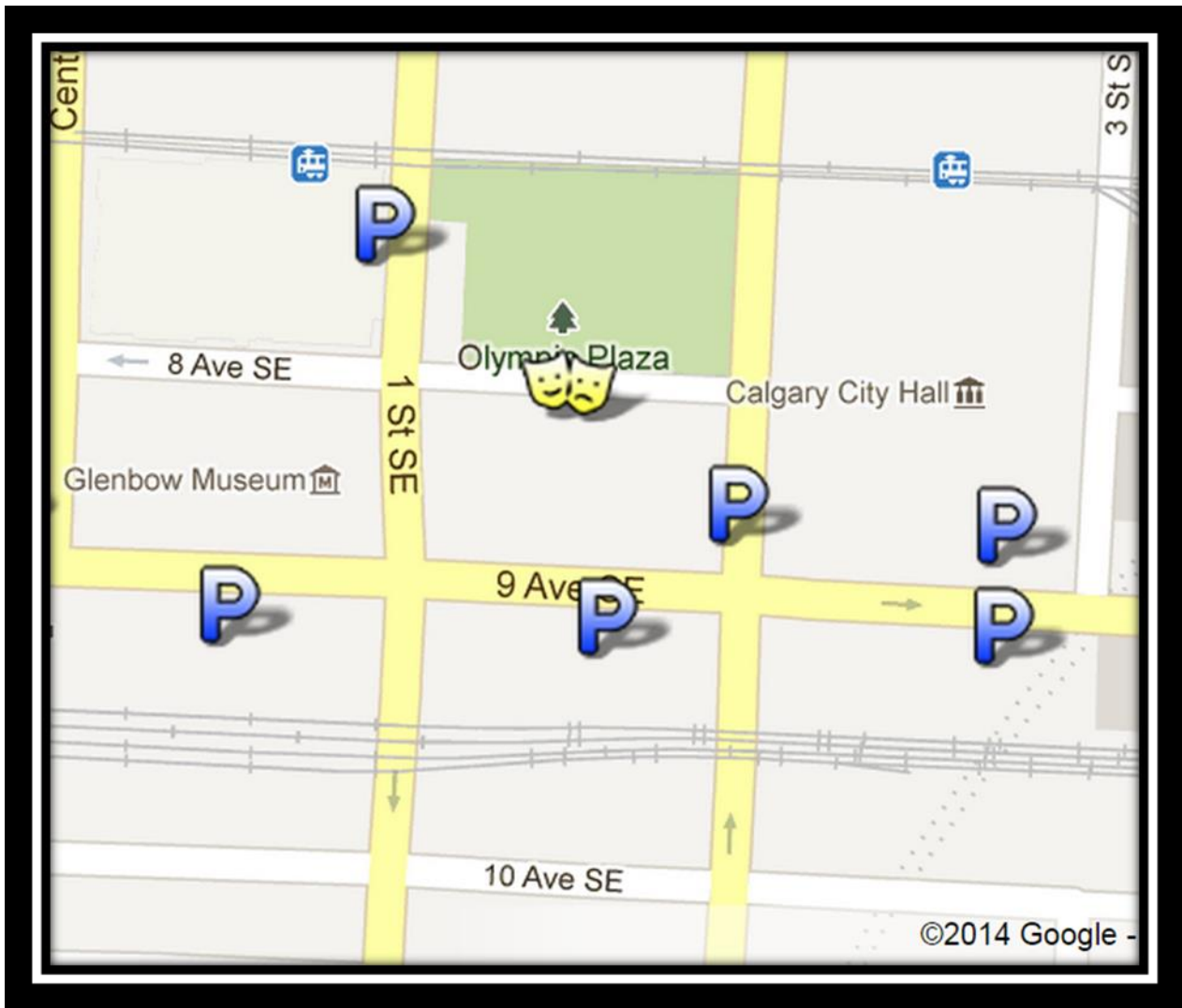
These are the stories worth telling. These stories break barriers; of time, backgrounds, opinions... they help us make sense of what it means to be alive right now. Hopefully they help us find beauty and peace amongst all the noise and confusion. Hopefully they'll help us find ourselves, and each other.

This is what we do.
This is why we do it.
This is who we are



FINDING THE THEATRE

Entrance to the **Martha Cohen Theatre Lobby** is on the south side of 8th Avenue between 1 St SE and Macleod Trail North. This is where buses will park for drop off and pick up.



CONNECT WITH US



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Alberta Theatre Projects



atpinsider.blogspot.com

Alberta Theatre Projects

The Martha Cohen Theatre
Arts Commons - 215 8th Ave S.E.
Calgary, Alberta, T2G 0K8

For all things education related,
contact:

Jonathan Brower
Youth Engagement Manager
(403) 294-7475 ext. 1098
jbrower@ATPlive.com



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) What time does the performance start? How long is the show?

The performance begins at **11:30am** and runs approximately **2 hours** with one 15 minute intermission; ending at approximately **1:50pm**. This performance includes a Q&A with artists on stage, directly after the curtain call.

2) What time should the bus pick up the students from the school, and from the theatre?

The bus should be at your school to pick up the students at **10:30am** and back to the theatre no later than **2pm**.

3) When and where are the students going to eat their lunch?

We open the lobby of the Martha Cohen Theatre at 10:45 for students to eat their lunches. Please allow at least 30 minutes prior to the matinee start time so students are able to comfortably eat, and take their seats on time. **NO FOOD OR DRINK IS ALLOWED INSIDE THE THEATRE.**

4) Where should I tell the bus company to drop us off?

Stephen Avenue (8th Avenue SE) will be accessible from 10:00am. Please direct bus drivers to take MacLeod Trail South and turn left onto Stephen Avenue (8th Avenue SE). Please note, due to limited access we request that all vehicles stop only for drop off and pick up. **THERE IS NO BUS PARKING AVAILABLE ON STEPHEN AVENUE,**

5) Where will students leave their coats and backpacks during the performance?

Students are able to leave their coats/backpacks in the lobby or bring them into the theatre. Coats should be on the back of the seats and backpacks can be under the seats. At no time should the student take food out of their backpack and eat during the performance.

6) Are the students able to leave the theatre?

We encourage students to stay in the theatre for the entirety of the performance. However, if it is necessary for a student to leave, please ask our ushers for assistance in order to exit safely. Students will have to wait to re-enter until an appropriate break in the play when an usher will safely escort them in.



Share your art with us!

We would love to receive your feedback about the performance. Please send your letters, pictures, cards, etc. to:

Jonathan Brower

Youth Engagement Manager

Alberta Theatre Projects,

220 9 Ave SE, Calgary AB, T2G 5C4



THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Before attending the theatre, please take some time to go over proper theatre etiquette with your students. We know this is common sense, but for some students this may be their first theatre experience.

RESPECT the actors and your fellow patrons

- When the lights go dim, it is time to be quiet and engage with the action on the stage
- Be sure to turn off cell phones
- Refrain from texting, talking or eating as this is disrespectful to the actors telling the story and your fellow audience members

RESPOND to what you see through laughter, tears, smiles, giggles or captivated silence.

- The actors feed off your presence and respond with their work on stage.
- Don't respond by talking to your neighbour; please wait until after the performance to discuss your thoughts.



Vanya and Sonia and Masha and SPIKE

CAST

Sonia Lois Anderson
Cassandra Nadien Chu
Vanya Christopher Hunt
Spike Stafford Perry
Nina Lara Schmitz
Masha Sonja Smits

COMPANY

Director Glynis Leyshon
Set/Costume Design Catherine Hahn
Lighting Design Gerald King
Composition/Sound Design Christian Goutsis
Lighting Design Apprentice Kalyna Conrad

Stage Manager Kerry Johnson
Assistant Stage Manager Emma Brager



VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.

Originally produced on Broadway by:

Joey Parnes, Larry Hirschhorn, Joan Raffe/Jhett Tolentino, Martin Platt & David Elliot, Pat Flicker Addiss, Catherine Adler, John O'Boyle, Joshua Goodman,
Jamie deRoy/Richard Winkler, Cricket Hooper, Jiranek/Michael Palitz,
Mark S. Golub & David S. Golub, Radio Mouse Entertainment, Shawdowncatcher Entertainment, Mary Cossette/Barbara Manocherian, Megan Savage/Meredith Lynsey Schade, Hugh Hysell/Richard Jordan, Cheryl Wiesenfeld/Ron Simons, S.D. Wagner, John Johnson in association with McCarter Theater Center and Lincoln Center Theater

Originally commissioned and produced by McCarter Center Theater, Princeton, N.J.

Emily Mann, Artistic Director; Timothy J. Shields, Managing Director; Mara Isaacs, Producing Director; and produced by Lincoln Center Theater, New York City under the direction of Andre Bishop and Bernard Gersten in 2012.

“Here Comes The Sun”

Written By George Harrison

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Vanya and Sonia and Masha and SPIKE

SYNOPSIS

It's a typical humdrum day in the lives of Vanya and Sonia, siblings not by birth but by Sonia's adoption. The two live in the Hardwicke house, their parents have passed on, and their movie star sister Masha pays the bills while they complain about their lives. Vanya's bemused temperament, surrendered to his circumstances, frays on Sonia's discontented approach to a life she never had. Their housemaid Cassandra only makes things more complicated by foretelling gloom and doom upon them every time she's near. Today she warns to "beware of Hootie Pie". Today is also the day Masha decides to pay them a visit with her new beau Spike, a very buff, very young and not so bright up and coming actor. At first it seems Masha has only returned to attend a costume party, but we soon discover she has been advised by her new assistant Hootie Pie to sell the family house. Between Sonia upstaging her at the costume party, Spike giving attention to Nina, the beautiful young neighbour girl, and Cassandra's voodoo, Masha isn't having the best visit. Everything comes to a head when Vanya has Nina perform his new play. When Spike starts texting during the performance, Vanya goes on a nostalgic rant and we finally find out where Masha's true allegiances lie and how it affects her family's future.



PRODUCTION BACKGROUND

Christopher Durang has described his process of writing *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* as putting Chekhov's characters and themes in a blender. Along the way, he's added a number of other elements, including Greek mythology and drama, Pennsylvania geography, and pop culture references. This is not a Chekhov parody, but a play that uses the basis of Chekhov scenes, characters, and quotes in a combination thereof. Some characters in Durang's play share the names of characters in Chekhov plays, (as well as some of our actors!) but none should be taken as allusions to the Chekhov characters bearing the same name.

Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike was first commissioned in 2012 by the McCarter Theatre, Princeton, in New Jersey, in association with the Lincoln Center Theater as a one act play. It later opened on Broadway in 2013, at the John Golden Theatre. The original Off-Broadway and Broadway play was directed by Nicholas Martin with the set designed by David Korins and costumes by Emily Rebholz.

Since then the play has made its way across North America making appearances at Berkeley, California's Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Los Angeles' Mark Taper Forum by Center Theatre Group, Phoenix Theatre, Indianapolis, Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona, in Seattle at the ACT Theatre and many more.

Because of the play's subject matter, themes, and contemporary relevance to Canadian audiences some notable Canadian productions include; Persephone Theatre at the Remai Arts Center, Saskatoon, Mirvish Theatre in Toronto, Winnipeg's Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre's John Hirsch Mainstage, and Arts Club Theatre at the Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, Vancouver and your very own Alberta Theatre Projects, in the stunning Martha Cohen Theatre.

Vanya and Sonia and Masha and SPIKE

SETTING

A lovely farmhouse in Bucks County, Penn.,
August. Present day.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: morning

Scene 2: that evening

ACT TWO

Scene 1: later that night

Scene 2: the next morning

Scene 3: a short time later

Scene 4: later that afternoon



CHARACTERS

VANYA: a resigned-to-life 50-something man living with his adopted sister in their deceased parents' house.

SONIA: his adopted sister, early 50s, regretful, discontent and insecure.

MASHA: their sister, also in her 50s, a glamorous and successful movie actress who travels the world and pays the bills.

SPIKE: her new boyfriend, an aspiring actor in his mid-20s, sexy and self-absorbed.

NINA: the neighbors' visiting niece longs to be an actress, energetic, star-struck and sincere. She is a lovely girl.

CASSANDRA: Vanya and Sonia's cleaning lady, who also happens to see visions of the future that often come true although no one believes her.

CHEKHOV IN A BLENDER

Thoughts from the Playwright Christopher Durang

By Julia Williams



Playwright Christopher Durang has always described *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* as “Chekhov in a blender.” Its creation was catalyzed, at least in part, by Durang’s startled realization that he was now the age of the older characters in Chekhov plays he’d fallen in love with as a young man. Not only that, he was living a quiet, rustic life in a remote farmhouse with its own small grove of cherry trees. He couldn’t help imagining himself as a Chekhov character.

“I like living in Bucks County,” Durang says. “But in Chekhov plays people who live in the country are usually unhappy and bitter and envious of people in the city. That was my starting point.”

While Durang plucked characters and themes from Chekhov plays, he insists his play was never intended to be a parody. “I’ve written parodies and I like parodies, but this wasn’t going to be one,” Durang says. “I wanted it to be set now, and to be American.” The siblings, Vanya and Sonia, open the play by lamenting that their parents named them after Chekhov characters. “I wrote that right away,” Durang says, “I don’t want people to think it’s actually Vanya from *Uncle Vanya* or actually Sonia. The Masha characters in *The Seagull* and in *Three Sisters* – those characters are not remotely like my Masha.”

The play also sprinkles in elements of Greek drama, Disney iconography and popular culture. To Durang, it couldn’t be more clear that these characters aren’t literally Chekhov characters, and he’s amused whenever people insist they are. “I was reading an essay where the writer was jumping through hoops trying to figure out who Spike was in Chekhov,” Durang says. “Spike isn’t anybody in Chekhov! I wanted a fourth name after Vanya and Sonia and Masha that would just ring out as wrong, so you’d know it wasn’t really Chekhov. When I was writing it I was actually thinking of Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore.”

This is an excerpt from ATP’s Season magazine Live. To read the whole article, and enjoy lots more insights into the plays in our season, pick up your free copy in our lobby.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Glynis Leyshon

On the very first day of rehearsal for this wickedly funny new play by Christopher Durang, Vanessa Porteous, ATP's Artistic Director said something that resonated strongly with me. She observed that as a culture, we often dismiss plays that bring us the gift of laughter. I too have observed how often brilliant comedies are carelessly dismissed as mindless entertainment, somehow deemed not as important or relevant as contemporary drama. One only has to read plays by Oscar Wilde, Moliere and Shakespeare to realize just how short sighted this narrow point of view is...and how much a brilliantly crafted comedy has to offer us all.



Imagine my delight then, when I was given the opportunity to work on the latest play by one of contemporary theatre's most wickedly funny playwrights – Christopher Durang. As a mature writer, Durang has crafted a wise and witty play that centers firmly on family and the complex bonds that unite three vastly different siblings. Now in late middle age...life for Vanya, Sonia and Masha is a truly Chekhovian mix of regret about the past, anxiety about the future, while navigating a present that is full of unexpected twists of fate. The term 'Chekhovian' was used deliberately here, because in this play Durang has taken many of the themes (and plots) from the plays of Chekov and mixed them in a blender, resulting in a wildly unpredictable cocktail of downright silliness and surprisingly touching loss. Figures from Disney prance about a Bucks County country house, housekeepers foretell the future and we are invited to laugh with, and at, the deeply flawed and refreshingly resilient characters that Durang brings so fearlessly to life.

This comedy, without a trace of self-consciousness, ranges from the witty to the wacky in the blink of an eye. And throughout, we have felt the spirit of Durang inspiring us to embrace his play with fierce and fearless honesty. The rewards have been great and we now take real pleasure in sharing this affirming, and entertaining, play with you all.

Enjoy

CAST

Lois Anderson – Sonia



For ATP: Flying Blind (co-pro Legs on the Wall, Axis, Arts Club, Belfry). Elsewhere: Alice Through the Looking Glass, Importance of Being Earnest, Stuff Happens (NAC); Taming of the Shrew, King Lear, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, All's Well That Ends Well (Bard on the Beach); Penelopiad, Griffin and Sabine, Matka King, Poster Boys (Arts Club Theatre); Wit (WCTC); Shirley Valentine (Gateway); Bonobo, Salome, Streetcar Named Desire (Leaky Heaven); The Score (Electric Company); Mother Courage (Freddy Wood); Cirque Poule (Paris Parade Festival); Queen of Hearts (Centaur/Les Saintes). Awards: Jessie Awards (Killjoy, Romeo and Juliet, Candida, Devil Box Cabaret, Salome, The Score), Vancouver Critics Choice Awards (Peter Panties, King Lear), Sydney Risk Emerging Director Award. Thanks to her daughters, Anouska and Elena.

Christopher Hunt – Vanya



For ATP: Over 20 productions including: Candide, Vigil, Respectable, Art, Stones In His Pockets, Half Life. Elsewhere: The Goodnight Bird (Centaur Theatre, Montreal); Punch & Judy (Caravan Farm Theatre, Armstrong, BC); Munich Now! (One Yellow Rabbit); Gaslight (Vertigo Theatre); The Gardener (Quest Theatre). Film/TV: Heartland, Little House On The Prairie, Caitlyn's Way, Shanghai Noon, You Know My Name. Awards: Christopher has received five of Calgary's Betty Mitchell Awards for his acting, most recently for The 39 Steps (Vertigo Theatre) and When That I Was... (The Shakespeare Company). Upcoming: Directing Dave Kelly in Epiphany (Lunchbox Theatre), and acting in Calamity Town (Vertigo Theatre) and The Light In The Piazza (Theatre Calgary). I hope that you enjoy what this wonderful company of artists has created!

Sonja Smits – Masha



For ATP: Debut. Elsewhere: The Test (Company Theatre/Canadian Stage); That Face (Nightwood Theatre); Perfect Pie (Tarragon Theatre); The Graduate (Theatre London); Vagina Monologues (US Tour); Nothing Sacred (Winter Garden Theatre); Uncle Vanya (Theatre Calgary). TV and Films: Traders (Series Lead); Eleventh Hour (Series Lead); Street Legal (Series Lead); The Diviners (TV Movie); My Life with Judy Garland (Miniseries); Owing Mahoney, How to Deal, Siblings, Videodrome (Feature Films). Awards and Nominations: Gemini Award (Street Legal); Gemini Nomination (Traders, Diviners); Blizzard Award (The Diviners); Genie Nomination (Videodrome, That's My Baby); ACTRA Award of Excellence; TWIFT Award of Excellence. Sonja is the proud founder and co-owner of Closson Chase Vineyards in Prince Edward County, Canada's newest viticulture region.

Stafford Perry – Spike



For ATP: Debut. Elsewhere: One Man Two Guvnors, Major Barbara, Enron, Enchanted April, The Wars, A Christmas Carol (Theatre Calgary); The Haunting, In the Heat of the Night, Panic, Double Indemnity, Rope, The Mousetrap, And Then There Where None (Vertigo); Pride and Prejudice, As You like it (The Citadel); Romeo and Juliet (Neptune); With Bells On (Lunchbox); Stray (Workshop West); As You Like It (The Shakespeare Company). Stafford would like to thank Meredith and Llewyn for making life so wonderful, and the rest of his family for their love and support.

DESIGNER SPOTLIGHT

Catherine Hahn

Set / Costume Design



For ATP: *Debut.*

Elsewhere: *Outliner* (Mascall Dance Company); *Not Enough Alone*, *The Lola Project* (Dance Victoria); *Contest of the Winds* (Caravan Farm Theatre with Sepwepemc Nation), *The Rez Sisters* (Belfry Theatre); *The Tragical Comedy of Punch and Judy* – puppet design and build (Caravan Farm Theatre); *Whether the Weather, The Story* (Theatre Columbus); *The Christmas Carol, Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tell Tale Heart, Macbeth* (Caravan Farm Theatre); *Everyone, A Modern Morality Play* (The Caravan with November Theatre, Electric Company, Theatre Replacement, Newworld Theatre, Melee Theatre, and Pound of Flesh); *That Summer* (Theatre Northwest); *House of X* (Wild Excursions Productions); *Harvest* (Chemainus Festival Theatre); *Everyone, Fresco*

(Bellaluna); *The White Spider* (Mascall Dance Company); *Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (NAC and Western Canada Theatre, Kamloops); *Beauty and the Beast, Alice in Wonderland* (Western Canada Theatre).

Other: Design Mentor for The Bachelor of Performing Arts Program (Capilano University). Designer and builder of parade costumes and large puppets, History 2 Life, Victoria's 150th Anniversary; Expo 74, Expo 86. Expo 88; Bread and Puppet Theatre (Vermont); project designer Winterfest, BC Place Stadium (Vancouver Childrens Festival); jewellery designer, visual artist.

COSTUME DESIGNS

by Catherine Hahn

Vanya and Sonia and
Masha and SPIKE

Masha



MASHA
AS
SNOW WHITE



Sonia



SONIA
AT
COSTUME PARTY



Vanya



VANYA
AS
DOC



VANYA



Vanya and Sonia and Masha and SPIKE

SET DESIGN PRELIMINARY MODEL
by Catherine Hahn



Photo by Matthew Hall

THEMES & TOPICS

Anton Chekov

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, born on January 29, 1860 in Taganrog, Russia. In 1875 the family moved to Moscow when his father's business failed, but Chekhov stayed behind to finish his studies. He moved to Moscow in 1879, enrolled at medical school, and supported the family with his freelance writing by producing short comic pieces for local magazines. His first story to be published was in the humor journal *Strekoza*, which Chekhov marked as the beginning of his literary career.

In the mid-1880s Chekhov practiced as a physician and published serious works of fiction, influenced by the major Russian realists of the century. This was a shift in his style as he desired to move beyond comedy and give a go at tragedy. He also began writing comedic farces for the theater, but later developed a mix of comedy and tragedy. During this time he decided to explore Europe and experience the beauty of its locations.

As his work developed in the 1890s, Chekhov illustrated how ordinary events can carry deeper meaning and began concentrating on mood and characters to show greater significance on their experiences in the play. Chekhov then collaborated with Constantin Stanislavki and the Moscow Art Theater to produce his plays, including *The Seagull* (1895), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *The Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). Chekhov later died of tuberculosis at the age of 44 in 1904 at a health resort in Badenweiler, Germany.

Plays by Chekhov & Connections to Durang

The Seagull (written in 1895, premiered 1896):

Considered to be the first of Chekhov's major plays, *The Seagull* dramatizes romance and artistic conflicts between a story writer named Boris Trigorin, an ingénue Nina, a fading actress named Irina Arkadina, and her son and playwright Konstantin Tréplev. The play utilizes an ensemble cast, similar to *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, and has characters that speak in ways to avoid addressing topics directly – otherwise known now as subtext. The opening of the first production was a failure because the actress playing Nina lost her voice from being intimidated by the audience. A later production became a triumphant success, which put *The Seagull* as a great new development in world drama. *The Seagull* has a character named Nina and another named Masha, both which are used to name two of the characters in Durang's play. Early in the play Sonia says "But I'm mourning for my life" to which Vanya responds: "I hope you're not going to make Chekhov references all day." Sonia's quote is a direct line from Masha in *The Seagull*.

Uncle Vanya (published 1897, premiered 1899):

In this play, an elderly professor owns a rural estate that supports his urban lifestyle. The estate is run by Vanya, the brother of the Professor's late first wife, and Sonya, the Professor's daughter by his first wife. The professor and his much younger second wife make a visit to the estate, which causes

complications when he announces his intention to sell the estate, which has become Vanya and Sonya's home, hoping to invest the proceeds to acquire a higher income for himself and his wife.

Three Sisters (written in 1900, premiered 1901):

Sometimes seen as a take on the Bronte sisters, this Chekhov play follows the relationships of the Sergeyevna sisters, with each other and with men. The play begins with the anniversary of their father's death, in addition to the youngest sister, Irina's, name day (birthday). In following a similar Chekhov theme, the sisters discover that their brother, Andrei, has mortgaged the household and kept the money to pay off gambling debts. Perhaps one of the characters in Durang's play is inspired by one of Chekhov's characters, as one of the sisters is also named Masha.

The Cherry Orchard (written in 1903, premiered 1904)

In a province of Russia in the early 20th century, Lyubov Ranevskaya has been living with an unnamed lover since her son died but is soon brought home after an attempted suicide. Once she arrives, Lopahkin arrives to tell the family that the estate will be auctioned away to pay off the family's debts, but proposes to save the estate by making it a development project for summer cottages by destroying the cherry orchard. The other family members grow fearful of this impending situation, not only because it would ruin their family home but would uproot the lives that they have and would force them to consider how they will move on – Vanya is unsure about what her marital status will be and Lyubov discovers her love to be ill. In acceptance of the selling of the estate, the family packs up and gets ready to leave.

Snow White

Snow White is a consistent reference in the play, and in *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* the Disney film's story arc and key traits are a major part of the play. The social politics that come with certain roles of the story – the prince, the princess, the dwarves, the witch – exemplify different dimensions of the relationships between the real-life siblings and Masha's boyfriend Spike. This is one of the hugely comic scenes of the play because of the reveal of the characters' costumes for a party they will attend. As expected, Masha, the beautiful actress, takes the role of Snow White while her boyfriend Spike goes as the prince. Vanya takes the role of Doc, one of the dwarfs, while Sonia makes an entrance with her take as the queen.

Showbiz

Another important theme in the play is Showbiz which theatrically shapes people's lives and in turn exposes important truths. It is thanks to the transformative power of her costume—and her assumed voice and accent—that Sonia discovers an alternative, more charismatic identity, and encounters unprecedented possibilities in her emotional life. Suddenly, this unloved fifty-year-old woman finds herself staring with a wild surmise at an unexplored world: the dating life. As Vanya says, "you found a different part of your personality and you released it. . ."

Vanya's Rant

Loss of shared culture

Vanya

"I know older people always think the past was better, but really—instead of a text with all these lowercase letters, and no punctuation, what about a nicely crafted letter, sent through the post office? Or a thank you note?"

Spike

"Yeah, yeah, it was real elegant back then, I get it. You had to wait five days for a letter, but it was real nice. Time marches on, dude."

One of the most emotionally charged moments of the play is Vanya's explosive monologue at the end as a response to Spike's incessant texting during Vanya's play reading. Vanya sees it as an insult—Spike sees it as multi-tasking. Many people, especially older generations, can likely empathize with Vanya's frustration. Technology advances at an almost exponential rate, the pros and cons of which are a part of daily conversation nowadays. While many people may disagree over the benefits of increased dependency on technology, looking at the past to see how things have evolved provides a healthy new perspective. Both Vanya and Spike have a point. It seems that the consideration and more articulate speech that comes with letter writing is a lost art. Then again, updates that you can exchange with your friends in a matter of minutes via texting or social media used to take weeks with the post office. Communication is definitely more efficient and environmentally friendlier now.

Nostalgia

Vanya

"WE LICKED POSTAGE STAMPS BACK THEN!"

Nostalgia is an internal conflict- remembering time past vs. the harsh realities of present day life. During Vanya's rant his nostalgia takes over. The word "nostalgia" is derived from two Greek roots: "nostos" meaning to "return to one's native land" and "algos" referring to "pain, suffering, or grief." Beginning with the writings of Johannes Hofer (1688), nostalgia has been associated with a myriad of physiological and psychological symptoms. In terms of time, it refers back to an earlier period in an individual's life, and draws on biased or selective recall of past experiences. Nostalgia may evoke memories of peaceful, pleasant times or of times of tension and turmoil. Nostalgia as an emotion contains both pleasant and unpleasant components. For Vanya the emotion is pleasant but when compared to the present, things become- "Bittersweet" the quality of the emotion is a distinguishing characteristic of the nostalgic condition.

Masha

“...Life happens, no?”

Sonia

“Not here it doesn’t. We sit still a lot. We look out the window. We bicker. We long for what the world cannot give We are in our twilight years, and we realize we have never really lived.”

Family Ties / Roots / Belonging / Hope

Masha

“What a day. “Oh, Olga, Lets go to Moscow.”

Sonia

“I don’t want to go to Moscow. I like it here.”

These are the last lines of the play and the most reinforcing notion of sticking to ones roots and staying connected with them. After having won back their sister, Vanya and Sonia and Masha stare out the window in peace and harmony. There is a renewed sense of hope for each of them. By getting back in touch with her roots, Masha has gained greater self-awareness, which helps her to make healthier, more compassionate decisions. Sonia, who has complained of never having really lived or found a life outside of her childhood home, has an upcoming date. We’re not given any sense that this may be the love of her life, but it’s a trip outside her comfort zone, which is often the most character-building decision a person can make. Vanya, who has always been mild-mannered and hesitant to bring any sort of attention to himself, takes a leap of faith by sharing his play with everybody. It might not have gone perfectly, but it sparked a defining moment for him, in which he asserted himself.

Youthful Optimism vs. Age and Wisdom

Sonia

“Let’s sit and wait for the blue heron to come.”

The experience of aging is practically another character in this play. Sonia seems to be almost obsessive over the thought that it may be too late for her to have a life. Nina and Spike's youth seems to be a catalyst for the other characters’ self-awareness. Masha resents Nina for her youthful beauty because it reminds her of the alluring ingénue spark she’s since lost. She seems to think that dating Spike, who’s nearly half her age, will make her feel young again, but if anything, it makes her feel older. Spike awakens something in Vanya, who has grown into middle age without really exploring his life. And although some may call Nina naïve, her young idealism inspires Vanya to open up and show everyone his play.

STUDY GUIDES

Classroom Activities

- 1.) Have students, perhaps in pairs or small groups, create short story (one page) revolving around an emphasized “punch line.” Be sure to work with students to design criteria and identification techniques for Joke Structure (ex. “the set-up”).
- 2.) Do some personal reflection with the topic of “nostalgia” and present a personal case study. Findings could be shared in a report, a dramatization, or a visual representation.
- 3.) Masha makes the other characters in the play dress up as characters revolving around her as Snow White. She infers personality traits which reflect those of the fairy-tale characters. (ex. Sonia – Dopey / Vanya – Grumpy, Spike – Prince Charming). What other Fairy-tale stories could have been imposed in a similar way? Include detailed reasoning to support your conclusions and include character costume drawings.

Creative Conclusions

- 1.) Draw, write about, perform, sculpt, or make a collage of an event that represents a nostalgic feeling (real or ideal). What feelings does this evoke? How strongly would you defend these feelings.
- 2.) Identify some themes that you connect with in the play. Write a “Rant” like Vanya’s to be performed for the class (one page) on a topic influenced by the play. Something that really annoys you, in relation to or correlated by the themes in the play.
- 3.) Challenge yourself to compose a 140-character tweet about this play and send it to @contemporaryATP.

Questions / Discussion

- 1.) Tension is a core aspect of all literary art forms and is a key element in performance art. It is generated on various levels and in multiple and diverse ways. What are two sources of tension in the play? Explorations of each area prior to the show will enhance a viewer’s experience.
- 2.) Throughout the play, other playwrights are quoted. What other layers of meaning can we add to what the characters are saying by knowing some background about where those lines were originally spoken (or written)?
- 3.) Although *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* isn’t strictly classified under the “Theater of the Absurd,” it definitely contains some absurdist elements—can you name a few?
- 4.) What elements of metadrama are at work in the performance? Did these add to or detract from your experience? Did these elements work with or against some of the central ideas and concerns of the play?
- 5.) Vanya’s rant outlines a “digital disconnect” which plagues youth across North America. Across Canada we have seen a spike in social media and technological influences which have had varying effects on human connection and communication. How does technology influence the way you communicate now verses the past?
 - a.) Is it good or bad?

- 6.) What is Durang's view of cellphones in the theatre?
 - a.) How does he show this in the play?
 - b.) What does this say about his views on the effect of cellphones on today's youth?
- 7.) How does Christopher Durang use elements from Chekhov's plays while still making the situation fresh, new, and modern?
 - a.) Does knowing that his play has similarities to Chekhov's plays influence the way you perceive it?
 - b.) Why might playwrights draw inspiration from other works by previous playwrights?
- 8.) How do we perceive the past?
 - a.) Do people tend to celebrate or regret the past?
- 9.) Why is there usually strife between generations?
 - b.) What fuels generational differences?
- 10) What is the difference between satire and parody?
- 11) How does Spike signify his difference from the other characters? If so, how?
- 12) What is your definition for sibling rivalry?
 - a.) Does the definition change when dealing with step-, half and adopted siblings?
- 13) What effect does Sonia's costume have on her behavior?
 - a.) Have you ever worn a costume?
 - b.) If so, did that effect your behavior or your personality? How?

Post Show Discussion / Activities

- 1.) What theatrical techniques did you notice during the performance? How did these techniques generate tension in the audience?
 - a.) Create a Lighting Design Plot for your schools theatre space or ATP's! Include simulated attributes of full scale theatrical lighting fixtures including; color, beam angle, intensity, projections and gobos. List fixtures needed and plot them on a grid.
- 2.) Re-imagine the setting of the play – what if, instead of Vanya's living room, the action between the family had been held somewhere else?
 - a.) What impact might a change in setting have? For example, what if the discussion took place somewhere public?
 - b.) Create a Maquette (Set Design Model) for your imagined setting.
- 3.) How would you describe the relationship between Vanya and Sonia?
 - a.) How does Masha fit in with the rest of the family?
 - b.) How would you describe their family?
 - c.) Does this remind you of your own family? How?
- 4.) How does each character feel about the past and the events that have happened to them?
 - a.) How do they feel about the future?
- 5.) How would you describe the character of Cassandra and Spike?
 - a.) How do they fit into the world of the play?
- 6.) What was the result of the costume party?
 - a.) How did the different characters feel after the party took place?

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

Stanislavskian Sense Memory

Affective memory: an element of Konstantin Stanislavski's "system" of Method Acting. It requires actors to call on details of similar situation (or a situation with similar emotional import) to those of their characters. Actors would need to take emotion and personality and access it when in character. Sense memory specifically refers to recalling physical sensations surrounding emotional events as opposed to emotions themselves. The system is a progression of techniques to train actors on drawing believable emotions to performances from memory.

Meisner Repetition Technique

Meisner Repetition: is an acting technique developed by theatre practitioner Sanford Meisner, this technique allows the actor to create externally and behave instinctively. There is greater focus on other actors as opposed to the character's internal thoughts or feelings. With the repetition, both actors sit across from each other and respond repeating a phrase with different tone, inflection, and intensity to change the meaning of the line. The actors respond freely and spontaneously. Both this technique and the Stanislavskian method are referenced by Masha when she describes her acting training.



QUOTED LINES WITH LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

“And I forget something every day. I can’t remember the Italian for window or ceiling.”

Irina in act three from Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* laments, “Oh my God, I’ve forgotten, forgotten everything, my head’s such a whirl. I can’t remember the Italian for “window” – or “ceiling” either. I’m always forgetting things, I forget something every day.”

“Fame, thou glittering bauble”

Captain Hook says this in act five of the play (chapter 14 of the novel) *Peter Pan*, following what he thinks is his triumph over Peter—he’s captured Wendy and the Lost Boys and has poisoned Peter’s medicine. On the pirate ship Jolly Roger, Hook should be “bellied out by the winds of his success” but he is instead uneasy and pensive. “All mortals envy me, yet better perhaps for Hook to have had less ambition! O fame, fame, thou glittering bauble, what if the very – (*interrupted by a sound from Smee*) No little children love me. I am told they play at Peter Pan, and that the strongest always choose to be Peter. They would rather be a twin than Hook; they force the baby to be Hook.”

“I am a wild turkey.”

A new take on Nina’s line from *The Seagull*: “I’m a seagull. No, that’s wrong, I’m an actress.” I haven’t lived. an echo of lines said by Vanya in *Uncle Vanya* (“I’ve not lived, not lived, I tell you. Thanks to you the best years of my life have been thrown down the drain.”) and by Sorin in *The Seagull*, “Twenty-eight years I’ve worked for the Department of Justice, but I haven’t lived yet, haven’t experienced anything.”

“I’m in mourning for my life.”

A quote from Masha in *The Seagull*, explaining why she always wears black. A succession of tedious days and tedious nights at the end of *Uncle Vanya*, Sonia tells Vanya that “We shall live through a long succession of days and endless evenings.” Durang has said he found this line in an older translation of *Uncle Vanya*.



GLOSSARY

Piccolo: a small flute

Metaphor: a figure of speech to compare two things that are alike figuratively but not literally

Heron: a long-legged, long-necked and usually long-billed bird

Harbinger: an omen

Ides of March: reference to the date March 15, when Roman leader Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C.

Amity: friendship

Enmity: hostility

Calamity: disaster

Entreaty: an appeal

Incipient dementia: emerging intellectual deterioration, usually a result of old age

Trojan horse: term used to describe a person or thing intended to undermine or destroy from within; a reference to the classical mythology story in which the Greeks hid in a gigantic hollow wooden horse, disguised as an offering, to destroy Troy and win the Trojan War

Dorothy Parker: an American writer known for her wisecracking wit who produced poetry, short stories and screenplays in the early/mid-20th century

Dotage: an offensive term for the lack of strength or concentration sometimes believed to be characteristic of old age

Repast: a meal

Nymph: a woman with graceful, delicate, fairy-like features

Libation: a strong drink

Name-day: birthday

Agamemnon: a Greek leader during the Trojan War who was killed by his wife upon his return

Intuit: to feel

Norma Desmond: a character in the 1950 film *Sunset Boulevard* who was a fading moving star

Harpy: a nagging or bad-tempered woman

Traipsing: to wander without purpose

Cavorting: frolicking or behaving in a festive manner

Harangue: a tirade

Maggie Smith: an English actress who has won two Oscars and been appointed a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her contributions to the performing arts. You may know her as Professor McGonagall from the *Harry Potter* films.

Stanley Kowalski: a working-class character from the 1947 Tennessee Williams play *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Pirandellian: describing a drama in which actors become inseparable and indistinct from the characters that they play; reference to the works of early-20th century Italian dramatist and poet Luigi Pirandello

Pollyanna: an eternal optimist; reference to the child heroine of the 1913 eponymous novel

Ethereal: exquisite in an otherworldly manner

Hummel figurine: porcelain figures originally inspired from the artwork of Sister Marie Innocentia Hummel (1909-1946) from Bavaria.

TERMS FROM VANYA'S RANT

Sam Spade: fictional private detective from the novel *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) by Dashiell Hamitt.

Nora Charles: half of the fictional husband-and-wife detective team Nick and Nora Charles created by Dashiell Hamitt in the 1934 novel *The Thin Man*.

Ingmar Bergman: (1918-2007) world-famous Swedish film writer and director.

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet: an ABC series that ran from 1952 to 1966. The show featured the quintessential (and real-life) couple Ozzie and Harriet Nelson.

The Bishop Sheen Show: "Life is Worth Living," a television program led by Catholic Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979).

Camelot: *Camelot* is a stage musical by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe that premiered on Broadway in 1960, with Julie Andrews as Guenevere and Richard Burton as King Arthur.

Davy Crockett: The tall tales of the legendary figure Davy Crockett (1786-1836) inspired the 1955 Disney movie *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, starring Fess Parker as Davy.

The Dinah Shore Show: "The Dinah Shore Chevy Show," in which actress Dinah Shore (1916-1994) hosted a weekly variety show featuring guest stars, songs, production numbers and skits. The show ran from 1956-1963.

Presentiment: a feeling that something will happen

Vanya and Sonia and Masha and SPIKE

Self-effacement: humility or modesty.

The Ed Sullivan Show: a variety show on CBS hosted by Ed Sullivan (1901-1974), first called “Toast of the Town” (1948-55) then “The Ed Sullivan Show” (1955-71) that showcased various types of entertainment to American television audiences.

Howdy Doody: a kids television program that premiered in 1947 and ran for 13 years. The show revolved around Buffalo Bob (Bob Smith) and his friends, who included both marionettes and people.

I Love Lucy: a situational comedy produced by CBS from 1951-57. It was the most popular show in America for four years.

Kukla, Fran and Ollie: a daily live ad-libbed television series that debuted in 1947 and ran for 10 years.

The Mickey Mouse Club: a TV show produced by Disney and broadcast on ABC from 1955-58. It was aimed at children and starred children, called “Mouseketeers.”

Perry Como Show: Perry Como (1913-2001) was one of the most popular singers between World War II and the start of the rock and roll era.

Señor Wences: Wenceslao Moreno (1896-1999), a Spanish ventriloquist whose career started in the 1920s and lasted well into the television age. Unlike other ventriloquists of his era, he didn’t work with a dummy, but instead transformed his thumb and forefinger with makeup and a wig into the impertinent boy character Johnny.

Tommy Kirk: (b. 1941) the fun, wholesome and clean-cut face of Disney during the late 1950s and early 1960s.



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

DRAMA: GRADES 9-12

- a) extend the ability to concentrate
- b) sharpen observations of people, situations and the environment
- c) extend understanding of, acceptance of and empathy for others
- d) demonstrate respect for others — their rights, ideas, abilities and differences
- e) develop the ability to understand and apply the specific presentation techniques demanded by various dramatic forms
- f) explore various approaches to analyzing a script for purposes of study and/or presentation
- g) gain knowledge of disciplines that enhance dramatic process and product
- h) demonstrate understanding of integration of disciplines to enrich a theatrical presentation.
- i) explore various conventions and traditions of theatre
- j) broaden knowledge of theatre by viewing as great a variety of theatrical presentations as possible
- k) demonstrate the ability to assess critically the process and the art
- l) demonstrate recognition of and respect for excellence in drama and theatre
- m) develop an awareness of aesthetics in visual and performing arts

ART: GRADES 10-12

1) Articulate and Evaluate

- a. use the vocabulary and techniques of art criticism to interpret and evaluate both their own works and the works of others
- b. use the vocabulary and techniques of art criticism to analyze and evaluate their own works in relation to the works of professional artists

2) Relationships

- a. solve teacher- and student-developed problems by varying the dominance of design elements for specific visual effects
- b. use the vocabulary and techniques of art criticism to analyze and evaluate their own works in relation to the works of professional artists

3) Organizations

- a. experiment with various representational formats – be conscious of the emotional impact that is caused and shaped by a work of art

4) Emotional Impact

- a. be conscious of the emotional impact that is caused and shaped by a work of art
- b. discover how various materials alter representational formats and processes used in achieving certain intended effects.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: GRADE 9

1) Express ideas and develop understanding

- a. talk with others and experience a variety of oral, print and other media texts to explore, develop and justify own opinions and points of view
- b. explore and explain how interactions with others and with oral, print and other media texts affect personal understandings
- c. extend understanding by taking different points of view when rereading and reflecting on oral, print and other media texts

2) Consider others' ideas

- a. integrate own perspectives and interpretations with new understandings developed through discussing and through experiencing a variety of oral, print and other media texts

3) Combine ideas

- a. examine and re-examine ideas, information and experiences from different points of view to find patterns and see relationships

4) Extend understanding

- a. assess whether new information extends understanding by considering diverse opinions and exploring ambiguities

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: GRADES 10-12

- 1) Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences
- 2) Comprehend literature and other texts in oral, print, visual and multimedia forms, and respond personally, critically and creatively
- 3) Respect, support and learn about collaboration with others

