

School Play Directing Proposal

Director: Niall Ng

Phone: 973-747-9955

Email Address: niallngartist@gmail.com

Title of Play: The Cherry Orchard

Playwright: Anton Chekhov, Translated by Robert W. Corrigan

Publishing Company: Dramatists Play Service

Royalty Fees for Play: \$100 per performance

Approximate Running Time: 120 minutes, including intermission

Plot Summary:

Lyubov Andreyevna Ranevsky is the matron of a family of Russian aristocrats. Set in Russia in the early 1900's, the characters struggle to come to terms with a shifting political and economic climate, in which the wealth and power of the noble class is being replaced by the nouveau-riche business owners of the industrial revolution. The family's name means less and less as time goes on and their savings have all but dried up. Deep in debt, the estate and once-prized cherry orchard will be going on auction to pay the mortgage. Lyubov returns with her family and friends after having mostly abandoned the estate for several years. Much of it has been kept up by Lopahin, a former serf turned wealthy industrialist. He suggests to the family that they destroy the orchard and divide the land into summer cottages to be bought or rented. Lyubov and her brother, Gaev, refuse his advice and affirm that they will be able to buy back the estate through help from other members of their class.

The return of the family also prompts the return of their former tutor, Petya Trofimov. He is a great, but weary intellectual who tutored Lyubov's son, Grisha, until his untimely death. He is also secretly in love with Lyubov's youngest daughter, Anya. He suggests that they abandon the estate altogether, thus abandoning classist traditions based in greed and vanity. He tries to convince the family to create something for the good of others instead of pursuing luxury. Lyubov rejects his advice as well, and agrees to leave the financial matters surrounding the auction to Gaev.

Still in denial, Lyubov throws a party at the estate and focuses her attention on easing the personal relationships of her friends and family. But the party is cut short when Gaev returns to inform her that he failed to secure the estate, and that it has been bought by Lopahin. As the new master, Lopahin plans to destroy the orchard and divide the land as he had suggested to Lyubov previously. Lyubov is left devastated.

After a few days, the family has packed up their remaining possessions and has made plans to travel abroad. Lopahin considers his new position of power and can scarcely believe it himself. Despite his intentions with the estate, Lyubov decides she cannot bear any ill feelings towards Lopahin. She realizes that it was a matter of time before someone else took over the estate, and that Lopahin is quite deserving of it after all his hard work on it. She also considers how much Lopahin loves her oldest daughter, Varya, and values their feelings for each other. The play ends with the family moving out of the estate for the last time, free of the burden of nobility, and ready to embark on a great new journey.

Character Breakdown: 5F / 7M

Lyubov Andreyevna Ranevsky- Female, owner of the cherry orchard, understands love far more than money

Anya- Female, Lyubov's youngest daughter, thoughtful and compassionate

Varya- Female, Lyubov's oldest daughter, diligent and hard-working

Leonid Andreyevich Gaev- Male, Lyubov's younger brother, views life as a game

Yermolay Alexeyevich Lopahin- Male, a former serf turned wealthy businessman

Pyotr Sergeevich Trofimov- Male, tutor to Lyubov's family

Semyonov-Pishchik- Male, a wealthy landowner

Charlotta Ivanovna, Female, a governess, a true performer at heart

Feers- Male, 87-year-old servant of the estate

Dunyasha- Female, a maid, wants to fall in love

Yasha- Male, a servant, a lover of ladies

Epihodov- Male, a clerk, a terrible musician

What is your vision for the show?

To be clear: *The Cherry Orchard* is a comedy! It lacks the modern jokes and broad characters that come from Neil Simon, but make no mistake that Anton Chekhov has created a charming ensemble of deeply flawed, uniquely interesting, and fun characters. Each character brings a different color to the mix, including the confused, but empathetic Lyubov, wearily academic Trofimov, overly-romantic Dunyasha, and doddering, old Feers. Every character has detailed history, tragic flaws, and specific wants out of life. My synopsis of the plot primarily followed Lyubov's journey through the play, but every character in this touching ensemble is a joy to watch as they take their own, specific journeys. At the center of my vision is a joyous cast, all of which the audience will be able to laugh along with.

I want this play to not only bring joy, but hope to our audience. In this play, the worst thing that Lyubov can imagine happening comes to pass, and though it is devastating, she finds that there is so much of the future to love going forward. This pandemic has affected us all in a number of ways, and this play will inspire the audience to be optimistic about the journeys ahead.

Why do you feel this show would be a good choice for High School Students?

At first glance, Chekhov seems rather daunting. There's a ton of philosophical ideas bouncing between the characters, strange humor, and complex Russian names. Russian literature and

drama also has a penchant for the tragic, something theatrical audiences will not be gravitating towards for some time. However, many of Chekhov's works are really comedies, and *The Cherry Orchard* is no exception. Working on this play will be a tremendous experience for an actor of any level as they come to understand not only their character, but the unique way in which their character interacts with the world and others, and how Chekhov's surprising brand of comedy ensues. As the characters constantly discuss ideas about philosophy, so will our cast, thus enriching their experience and allowing them to further bring these characters to life before an audience. There will be so much to learn about as we delve into this play and I would love to bring on a dramaturg for this production as well!

This play is great for high school students because it will bring a unique challenge that is atypical for young actors, but provide great academic rewards through artistic exploration. There is a large cast, and every member will have their chance to shine. This play also allows plenty of room for non-traditional casting to welcome students of all backgrounds. The set pieces and costumes can be as grand or as simple as we want them to be, leaving plenty of room for creativity from the production crew.

What are your particular production expectations for this show? (staging, costumes, sets, major props, time period, music requirements, etc.) Please list any aspect(s) of the play that may have a large impact on the school budget.

This is a period play taking place in a grand, but rather empty estate in Russia in the early 1900's.

For costumes, the men will generally require suits. The women will require either dresses or long skirts, preferably with petticoats. I don't imagine any of the characters will need more than one costume, but if we can have more formal attire for the party scene and traveling clothes for the ending, that would be ideal. Hats for the men are also ideal, but not necessary.

Props should include trays, glasses, luggage, galoshes, a string instrument (doesn't need to be played), and a revolver (doesn't need to look realistic or ever fire).

The play almost entirely takes place in one room of the largely empty and unattended estate, so we can put a lot of effort into our background scenery and the floor to give this effect. Chairs should be wooden, but otherwise simple. Part of the play takes place outside, in the orchard, so prop trees, a bench, a change of lighting and the sounds of birds can give this effect without needing to take apart the entire set. Lastly, fake flower petals can blow in through the window throughout the course of the play, symbolizing the death of the orchard and the Russian aristocracy.