

Alton Fringe Theatre

Anton Chekhov

THE CHERRY ORCHARD



**Wessex Arts Centre
Alton College
26-28 October 2023**

Anton Chekhov
THE CHERRY ORCHARD
Adapted for Alton Fringe Theatre
by Michael Biddiss

CHARACTERS AND CAST

LYUBA Ranyevskaya <i>Owner of the Estate</i>	Sarah Castle-Smith
ANYA <i>Lyuba's younger daughter</i>	Lou de Peyrecave-Moore
VARYA <i>Lyuba's elder (adoptive) daughter</i>	Lisa Felix
Leonid (Lenya) GAYEV <i>Lyuba's brother</i>	Rod Sharp
Yermolay LOPHAKIN <i>A neighbouring businessman</i>	Simon Brencher
Petya TROFIMOV <i>A student</i>	Joseph de Peyrecave-Moore
Boris Simeonov- PISHCHIK <i>A neighbouring landowner</i>	Michael Biddiss
CHARLOTTA <i>The family's governess</i>	Sue Hubbard
FIRS <i>The family's most senior retainer</i>	James Willis
DUNYASHA <i>A family maid</i>	Jane Samways
YEPIHODOV <i>Clerk to the estate</i>	Steve Gerlach
YASHA <i>A manservant</i>	David Waltham-Hier

DIRECTOR
Louise Biddiss

PRODUCTION TEAM

STAGE MANAGER	Lesley Willis
COSTUMES	Penny Cushing, Helen de Peyrecave, Wendy Crozier
PROPS	Cath Gerlach
STUDIO TECHNICIAN	Alex Cheng
SOUND/MUSIC	Chris Lang
BAR/FRONT OF HOUSE	Brian Arrowsmith & Friends of the Fringe
TICKETS/PUBLICITY	Steve Gerlach
POSTER	James Willis
PROGRAMME	Michael Biddiss
PHOTOGRAPHY	Ian Dumelow, Steve Gerlach

With thanks to Amery Hill School for rehearsal facilities, HSDC Alton College, Wildly Upbeat Printers, The Cheriton Players, The Eight Bells, and to Members and Friends of the Fringe who have assisted with rehearsals, props, and costumes.

The action takes place around the time of the play's first performance (1904), in the chief mansion of a declining and neglected estate in rural Russia.

ACT ONE: A very early morning in May.

ACT TWO: A late afternoon in July.

Interval (15 minutes)

ACT THREE: An early evening in August.

ACT FOUR: A morning in October.

THE PLAY

Since its opening performance in 1904 *The Cherry Orchard* has become deservedly renowned as one of the world's best-loved theatrical works. While Chekhov labelled it as a Comedy, its first director Stanislavsky presented it as Tragedy. Each had a point, as the play entwines both humour and sadness.

The ailing orchard at the heart of Lyuba Ranyevskaya's increasingly neglected estate stands as symbol of a dissolving social order. There her self-deluding confusion is shared, in various ways, by the rich gallery of other characters – family, friends, and servants – whom Chekhov displays around her. Generally bewildered and sometimes eccentric, they range from idealistic youth to crumbling old age and from those absorbed with future ambitions to those ensnared only in perilous nostalgia. Together, as they contemplate the sale or salvation of the orchard, they provide us with a 'theatre of mood' rather than of predominantly physical action. Here even the hesitations and silences become creative.

Above all, the varied emotional experiences being registered in the face of social transformation have a timeless and universal quality that allows audiences to recognise on stage something of themselves – their own hopes, fears, and dilemmas. Chekhov's ability thus to create a wide assortment of convincing characters who are still capable of moving us remains central to his dramatic genius.

The present production aims to remain faithful to the theatrical naturalism that Chekhov helped to pioneer. The adaptation, specially prepared for Alton Fringe Theatre, brings all four Acts onto a single and simple stage setting, which allows us to quicken the pace of the central sections while preserving the main thrust and subtlety of the dramatic narrative with its vital ensemble-playing.

For more than a century *The Cherry Orchard* has proved to be a perennial delight, enduring both in its relevance and its reputation. Under the direction of Louise Biddiss (Dilloway), herself a founding member of Alton Fringe Theatre some thirty-five years ago, we are proud to be making at last our first venture into the world of Chekhov and to be presenting for our audiences a work of such rich humanity.

ANTON CHEKHOV 1860-1904



Anton Chekhov was born at Taganrog on the coast of the Sea of Azov to the north of the Caucasus. His grandparents had been serfs, but his father had eventually risen to the status of a shopkeeper. After the business became bankrupt and most of his family had fled to Moscow Anton was left behind to complete his final three years at the local high school. Once he was able to rejoin the others he managed, in 1879, to gain entry into the Medical Faculty of Moscow University.

Chekhov then helped to fund his studies and much of the family upkeep by writing, particularly in the form of short stories that were initially somewhat unpromising. By the later 1880s, when he was now qualified as a doctor, his efforts at authorship were increasingly directed towards the stage as well. Most notable at this phase were a series of one-act comic sketches known as 'vaudevilles'. However, in 1887 *Ivanov* was premiered as his first full-length play. Two years later there appeared another, *The Wood Demon*, but he soon withdrew this from performance.

Even as Chekhov's maturing talent and reputation as a short-story writer blossomed in the 1890s his public recognition as a dramatist was being slowed by his unfashionable determination to combat the artificial over-theatricality still dominating the contemporary stage. But towards the end of that decade his prospects were transformed by the emergence of the Moscow Arts

Theatre. This was headed by Konstantin Stanislavsky who shared Chekhov's commitment to a more naturalistic style of acting. In 1898 the Moscow company revived *The Seagull*, which had been poorly received on first performance at St Petersburg two years earlier. Stanislavsky premiered Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (a reworking of the *The Wood Demon*) in 1899, followed by *Three Sisters* in 1901. Then during 1903 the author composed *The Cherry Orchard*, which turned out to be the last of his four great plays. It opened in Moscow to much acclaim on 17 January 1904, the playwright's forty-fourth birthday. Six months later he was dead.

Even while wrangling with Stanislavsky over how best to present this last play, Chekhov had already entered the terminal phase of tuberculosis. For nearly twenty years he had battled the advancing symptoms while developing his twin careers as author and doctor. In 1890 he had braved the rigours of far-eastern Siberia, helping with a census of the Sakhalin penal colony and writing a devastating report on the prevailing conditions. Two years later he bought a small estate at Melikhovo, some fifty miles from Moscow. There as a much-loved general practitioner he served his neighbours of all classes – and also built himself a writing lodge surrounded by his own orchard. In 1898 he moved to warmer climes, buying the villa near Yalta where he composed most of his two final plays.

From time to time he was also drawn back to theatrical Moscow, particularly after he wedded the actress Olga Knipper in 1901. If much of their brief and childless marriage was fated to operate only at long distance, it also produced fine treasures of letter-writing for posterity to enjoy. And Anton and Olga were at least securely together when he died in the course of a spa visit to Germany. From there his body was returned to Russia for a fittingly celebratory burial in Moscow's Novodevichy Cemetery.

'Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.'



The Cherry Orchard company

About **ALTON FRINGE THEATRE**

Thirty-five years ago a group of talented amateurs came together during Alton's then *May Arts Week* to perform T.S.Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* under the professional direction of Patrick Sandford. Inspired by this experience they then stayed together under the leadership of the late Tim Guiding to develop a new drama group. Ever since Alton Fringe members have been challenging themselves and their audiences with a wide variety of dramatic material. The characteristically small-scale, intimate productions have attracted a devoted following, and some members of the group have taken turns at directing and writing as well as acting.

On the back page of this Programme you will find a listing of most of the 60 productions presented to date.

Website: www.altonfringe.com
Email: altonfringetheatre@gmail.com

'ALLO 'ALLO!

by Jeremy Lloyd and David Croft

Alton Operatic & Dramatic Society
Alton Assembly Rooms 8-11 Nov
Tickets: www.aods.org

A Selection of our Previous Productions

1988 (for Alton Arts Week)
Murder in the Cathedral (Eliot)

1989 **Habeas Corpus** (Bennett)
The Sea (Bond)

1990 **Plenty** (Hare)

1991 **A Family Affair**
(Ostrovsky)

1992 **Nicholas Nickleby**
(Dickens)

Blood Wedding (Lorca)

1993 **The Women of Troy**
(Euripides)

1994 **The Lady's Not for Burning** (Fry)

1995 **The Birthday Party / Party Time** (Pinter)

The Taming of the Shrew
(Shakespeare)

1996 **Bloody Poetry** (Brenton)

1997 **Becket** (Anouilh)

1998 **Mary Stuart** (Schiller)
Our Country's Good
(Wertenbaker)

1999 **The Food of Love**
(Shakespeare's songs)

2000 **Millennium Production of Medieval Plays & Music**

2001 **Don Carlos** (Schiller)

2003 **Pygmalion** (Shaw)

2004 **The Fire Raisers** (Frisch)

2005 **The Winter's Tale**
(Shakespeare)

2006 **Under Milk Wood**
(Thomas)

2007 **A Man for All Seasons**
(Bolt)

2008 **Kindertransport**
(Samuels)

Salome (Wilde) – at Edinburgh Fringe

2009 **Moll Flanders: The Musical** (Defoe/Luckham, Leigh, Miles)

2010 **Great Expectations**
(Dickens/Bartlett)

2011 **Blue Remembered Hills**
(Potter)

2012 **The Thirty-Nine Steps**
(Buchan/Hitchcock/Barlow)

2013 **The Tempest**
(Shakespeare)

Talking Heads (Bennett)

2014 **An Enemy of the People**
(Ibsen)

2015 **The Waste Land** (Eliot)

2016 **The Wind in the Willows**
(Grahame/Applegarth)
King Lear (Shakespeare)

2017 **Sweet Fanny Adams**
(Guilding)

2018 **Luther** (Osborne)

2019 **The Way of the World**
(Congreve)

Macbeth (Shakespeare)

2022 **ZigZag - the story of Gilbert White** (Applegarth)
Top Girls (Churchill)

2023 **The Plague**
(Camus/Bartlett)