MTC Education Teachers’ Notes 2013

The Cherry Orchard
by Simon Stone after Anton Chekhov

10 Aug — 25 Sept 2013
Southbank Theatre, The Sumner
Teachers’ Notes prepared by Meg Upton
BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE...

THE EXPERIENCE
In the theatre we share stories which differ from TV, DVD, film, books, magazines, podcasts and other media. In the theatre stories are told by real people in real time before a live audience. Each performance of a play is different to any other as it is dependent upon the time, the actors, the technical equipment and, very importantly, the audience. You can’t re-read a live theatre performance or copy it to see again and again. Each performance exists only once. The performance you will see of The Cherry Orchard will differ from the one performed before and the one performed after, which makes it special and unique. Your role as an audience ensures its uniqueness. As students of theatre, you are advised to carefully prepare to see the production so that you can capture that unique, one-off experience and be able to reflect on it in detail.

ABOUT THE CHERRY ORCHARD
Andreyevna Ranevskaya returns to the family estate seeking refuge from a failed love affair and impending bankruptcy to face the prospect of losing the family’s beloved cherry orchard. Fortunately, her former labourer, Lopahkin, now a successful property developer, has a cunning plan. Will Ranevskaya embrace the winds of change, or is the pull of the past too strong?

Cast & Characters
Yepihodov (a clerk who works for the estate)  Gareth Davies  
Firs (an aged family servant)  Ronald Falk  
Gayev (brother to Ranevskaya)  Robert Menzies  
Anya (daughter to Ranevskaya)  Eloise Mignon  
Lopahkin (a successful business man)  Steve Mouzakis  
Varya (Ranevskaya’s adopted daughter)  Zahra Newman  
Pischik (a landowner fallen on hard times)  Roger Oakley  
Yasha (a servant/valet to Ranevskaya)  David Paterson  
Andreyevna Ranevskaya (an aristocrat)  Pamela Rabe  
Dunyasha (a maid)  Nikki Shiels  
Charlotta (Anya’s governess)  Katherine Tonkin  
Trofimov (a university student)  Toby Truslove

Creative Team
Direction & Adaption  Simon Stone  
Set & Costume Design  Alice Babidge  
Lighting Design  Niklas Pajanti  
Sound Design & Composition  Stefan Gregory
ORIGINAL PLAY

_The Cherry Orchard_ is the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov's last play. It opened at the Moscow Art Theatre on 17 January 1904 in a production directed by Konstantin Stanislavski. Chekhov intended the play as a comedy however, Stanislavski insisted on directing the play as a tragedy. Since its initial production, directors have felt they need to contend with what they perceive is the dual nature of the play.

Chekhov’s play concerns an aristocratic Russian woman, Madame Lyubov Andreyevna Ranevskaya, and her family. Ranevskaya returns to the family's estate - which includes a large and well-known cherry orchard - just before the estate is to be auctioned to pay the mortgage. While presented with options to save the estate, the family essentially does nothing and the play ends with the estate being sold to the son of a former serf/servant, Lopahkin. The family leave to the sound of the cherry orchard being cut down.

Chekhov’s play presents, amongst others, themes of cultural futility, both the futility of the aristocracy to maintain its status and the futility of the bourgeoisie (middle class) to find meaning in its newfound materialism. There were huge socio-economic forces at work in Russia at the turn of the 20th century, including the rise of the middle class after the abolition of serfdom in the mid-19th century and the diminishing of the aristocracy. Chekhov’s play reflects aspects of these global forces. For Russia these culminated in the uprising and revolution of 1917.

Adapted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cherry_Orchard

**LINK:** Read an online translation of Chekhov's original play: http://www.artlit.org/en/belles-lettres/orchard/Orchard-I.pdf

**ON ADAPTATION**

_The method I'm employing ... is to create resonances of turn-of-the-century Russia; and to create resonances of various periods of the radical world coming to blows with the traditional world through the century just past – Simon Stone._

Melbourne Theatre Company’s production of _The Cherry Orchard_ is an adaptation of Chekhov’s play by director Simon Stone. Students may find it useful to read a translation of the original play in order to familiarise themselves with the characters and the narrative (see link above). The following links, excerpts and quotes are offered in order to provide perspectives on the process of adaptation, why Simon Stone has adapted the text and what he feels has been essential to retain.

**LINK:** A podcast of an interview on Triple R during which Simon Stone discusses adaptation of classic texts http://ondemand.rrr.org.au/grid/20130717084441

**LINK:** Article by theatre critic and analyst, Alison Croggan, discussing adaptation and its current place and perception in contemporary theatre practice: http://www.abc.net.au/arts/blog/Alison-Croggon/playwright-versus-director-130731/default.htm

**LINK:** A recording of Neon Conversation: The Art of Adaption, a panel discussion held as part of MTC’s Neon Festival: http://mtc-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/Audio/1656.mp3

EXCERPT from Theatre from the Backseat, a blog, which discusses ‘authorship’ in adaptation

Even a cursory examination of the question of authorship and the stage (and I don’t pretend to be making anything more than a cursory examination here) shows us that theatrical authorship is already more complex than in a written text. Instead of there being a direct line that goes author to text to reader, in the theatre, there are filters laid on top. There are more mediators: playwright to director to actors to audience. You will note that the text does not appear in this second schema, because which text is the fixed text? We could argue that it is the script, the written text provided by the playwright to the director. However, because the play is an inherently performative form, the text can never be wholly experienced on the page. It must be performed to become an object of consciousness for the audience, and so it must pass through director and actors. There are a number of subjectivities in play here: to get to the audience, the playwright’s text must pass through a number of interpretations or readings. The director in particular becomes a figure who is both author and reader: at what point does the director’s reading of a text change the text itself?


THE SETTING AND CONTEXT

In Chekhov’s story, the old and new worlds collide. Developers, businessmen and radical thinkers looking to the future jostle a Russian aristocracy paralysed by indecision. Stone says his Cherry Orchard 'takes place in a recognisable world not yet totally disillusioned with capitalism', and adds cryptically 'the whole Arab Spring is certainly an attempt to reposition the geopolitics of a region'


Both Simon Stone and MTC Literary Manager, Chris Mead, speak about a 1970s referencing. While the production is not set specifically in the 1970s, the economic and political processes in both Russia and Australia of the time suggest financial crisis and significant social change.

The physical setting for this production is an estate owned by Andreyevna Ranevskaya, a Russian aristocrat. Ranevskaya has just returned home after several years living in Paris with her lover. The family and servants have gathered to welcome her home. The specific settings are the upstairs nursery, a field on the edge of the estate near the river, the rear of the estate. The final act takes place again in the upstairs nursery.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

The Cherry Orchard is a scripted work. Chekhov’s original play took place across four acts. Simon Stone has chosen to retain that structure. As in Chekhov’s original script, this version of the play uses the device of the four seasons - Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter - as a structural arch. Acts 1 and 2 make up the first half of the production, and Acts 3 and 4 make up the second part of the production. There is an interval of approximately twenty minutes. The production uses a theatre curtain, much like those used in traditional proscenium arch theatres, to indicate the end of each act. In contemporary theatre spaces a curtain is often not a permanent fixture, therefore, this is a deliberate decision by the director and design team to indicate the acts, the seasons and time passing.

THEATRICAL STYLES

MTC Literary Manager, Chris Mead, comments in his interview that Chekhov’s writing demanded ‘a new acting style’. Simon Stone mentions in his interview that ...in recreating Chekhov it is like trying to reconstruct all those irrational things going on in people’s minds that lead to that transcript of a point in time. Both believe that the play is very much concerned with characters rather than action.
In terms of the theatrical styles present in this production it may be useful to consider ‘realism’, life-like representation and naturalistic acting. The physical space that the characters inhabit is quite sparse and transformational but within that, the acting style is indeed aimed at life-like representation. The dialogue is often conversational, characters are frequently interrupted and on occasion more than one conversation is occurring.

Chekhov’s original play was written as a comedy. Many aspects of Simon Stone’s adaptation are comedic incorporating aspects of slapstick, verbal comedy, situational comedy, absurdity and farce. Amidst the laughter, you may notice that there are moments of poignancy, drama and even tragedy either juxtaposed or standing alone. For students of Theatre Studies it will be important to consider how these styles and moments are made apparent through the representation of characters and the actors’ performances.

In a recent interview for Brisbane media, Simon Stone said...
"My endless pursuit - which shifts in its particulars - is to elevate to the status of a myth a timeless story; something that was written quite specifically for a particular era. "The method I'm employing ... is to create resonances of turn-of-the-century Russia; and to create resonances of various periods of the radical world coming to blows with the traditional world through the century just past." In Chekhov’s story, the old and new worlds collide. Developers, businessmen and radical thinkers looking to the future jostle a Russian aristocracy paralysed by indecision. "All the words people use are as impotent as they are potent," adds Stone. "The joy audiences get out of the play is watching people try to talk to each other and failing, or having one brief moment of connection ... It's about losing things you’re in love with."

THE PERFORMANCE SPACE
The Sumner is a very contemporary theatre that offers a large playing space and a raked auditorium. For this production of The Cherry Orchard a box set is placed on the existing stage and an actor-audience relationship is established accordingly. The director plays with the actor-audience relationship by exploring the possibilities of the playing space, the edge of the stage, the off-stage, and a fourth wall.

Further, where you sit in the theatre may determine your experience of the performance. It may be useful to consider the ‘director’s gaze’. What choices has the director made that impact upon your experience of the performance?

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SOCIAL, HISTORICAL & CULTURAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

ABOUT ANTON CHEKHOV (1860-1904)
Chekhov’s two last plays—Tri sestry (1901; Three Sisters) and Vishnyovy Sad (1904; The Cherry Orchard)—were both written for the Moscow Art Theatre. But much as Chekhov owed to the theatre’s two founders, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky, he remained dissatisfied with such rehearsals and performances of his plays as he was able to witness. Repeatedly insisting that his mature drama was comedy rather than tragedy, Chekhov grew distressed when producers insisted on a heavy treatment, overemphasizing the—admittedly frequent—occasions on which the characters inveigh against the boredom and futility of their lives. Despite Stanislavsky’s reputation as an innovator who had
brought a natural, non-declamatory style to the hitherto overhistrionic Russian stage, his productions were never natural and non-declamatory enough for Chekhov, who wished his work to be acted with the lightest possible touch. And though Chekhov's mature plays have since become established in repertoires all over the world, it remains doubtful whether his craving for the light touch has been satisfied except on the rarest of occasions. Insisting that his *The Cherry Orchard* was "a comedy, in places even a farce," Chekhov offered in this last play a poignant picture of the Russian landowning class in decline, portraying characters who remain comic despite their very poignancy.


MODERNITY AND CLASSICISM

In his interview for these resources, director Simon Stone uses the terms 'modernity' and 'classicism'. What do these mean in general, and what might they mean for his version of *The Cherry Orchard*?

**Modernity** typically refers to an historical period marked by the move from feudalism (or agrarianism) toward capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization, the nation-state and its institutions and forms of surveillance (Barker, 2005, p444). At the time that Anton Chekhov was writing *The Cherry Orchard*, Russia in the early 20th century, Russia was still a feudal state ruled by a Tzar, possessing an aristocratic upper class, who had house servants, and whose lands were worked by serfs. In other parts of the world, industrialization and capitalism had brought about the growth of a new middle class.

In the world of art, **modernity** as a term has been used to describe art that is made in cultural conditions "in which the seemingly absolute necessity of innovation becomes a primary fact of life, work, and thought" (Smith, 2009).

**Classicism** – *Classicism implies a canon of widely accepted ideal forms*. How might this statement relate to the theatre, to Chekhov's theatre, to contemporary theatre making?

Classicism in the theatre was developed by 17th century French playwrights from what they judged to be the rules of Greek classical theatre, including the "Classical unities" of time, place and action, found in the *Poetics* of Aristotle.

- Unity of time referred to the need for the entire action of the play to take place in a fictional 24-hour period
- Unity of place meant that the action should unfold in a single location
- Unity of action meant that the play should be constructed around a single 'plot-line', such as a tragic love affair or a conflict between honour and duty.

Further reading: http://www2.cnr.edu/home/bmcmanus/poetics.html

RUSSIAN NAMING CUSTOMS

While the names of the characters appear at the beginning of these notes, in *The Cherry Orchard* you will hear some characters' addressed in a variety of ways. In Russian naming customs it is usual for people to have three names: a given name, a patronymic name (derived from the father’s name), and a family name (a surname). There are also formal, informal, and diminutive forms of people’s names. Depending on your relationship to the person, a version or combination of these is used. Confused? You may like to read more at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Slavic_naming_customs
CHRIS MEAD, LITERARY MANAGER AT MTC, SPEAKS ABOUT CHEKHOV AND SIMON STONE’S ADAPTATION OF THE CHERRY ORCHARD

What Simon has talked a lot about is trying to create the conditions for audiences to experience what Chekhov wanted them to experience with this play. What did it feel like to watch this play for the first time? Chekhov was so modern, and quite a way apart from his immediate contemporaries – Ibsen, Strindberg, Bernard Shaw, Granville-Barker – that one can more clearly see that the craft of acting had to be reinvented in order to play it successfully. Of course though, even with its first production, Chekhov thought it a comedy, and Stanislavksi, its first director, thought it a tragedy. Suffice it to say, Chekhov hated it.

In most plays the characters ultimately sum up the play for you thematically. So, for instance, Prospero in The Tempest tells the audience this is why the play is like this and I have done these things for those reasons. Most plays try to make it meaningful in that way. In Chekhov there is a real desire to evade that, because life isn’t like that. Chekhov wanted to create life as he felt it was lived, on stage, hence the drive towards something more natural in acting – not just realism, but naturalism, and certainly nothing like the more common and accepted theatrical melodrama style (with the exception of people like the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen).

What has been fascinating with the approach to the text in the rehearsal room is we have spoken about a lot about documentaries. When you are in a documentary you never know when you are in a good bit. Someone is filming everything all the time, so what are the good bits? There is an amazing compression in the way the final documentary is made and everything in that final cut is crucial. This is Chekhov.

Dramatic action in Chekhov is different, or perhaps maybe the obverse, from what we usually expect in a play: ‘What does a character want and what are they going to do to get it?’ In most plays the work unfolds according to this one piece of logic; Hamlet tries to change his world and the people in it to get what he wants, to avenge his father’s murder, by his uncle. In Chekhov, however, what they want is often very small, it is often relationship based, so if you ask the question ‘What’s at stake?’ well nothing really. In Hamlet of course it’s life and death. Sure the Gayev’s will lose their estate, but that hardly sums up the play, or the losses felt by each character. What Chekhov does so astonishingly well is to give each of his characters an aria of sorts, allowing us immediate access to their emotions, wants, needs and fears. Armed with this knowledge, and a great love and empathy for them, we are compelled through the play knowing just how devastating each moment is for them, all of them. We love them, we laugh at them and we fear for them. It is a unique kind of dramatic irony. In Chekhov actors can’t play irony of course, or loss of class, and or revolutionary change. Actors can’t play these things. So, this thing, this very modern concept of, for want of a better phrase, (coined by a colleague) ‘negative action’ means that what we experience is all about character.

There are huge amounts of information about character in this play that, prior to Chekhov, had never happened before in the theatre in this way. So we love these characters. Every time we meet a character for the first time in The Cherry Orchard, Chekhov presents them in such a way that we love them. There is just enough information in Chekhov’s play for us to go, ‘Ohhh!’ We see their dilemma, we see their pain, we see their obstacles and then we watch them fail. Even when Lopahkin gets what he wants, it isn’t enough and he doesn’t feel satisfied. Ultimately what he wants is to be part of them, not to own them. He wants to be family but he will never be because they can’t accept him as family. There are some funny monologues in Act 3 where Lopahkin is saying ‘Well now I am family, now I am part of you’, but he isn’t! There is a delicacy in the way that Chekhov handles that awkward almost tragic moment. There is a wonderful authorial sleight of hand at the beginning of Act 2 with Charlotta’s monologue, and there are other examples in the play, where characters tell each other their deepest darkest secrets or worries, but nobody listens! It’s almost as if as an audience we get to hear it but nobody else in the world of the play
cares or listens, so did it actually ever even happen? It’s almost as if there are these astonishing moments of subtext in the text. Playwrights had never really written subtext before and it’s this brilliant, dramatic sleight of hand.

Much of what Simon has done during the adaptation is to cut out a lot of his own writing and return to Chekhov. In many ways, beat for beat, dramatic gesture by gesture, this is a faithful adaptation. Not reverential, but a faithful, careful and very considered adaptation. Chekhov doesn’t abandon any of these characters, they are all equally weighted, and he doesn’t stack the deck. We love Lopahkin even though he is buying up the estate, and you could present Trofimov as a revolutionary hero or as a jerk, he doesn’t do that either. This play is incredibly fair minded – it is up to us to judge, or at least to see life lived in all its chaos and confusion. There is an amazing degree of precision written into the world of this play. Aristotle says that character is subservient to action but Chekhov gets away with this imbalance, the plays works because it feeds the central idea of ‘What do they want?’ We watch as they try to get what they want, fail, wonder if or someone else should give it a go, or just wait for somebody else to do it. And here one feels very strongly, the beginnings of Beckett. It has been lovely watching the production find the balance between chaos and indeterminacy, and a powerful sense of character, and thematic, articulacy that is all there in the writing.

In the rehearsal room we have talked about the 1960s/1970s as a reference point for this version. This was a point where, in Australia, beautiful colonial buildings began to get knocked down or sold and turned into apartments, sub-developments and so on. So the look of the show is to give it a particular historical referent, insofar as to allow an audience to see through time, back to the time and place of creation of the play, but also to allow an audience to see a bit of themselves in the world of the play. It isn’t set now either, so there can be a sense of nostalgia about times back then. Given that the play itself is about nostalgia, that 1970s reference point provides a prism through which to view the work, nostalgically, historically but also more analytically. Plus of course it is in a room with not many exits, another hint towards its modernity. Ultimately the production is doing its best to be what this play was at the time of its creation, radical, honest, playful and poignant about the world as it is, and about each of our hopeless dreams and failed loves.

**DISCUSS:**
What does Chris Mead’s commentary evoke for you?
What are some key words, phrases or descriptions he uses that you are curious about?
What new understanding does it provide in thinking about ‘character’?
What are you imagining you will see?
IN CONVERSATION WITH SIMON STONE, PAMELA RABE AND ROBERT MENZIES,  
THE CHERRY ORCHARD

Simon, Pamela and Rob spoke with Meg Upton in week three of rehearsals for The Cherry Orchard

Pamela Rabe – LyubovRanevskaya  
Robert Menzies – Leonid Gayev  
Simon Stone – Adaptation and Direction

What is the world of this version of The Cherry Orchard? What might be familiar to an audience? What may be unfamiliar?

Rob:
Well in the first instance it’s the world of the theatre. A space where an audience arrives at, where there are people within that space and where there will be things to look at.

Simon:
Hopefully they will recognize themselves. They will see people they know.

Pamela:
If they have read the play in one of its many adaptations that preserve the Russian names of the characters, they will recognise in this version a cast of people who populate this world as having Russian names.

Is this version to be set in the 1970s?

Simon:
No it isn’t, but this seems to be the way it is being talked about at present

Pamela:
Perhaps it is something that has trickled through because people want to latch onto or locate it somewhere.

Does this version of The Cherry Orchard have a specific time or era?

Simon:
No, it doesn’t have a time. At the design presentation I said to the actors that a useful reference for the journey we were embarking on in terms of dislocating time was the 1970’s. The reason it is a good reference is because is a time suspended between when the play was written and our time. So, by giving some thought to the 1970s as a time, that period is distanced enough to be able to be a deflection of ‘classicism’ and of any sense of ‘modernity’. Either of those two, if they become the predominant feature, are a distraction for reading the play. A timelessness, a sense that the entire history, every version of the play, is coursing through the audience’s awareness as they are watching it and coursing through the actors as they are playing it. That is really important. This becomes a myth that we are all sharing again in a way that we share the Santa Claus myth every Christmas.
How is this version structured? Its original structure was in four acts. Its original production was directed by Stanislavski at Moscow Art Theatre. Are there any references or resonances of these aspects in this production?

Rob:
This production has four acts. That structure has been maintained, but obviously not being directed by Stanislavski! I think this adaptation is very faithful to Chekhov and I suspect comes very close to what he had in mind.

What do you think he did have in mind?
Rob:
Something chaotic and random - like real life. Something that builds towards a moment, or series of moments through the audience’s witnessing of it, although none of it is our (the audience’s) affair really.

Simon:
It’s hard to construct something that feels unconstructed – like life. Chekhov is the playwright that I believe has got closest to that. Shakespeare’s probably the writer who has got closest to perfect construction and Chekhov to perfect deconstruction. So this play needs to be experienced in a very different way to the usual idea of the ‘plot’ moving people’s interests’ forward. It isn’t about revelations or surprises or deaths or betrayals, it’s about a series of moments of existence. An audience will always read drama into those moments of existence in the same way we read drama into a nature documentary. In a nature documentary the bird isn’t aware they are in anything dramaturgical but through an audience’s projection of their own meaning of their own lives onto that nature documentary, they create the most extraordinary tragedies or comedies. It is that projection that we need to find room for in this production. Which is not to say that we have burnt our finger prints off so that people can project whatever they want. In our process we are trying to be as true as possible to each of the moments of existence which means the actors might at times feel a bit lost. They need to surrender themselves to not knowing what is going to happen next or how it should happen. I am trying to be as much a guardian as possible to the truths of those situations.

Pamela, would you please describe your character, Lyubov Ranevskaya, what sort of woman is she? At what point is she in her life? What is important to her?
Pamela:
I am going to answer this question by beginning where Simon left off, the notion of Chekhov being the master of a deconstructed story telling. He seems to explore that through a forensic eye on humanity and the illogic of people’s behaviour. Through negligence, distraction and self-absorption they collide in this over-populated house, or room as it is in this interpretation, the story begins to form. Ranevskaya is the queen of that self-absorbed, distracted, human court or family. She is a woman in her fifties who has a deep history with the family home in which the story occurs. There have been a series of accidents and incidents, sometimes by her own making, for which she often doesn’t take responsibility, and at other times does take responsibility while feeling she is being punished. Certain events, including the death of her husband and her young son, have developed in her an anxious attachment to the house and the cherry orchard. During an absence of five years she left behind her daughter, Anya, her adopted daughter Varya, and her brother Gayev, together with the broader retinue of people associated with the estate, to live in Paris with her lover.

Why does she return?
Pamela:
She comes back because she said she needed to. There is an overwhelming longing to return but an immediate and pressing concern is the threat that the whole estate may disappear if something doesn’t happen. It requires her presence.
Rob, would you please describe your character Gayev? What sort of man is he? What is his place, role, value, importance within this world?

Rob:
He should be the man of the family who takes controls of things but has never taken control of anything, ever. We have a few speculations about why that might have been. It could be because he has been under the influence of his sister. It could be that his parents were distant, he was never shown how to do things. In the original he is obsessed with billiards, in this version he is obsessed with a train set. He loves his family.

Pamela:
I think they all love their family and there is a belief that love is the most important thing which is not something that is shared by every character in the play.

Would you talk about the central concerns of the play?

Simon:
I suppose the largest theme running through the play is uncertainty about the future which is one of the reasons why it continues to be so cherished in every era. In the same way that King Lear is about the same theme, Hamlet, Death of a Salesman, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. A lot of great plays are about not knowing what is going to happen next. It is very good dramatic material. But what you are dealing with here is the end of one era and the beginning of an uncertain new era. Chekhov places into that world characters that represent the ambiguity of that future. The past is a known entity but people may ‘disremember’ it, they may have different perspectives on what the past is, but it is certainly known and mythologized. The future contains much more ambiguity, including Chekhov’s own opinions of the future.

Maxim Gorky, the great Russian playwright who came after Chekhov, tended to pick a ‘side’ in terms of his politics, partly because he was attached to the Communists for part of his career, and because he believed in the Communist cause. One of Gorky’s great plays, Summerfolk, has a similar plot. They were written at the same time, but Chekhov has his radicals appear to be as ridiculous or respectable as his industrialists and his aristocrats. Chekhov manages to fall in love with what is common amongst people rather than what sets them apart. Part of the way he does that is by watching them but up against each other.

Stanislavski has been quoted as saying that Chekhov expressed his best ideas and thoughts in ‘the spaces between the lines’. Is this version of The Cherry Orchard about subtext? Does it wear its heart or concerns on its sleeve more openly?

Simon:
The thing about subtext is that someone gets to decide what it is which I don’t really believe in. I want there to be an incredibly strong existence on stage from a performer and I want there to be incredible subtext, but even giving it a word that relates itself to ‘text’, renders it a bit logical or rational. I don’t think that there’s a dichotomy between what I as a director/writer am saying is what I want and what I actually want. I think there are a million things going on at any given point in time. An actor can’t play ten things at once so they usually do need to choose. This makes sub-text a helpful way of performing. What I am more interested in, particularly with this play, is when people are on the same page and when they aren’t as that’s when it’s most interesting. Usually, the pauses or silences occur when suddenly everyone notices they are in the same space together for the first time. That is what is really interesting, that moment, not what is said. The characters create a community for a brief second before they all fall apart in their self-obsession.
Something the students and teachers may be interested in is whether there is a point when the characters appear to have been ‘created’ or feel ‘finished’? Or does the concept of character remain fluid?

Rob:
Ultimately your job as an actor is to be ‘present’. ‘Character’ is a slightly alien notion to me, I don’t believe in it. You go out there, you say certain things, you do certain things. I don’t put a character together in my shed at home. My job is to be present in each of the moments and if someone wants to call that my ‘character’, that is up to them.

Simon:
Someone’s character in real life is judged by the series of things they have done. Their character can’t be judged solely on something they have done once. People often say, ‘Please don’t judge my character on this one event’. There is a much larger narrative. So ‘character’ is the sum total of all the things you have witnessed someone do in a play.

Pamela:
And some plays lend themselves to a kind of parsing or organising in an objective, super-objective, action, beat, verb type of way. I’ve worked on Chekhov plays where I have used that type of process, but the process with Simon has been very different. We began this conversation with a discussion of the nature of people in time. As Rob says, this process is an exploration of not knowing what happens next, but being present. Through that process we start to crystallize something which is not necessarily a series of intellectually organised moments of ‘presence’, but lots of present moments. We will have a known performance that we are creating and can recreate, so that the script, the events, the backstory, can be repeated eight times a week in season. But, this has been a very different process. I am interested in how students of the play or the performance event will watch and think about how differing processes build different work.

Simon:
One thing that should be mentioned is that Rob knows that it would be wrong to come on stage with a working class accent when he is an aristocrat.

Pamela:
There are a series of givens that must be accounted for.

Simon:
Yes, there are givens that we can’t contravene within the rules of this play unless we are deliberately trying to invert logic or say the opposite of what the play is saying. In some plays it is very helpful to invert a character and it can make for very interesting explorations, but in this play it would be somewhat perverse. I would say that a character has a background and then they are the sum total of the things they do on stage.

Pamela:
I can’t help but engage with thinking about why my character behaves the way she does, why she does certain actions. That’s how you construct things. But in this process, because it is based on the irrationality of the actions of the characters, you build a profile not by something you have decided in your loungeroom or in your preparation before rehearsal. It absolutely demands that it is discovered on your feet in the space in the presence of the other performers.
Simon:
This is something that makes Chekhov very difficult to read. One of the most common stories of those who attend drama school, see Chekhov performed or perform it themselves, they say that when they read it they hated it and couldn’t understand what was happening. I presume this may be the experience of those who have read the play before they come to see it. There is a great deal of irrationality in the script and it is very difficult to understand the socio-political context of the original play. That is often a very fashionable way of looking at why we don’t understand texts from the past. With Chekhov I think it is more likely that the moment of joyful existence that exists in the laughter of a character hasn’t existed yet in performance, so it is hard to tell on a page what it means.

If you had a dinner party or a birthday party or you were hanging out with your friends and you took a transcript of it and you notated when people laughed and what they said, it may look somewhat like a Chekhov play I believe. Someone would randomly start laughing and you can’t tell from the transcript that they were looking at someone or responding to someone in that moment or thinking about something in that moment. That existence is very hard once transcribed to understanding. In court cases where conversations are transcribed a jury or member of the public may ask; how did this get from that moment to that moment, and then she killed him? We don’t understand what must have been going on in the room at that point in time. So in recreating Chekhov it is like trying to reconstruct all those irrational things going on in people’s minds that lead to that transcript of a point in time. That means a lot of experimentation and can’t involve thinking through things logically. Just like you can’t recreate what happened on the day that a documentary was filmed with a particular group of people.

Pamela:
There is something particular about Chekhov in that he is fascinated by the capacity for human beings to delude themselves and each other. In the end I think this play is thick with subtext, but it is interesting in exploring that through a process whereby that the subtext is born out of the irrationality of behaviour rather than clear decisions you have come to.

Simon:
I have been extraordinarily lucky in this production to be working with such performers who are so incredibly experienced, talented and well springs of emotion and imagination. It means that the nature of the exploration that we’ve embarked on can take for granted that there is a connection with the material by the actors that is pre-existent. You can’t take that for granted all the time. I would never work like this with students in a drama school because I would spend about three weeks prior to beginning making discoveries about the students thinking and developing a log of experiences. So when they start talking about them on stage that they feel like memories rather than just a piece of dialogue. But each of these actors came to the floor with a great deal of that in place, to do with the level of experience and their incredible imagination. Imagination is the most important thing in Chekhov.

Rob:
I think this conversation has thrown up some very basic acting questions. I don’t necessarily have answers to any of them.

Could we discuss the design for the production? How does it influence the stagecraft and the way the play is coming together, to construct or deconstruct these characters’ world?

Simon:
Something that often helps stagecraft is where you put the furniture. I often cripple actors’ abilities to rely on furniture by removing it. This play starts without furniture then the subsequent introduction of furniture comes from the characters rather than from the design. Usually set pieces are put in a place so that the use of it will make a performer visible to the audience. If a character sits on that chair or stands at that bench they will be seen in this way. The tendency of the actor to then be realistic is serving their
visibility. Whereas in this playing space the absence of furniture or set pieces removes that tendency. The set makes it difficult to solve many stagecraft problems for the actors but what it does wonderfully is it makes them connect with each other.

Would the actors agree with that? Are you making discoveries?

Pamela:
We’re playing in it. Any kind of ‘dream’ space you create on stage, in this instance a large three sided box, makes the air thick within it and we are playing inside and within that.

Rob:
All four seasons, all four environments in this play, are really suggestive. There are a lot of small chairs with big people in this space. Big people and small chairs are highly suggestive.

Simon:
And there is a train set occupying a good part of the room

Rob:
And a basketball net.

So does this version of *The Cherry Orchard* work through the four seasons as Chekhov suggests in his original script?

Simon:
Yes it does.

What about costuming? Will this enhance, create, emphasise character?

Simon:
Costuming as well as set design has gone down a rather strange avenue for the last fifty years, at least in the English speaking theatre world, the idea of costume creating character. Alice Babidge, the designer, and I refuse to create drawings before we’ve met the actors and discovered what they want to do with their characters. We might have suggestions about what we want to provoke in the actor but if the actor responded by saying ‘No I don’t think that is who I am creating at all’, we don’t keep them in that silhouette or that fabric or piece of clothing. In my work, and this is different to other directors, if I ever notice a costume when the character isn’t trying to be noticed then the costume has failed. What you should be looking at is human beings interacting with each other, unless the character wants to be noticed. If they aren’t noticed when they need to be, then perhaps the costume has failed. I hope that the costumes just look like the kind of things that people wear, which is really difficult to make work when you need to make decisions. Sometimes designers choose clothing that is very similar to what the actors would wear themselves which is an interesting solution.

Pamela:
And potentially a dangerous one. There are obviously very strong aesthetic choices being made all the time. I don’t know what anyone else’s costumes are because, as Simon said, we haven’t had any costume presentations. I think that Firs, the aged butler, is wearing livery, so there are some signifying costumes in the play about servitude.

Simon:
Yes, but those are related to the character’s job. If the character’s clothing is related to their job we are sticking to the fact they would wear it. So there is a maid’s costume for Dunyasha, and livery for the butler Firs.
**Pamela:**
Given that this production has a timeless quality, speaking about my own costume, we are living in such a referential period with our own contemporary fashion, there are references to romanticism, but it is hard to pin down. Are you wearing a coat because it is cold? Or are you wearing a coat that reflects something of that person’s relationship with the world?

**Simon:**
What I don’t ever want a character to do is to delete the need to say anything once they have walked on stage.

**Pamela:**
I think it is important to avoid costume that solves everything.

**Simon:**
If they walk on stage and you get who they are, and everything that they do after that is reconfirming what you thought of the character as they walked on stage then that is something to avoid. Sometimes I find it fun to dress someone against the personality they are in their on-stage demeanour.

**Rob:**
That in my mind goes together with specific settings such as specific period settings. If a character comes on stage wearing a costume that says it all and I get it immediately then I am bored. If I walk in and see a set that says it all then I’m bored.

**Simon:**
You want to come to a space where you wonder what will happen next and you want to see someone on stage, walk on stage and wonder what they will do next. If you can keep that tension, constantly building then it is exciting. Every time the audience went to The Globe they saw the same space and wondered what they would see in that space and from that first moment they saw that unfold in an exciting or disappointing way. All the design choices in this production are attempting to create a site for the drama and the comedy.

**Rob:**
I am sure that is a reason for Belvoir Theatre’s (in Sydney) success. The audience knows that the space has nothing up its sleeve. That space just is.

**Pamela:**
Belvoir Theatre is a ‘wonky’ space. It’s not symmetrical and like La Mama Theatre in Melbourne you know that the room is the room. You feel this growing geological story-telling, something that our great temples of culture have kind of smudged out. It’s the idea that there are bells and whistles that allow us to forget the room we are in.

**Simon:**
I think it can be helpful to forget the room you are in if that is the desired experience then I think you do sometimes walk into Belvoir Theatre and forget it is the space that you saw the shows that you have seen. That will only be important if the play itself is about that kind of forgetting.

**Pamela:**
But you are talking about a relationship with a theatre or a relationship with a room. People don’t have those intense relationships with particular spaces but rather with things they have seen there.
Simon:
Yes, that’s right. Interestingly people have relationships with the old theatres of Europe. You can’t ignore them. If anything happens on stage you are aware of the decoration and of the room and you can’t delete the space you are watching on that particular night and for that particular show. We are hopefully creating that across the night. It never stops being the space and it is transformed through ‘trickery’ rather than through bringing on new set pieces.

Pamela:
I think it is important to note that the space is used ‘transformationally’ across the four acts of the play.

ANALYSIS, EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The following section focuses specifically on the requirements of performance analysis for VCE Theatre Studies Unit 4. The questions and analysis act as a guide and a springboard for responding to the production

Outcome 3 – Performance Analysis
The following dot points outline the Key Skills you need to consider when responding to The Cherry Orchard and completing Outcome 3

- Analyse the characters in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- Analyse and evaluate interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance including – the acting skills used to realise character, and the use of focus and acting space
- Analyse the use of verbal and non-verbal language to convey the intended meaning of the play
- Analyse the application of stagecraft
- Analyse and evaluate establishment and maintenance of actor-audience relationship
- Analyse the way actors work within theatrical styles utilized in the production
- Discuss the intended meaning of the play and how this was conveyed in the performance

The world of the play
The world of a play could be considered as being the world we witness on stage through the dialogue, action, subtext, direction, and design elements. As an audience, we enter the world of a play at a particular point in characters’ lives and exit at a particular point. It may be a realistic world, a fantastical world, an absurd world, or any number of combinations and permutations of these and others.

Performer, Rob Menzies, talks about the world of The Cherry Orchard as being ‘the world of the theatre’

- What elements or conventions of the theatre did you first notice or experience when you entered the auditorium of the Sumner?
- Were these elements and conventions recognizable? Had you experienced them before?
- What were your first thoughts when the performance began?

The beginning of the performance includes the sound of a basketball being bounced and thrown while the curtain is down. We hear it then we see it.

- What did this evoke for you?
- What did you expect or anticipate when you heard it?
The setting for the production is the estate owned by Ranevskaya and her family. The action takes place firstly in the old upstairs nursery, in a field on the estate, at the back of the house during a party, and the final act returns to the upstairs nursery.

- How did the design assist in creating these aspects of the world of the play?

*In the rehearsal room we have talked about the 1960s/1970s as a reference point for this version...it isn’t set now either, so there can be a sense of nostalgia* – Chris Mead, Literary Manager, MTC

- What references to the 1960s or 1970s did you see or hear in the performance? Consider language, set, costume, properties, music etc.
- Discuss Chris Mead’s comment that ‘it isn’t set now either’. Do you agree? Do you feel there were any contemporary references in the performance?
- How would you describe the world of *The Cherry Orchard*?

Director, Simon Stone, talks about this production as having ...a *timelessness, a sense that the entire history, every version of the play is coursing through it.*

- Discuss this comment with specific reference to the performance you saw and your understanding of Chekhov’s work

*Hopefully they will recognize themselves. They will see people they know* – Simon Stone, Director

- In the world of play did you recognize certain characters? Did they seem familiar to you?
- Which ones? What did they represent for you?

The world of this production has also been spoken about as being ...*Something chaotic and random* (Rob Menzies) and ...*At times the characters may feel a bit lost* (Simon Stone)

- Was this a somewhat chaotic and random world?
- What was chaotic? What seemed random?
- Was there any order or control?

**Language, structure & adaptation**

If you have read a translation of the original script (not required for the task but some students may have) you will notice that it is a scripted play in four acts. Simon Stone describes Chekhov’s writing as follows:

*If you had a dinner party or a birthday party or you were hanging out with your friends and you took a transcript of it and you notated when people laughed and what they said, it may look somewhat like a Chekhov play I believe*

- Discuss this comment. Do you agree with it? Did the language and dialogue have that feel?

As a class recall the moment when it is clear that Pamela Rabe’s character, Ranevskaya, has arrived home and comes upstairs

- What did you notice about the dialogue and use of language?
- Were there sometimes several conversations going on simultaneously?
- How did this style of dialogue contribute to the theatrical styles in the production?

Actor, Pamela Rabe describes Chekhov as...*the master of a deconstructed story telling. He seems to explore life through a forensic eye on humanity and the illogic of people’s behaviour.*

- What do you think Pamela Rabe means by ‘deconstructed story telling’?
- Could this mean disharmony? Non-linear narrative?
- Could it mean the foregrounding of character over action, therefore story or action is less important?
- You may find it useful to read the Literary Manager, Chris Mead’s commentary on the production included in these notes
Theatrical styles
Some theatre practitioners speak about ‘realism’ as being an overarching theatrical style in which ‘naturalistic’ acting is a recognized convention. This is up for discussion!

Chekhov has been described as being a master of the ‘realist’ school of literature. Literary Manager, Chris Mead states: In many ways, beat for beat, dramatic gesture by gesture, this is a faithful adaptation. Not reverential, but a faithful, careful and very considered adaptation.

- What are the conventions of ‘realism’?
- What aspects of ‘realism’ were apparent in this production of The Cherry Orchard?

Scholars suggest that ‘naturalism’ seeks to replicate a believable everyday reality. Chris Mead states in his interview: Chekhov wanted to create life as he felt it was lived, on stage, hence the drive towards something more natural in acting – not just realism, but naturalism, and certainly nothing like the more common and accepted theatrical melodrama style

- Discuss Chris Mead’s comment
- Do you think that the acting or aspects of acting in The Cherry Orchard was naturalistic?
- Did some of the scenes or moments feel like life as ‘it was lived’?

In some descriptions of Simon Stone’s previous adaptation of The Wild Duck, the term ‘ultra naturalism’ was used to describe the theatrical styles inherent in the performance.

- Were there moments in The Cherry Orchard that you felt were ‘ultra naturalistic’?
- Consider for instance, the opening scene where we ‘hear’ the arrival of Ranevskaya floating up from downstairs. Or in Act III (Act II in this production) during the party.

Chekhov described his play as being a comedy. Discuss and consider particular moments in the performance that were comic. For instance:

- Yepihodov (the clumsy servant) falling down the stairs, Lopahkin wearing the horse’s head, Yepihodov singing a song to his love Dunyasha, Charlotta’s clairvoyant moments, Gayev’s odes to cabinets and various other fixed objects, Lopahkin trying to propose to Varya, characters mimicking other characters’ voices
- Discuss other moments and why you found them comic – Physically? Verbally? The situation?

Both Chris Mead and Simon Stone mention that much of the comedy in The Cherry Orchard comes from the characters not listening to each other. As examples consider:

- Lopahkin presenting his plan to Ranevskaya and Gayev while they are playing Snakes and Ladders on the floor of the nursery
- The slide presentation of the land development plan to save the estate
- Charlotta’s monologue near the opening of Act II, Summer
- The arrival of the swimming pool
- Firs the aged butler’s contributions

Consider these and other moments in the production and how they contributed to the comedic style within the production – How do they enhance the theatrical styles? The creation of character?

Consider the terms ‘pignancy’ and ‘tragedy’ – what do these terms mean?

- Do the comic moments ever turn into these?
- How? Why? For which characters?
- Consider the intimate scene between Petya Trofimov and Ranevskaya at the party – how would you describe this scene? What is happening? Why?
...in the rehearsal room we have spoken a lot about documentaries... There is an amazing compression in the way the final documentary is made and everything in that final cut is crucial. This is Chekhov – Chris Mead

- Discuss this comment. What the conventions of a documentary?
- What aspects and elements of the production do you feel were reminiscent of or referenced a ‘documentary’ or even a ‘reality’ television show?

**DIRECTION: including sub text, use of space, actor-audience relationship**

In their interview, actors Pamela Rabe and Robert Menzies talk about the playfulness of Simon Stone’s approach to directing.
- Did you sense this playfulness in the performance you saw?

...pauses or silences occur when suddenly everyone notices they are in the same space together for the first time. That is what is really interesting, that moment, not what is said. The characters create a community for a brief second before they all fall apart in their self-obsession – Simon Stone

- Discuss this comment and the use of pause and silence in the production
- Consider the moment that Gayev activates the train set for the first time
- Consider the moment in the final act when Ranevskaya asks everyone to sit
- What other moments of silence and pause do you recall?

When Gayev turns on the train set it provides a quite poignant and absurd moment as everyone just watches the train go around the tracks.
- How do we read this moment? How do the other characters feel about Gayev? What did you notice?
- Comment on the direction of this scene and its impact

In the party scene in Act III (Act II in this production) there is a moment when all the characters arrive outside and line up against the wall of the house. They move in rhythm to the internal party music. They move together but are separate, in rhythm but disjunctive.
- Discuss the directorial decisions in this scene
- How does the direction work to create distinct characters?
- How does the direction work to create the world of the play in this moment?
- How does direction create place and location?

**SUBTEXT**

Sub-text is generally recognised to be what is not said but is implicit in the scene or conversation. The sub-text is considered to be what the characters really mean or really want.

In this production of *The Cherry Orchard*, Simon Stone is both adaptor/writer and director. Here is what he says about sub-text:

*The thing about subtext is that someone gets to decide what it is which I don’t really believe in. I want there to be an incredibly strong existence on stage from a performer and I want there to be incredible subtext, but even giving it a word that relates itself to ‘text’, renders it a bit logical or rational. I don’t think that there’s a dichotomy between what I as a director/writer am saying is what I want and what I actually want* – Simon Stone

- Discuss this comment by Simon Stone. What do you think he means?
- Does the dual role of director and writer create challenge here?
On the other hand ... *there are these astonishing moments of subtext in the text. Playwrights had never really written subtext before* – Chris Mead.

- Choose a scene or moment from the performance you saw
- Discuss in detail what you believe the sub-text to be. What was said and what was unsaid? What was really meant? What did the characters want?
- How do you know? How important were expressive skills, pause, silence?
- Evaluate the effectiveness or exploration of sub-text in this production ie your awareness of it, its implicitness or explicitness.

**USE OF SPACE**

Consider how the director utilized the space in this production. You might like to draw on any of the suggested scenes and moments already mentioned above or discuss new ones. For example, Anya’s breathless running through the space, the suggestion of a staircase, the opening of Act II in the garden, the arrival of Ranevskaya and her central positioning.

- How is space used to create intimacy between characters?
- When and how is the entire space used?
- How does Act III, the party, contract the space?
- How does the director create relationships between the characters in the playing space and through specific spatial relationships ie diagonal, on-off stage, proximity?
- How do the directorial decisions impact on the audience’s gaze? For instance, what do you look at in any given moment?
- Evaluate the use of space in this production. Were some moments very effective? Were others less so? Why?

**ACTOR AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP**

In his commentary on the play, Literary Manager Chris Mead discusses the actor/character – audience relationship in terms of dramaturgy. His discussion asserts that it is the writing and the world of the play that primarily determines the audience’s relationship with the actors/characters, and that we love the characters because that is how they are written

- Do you agree?
- Which characters did you respond to, relate to, laugh with, laugh at, empathise with, sympathise with, abhor?

Directorially, there also exists the physical actor-audience relationship. For instance how the playing space is designed, where the characters stand in the space in relationship to each other and in relationship to the audience.

- How is the edge of the stage used to create a particular actor-audience relationship in Act II?
- How is off-stage used to create a particular actor-audience relationship?
- How are the walls of the set used to create spatial relationships between the characters?
- How does the existence of a staircase to a lower floor impact on or create a particular actor-audience relationship?
- How does the existence of an inside/outside in the party scene impact on or create a particular actor-audience relationship?

The ‘fourth wall’ – the imaginary wall between the world of the play and the audience which is a convention of ‘realistic theatre’. In some scenes in *The Cherry Orchard* the characters move to centre stage and face outward. They ‘look out’ on the cherry orchard and reminisce or discuss their predicament or their situation:

- Discuss the actor-audience relationship in these moments
- Has the fourth wall been ‘broken’?
Does the fourth wall exist for other moments in the performance?

Consider Act III at the party. Is there a fourth wall or does the auditorium become something else and thus, break the fourth wall?

**Importantly**, discuss how the performers used their expressive skills in order to maintain or break the fourth wall.

**CHARACTERISATION**

This section addresses characterisation - in terms of function, motivation and status. It may be useful to consider how particular characters 'function' in the play. There is the inherent hierarchy of aristocrat, middle and servant class. There may also be characters that function as representations of concepts or ideas. In the very first scene the maid Dunyasha is told that she must ‘know her place’. Petya Trofimov, the student, tends to represent the ‘new’ and the keeper of ideas. Lopahkin tends to represent the upwardly mobile middle class. Gayev and Ranevskaya may represent an unsustainable past. Consider...

- Varya tends to pick up the pieces. Is she a voice of reason to the detriment of her own happiness?
- Petya Trominov has many ideas but do they still render him inactive?
- Charlotta’s futuristic readings, are they more a ‘party trick’ than anything else?

Literary Manager at MTC, Chris Mead states *we love these characters. Every time we meet a character for the first time in The Cherry Orchard, Chekhov presents them in such a way that we love them. There is just enough information in Chekhov’s play for us to go, ‘Ohhh!’ We see their dilemma, we see their pain, we see their obstacles and then we watch them fail*

- Discuss these comments and ideas
- How do characters function?
- Did you ‘love’ the characters?
- Did you recognize their pain, obstacles and failures?

RANEVSKAYA: Actor Pamela Rabe says of her character... *Ranevskaya is the queen of that self-absorbed, distracted, human court or family*

- Create a detailed character analysis of Ranevskaya
- How did the performer, Pamela Rabe, create this character?
- Comment on and evaluate her vocal quality, accent, gesture, movement, stillness, facial expression, mood shifts
- Discuss the character’s relationship to other characters and the impact. Who was she most connected to? What was her relationship to them? Did this relationship change? Why?
- What costumes did she wear? How was her hair styled? Did this change? Why?
- How did costume, hair and make up assist or enhance the creation of the role?
- Do you agree that Ranevskaya is a representation of the past?

And some plays lend themselves to a kind of parsing or organising in an objective, super-objective, action, beat, verb type of way. I’ve worked on Chekhov plays where I have used that type of process – Pamela Rabe, Ranevskaya

- Pamela Rabe is discussing a particular approach to characterisation in this comment
- What acting approach does it reference?
- If you were to apply this approach to Ranevskaya, choose a particular scene or moment from the performance and examine what her objective, super-objective and want may be

VARYA: *I think you could still say she’s kind of a conservative character, but conservative only in relation to the madness of the other characters. Again, that’s about needing routine and wanting things to function and to be a certain way* – Zahra Newman

- Create a detailed character analysis of Varya
• How did the performer, Zahra Newman, create this character? Ev
• Comment on and evaluate her use of vocal quality, accent, gesture, movement, stillness, facial expression
• Discuss the character’s relationship to other characters and the impact of that
• How did costume, hair and make up assist or enhance the creation of the role?
• Do you agree that Varya is conservative?

TROFIMOV: Everyone has their own agenda, everyone is trying to get their conversation across, often at cross-purposes to each other … One of the great things about Chekhov is he flips your allegiances back and forwards. You hear Ranevskaya’s perspective, you think you don’t want the cherry orchard to go, this is her home, but then you hear Trofimov who says the aristocrats will burn and die, they’ve had this land with people working as serfs – Toby Truslove

• Create a detailed character analysis of Petya Trofimov, the student
• How did the performer, Toby Truslove, create this character?
• Comment on and evaluate his vocal quality, accent, gesture, movement, stillness, facial expression
• Discuss the character’s relationship to other characters and the impact of that
• How did costume, hair and make up assist or enhance the creation of the role?
• Is Trofimov simply a voice piece for the revolution?

Characterization – Motivation
Chekhov considered his play to be a comedy but within the humourous moments, each character is motivated by particular dreams and aspirations. Consider the love triangle between the servants Dunyasha, Yepihodov and Yasha. Contemplate the complex relationship between Ranevskaya and her son’s tutor Peta Trofimov. Why has Firs the old butler remained with the family for so long? Why won’t Lopahkin propose to Varya?

Pamela Rabe says of her character, Ranevskaya …There is an overwhelming longing to return… and a pressing need to avoid losing the family estate

• Why did Ranevskaya leave the estate? What do you learn about this?
• Discuss how Ranevskaya’s motivations to return are made apparent in the production – perhaps choose a particular scene and dissect or deconstruct it in detail
• In the chosen scene, how does Pamela Rabe use her expressive skills – voice, facial expression, movement, gesture, focus, stillness, silence, space - and how does the direction assist in making these motivations explicit?

[Gayev] should be the man of the family who takes control of things but has never taken control of anything, ever – Rob Menzies

• Why is the character of Gayev so in active? Why does he present as lacking in motivation?
• How does the actor, Robert Menzies, use his expressive skills to convey this?
• Does this character’s motivation change? Why? How?
• How do other characters relate to Gayev? How did you respond to him?

At the beginning of Act II, Summer, Charlotta delivers a monologue about her parents and her past. They were carnies [carnival people]. Always travelling from one country to the next. My mum gave birth to me in the back of a caravan. And the next day they were off to the next city. My dad was the strongman and my mother read fortunes. She had the gift. Then one day they performed their greatest disappearing
act. My mother fell asleep at the wheel and drove head first into an oncoming truck. Boom. They both died instantly. I was miraculously unscathed. I’ve always been lucky – [from draft script]

- What motivates her to say this? Why now?
- How does the actor, Katherine Tonkin, portray this character in this moment?
- Do the other characters listen? What else is happening on stage?

But in this process, because it is based on the irrationality of the actions of the characters, you build a profile not by something you have decided in your loungeroom or in your preparation before rehearsal. It absolutely demands that it is discovered on your feet in the space in the presence of the other performers – Pamela Rabe

- This is an interesting comment by the actor about ‘motivation’ and ‘objective’.
- Discuss your understanding of these terms
- From your viewing of the performance, did you sense that the actors were ‘discovering’ the moments as the play progressed?

What Chekhov does so astonishingly well is to give each of his characters an aria of sorts, allowing us immediate access to their emotions, wants, needs and fears – Chris Mead

- The term ‘aria’ is generally associated with opera
- Discuss how Chris Mead uses this term in relation to The Cherry Orchard
- Consider the extended speeches by Anya about visiting her mother in Paris, Lopahkin on property development then on having purchased the estate, Charlotka on family life, Ranevskaya on her life in Paris and to Trofimov about ‘caring’, Trofimov on politics and society – are these ‘arias’?
- Discuss how the actors conveyed the ‘emotions, wants, needs and fears’ of the characters – what expressive skills did they use? How did the directorial choices influence these?

I think they all love their family and there is a belief that love is the most important thing which is not something that is shared by every character in the play – Pamela Rabe, Ranevskaya

- If love is a motivator, how is this conveyed in the production? In which scenes or moments?
- Consider the role of love between the characters of Dunyasha and Yepihodov, Dunyasha and Yasha, Anya & Ranevskaya, Trofimov and Anya, Varya and Lopahkin.
- Does love as motivation prove to be a strength or a weakness for these characters?

Characterization – Status

Chekhov’s original play examined status and hierarchy without artifice. Aristocrats and servants were evident, and pushing into the gaps were the bourgeoisie or middle class. Remember the social, political and historical contexts of the time. The Russian revolution elevated the middle class to prominence by 1917. Nevertheless, Chekhov was still interested in the ordinariness of people. There is a hierarchy in the world of this production that is reminiscent of Chekhov’s world – aristocrat or wealthy elite, middle class, and servant.

[Gayev] should be the man of the family who takes control of things but has never taken control of anything, ever – Rob Menzies

- How would you describe the status of the character of Gayev in the play?
- When do you notice Gayev? Does he have a particular function?
- What is his relationship to the valet, Yasha?
- Would it be relevant to say that he is ‘tolerated’ or ‘indulged’?

In the very opening scene to the production, the businessman, Lopahkin says to Dunyasha the maid, ‘remember your place’

- How is this statement about ‘place’ enacted in the play?
- What is Dunyasha doing in this act that represents her ‘place’?
Ranevskaya as a character commands attention in almost every scene she appears in

- Consider the moment of her arrival. She stands centre stage and the other characters surround her, scattered against the walls and they appear to wait for her reaction
- Consider her arrival in the Summer garden scene with a need for more champagne
- Consider her interactions with her brother Gayev, the property developer Lopahkin, and student Petya Trofimov
- How does the actor, Pamela Rabe, manipulate her expressive skills to convey high status, equal status or changing status in her relationship with these three characters?
- IN PARTICULAR, the scene at the party with Trofimov begins as nostalgia and ends with aggression. Comment on the status play in this scene

In the opening scene, Lopahkin, the property developer who eventually buys the estate says

_We’re different kinds of creatures. Them and us. I mean look at me. I’m richer than anyone around here. I’ve got more money coming out my youknowhat than I know what to do with. I own most of the restaurants, the clubs, the hotels round here, and you know what? It doesn’t make a difference. As soon as I open my mouth, they know I’m not one of them._  - [from draft script]

- Does this statement by Lopahkin play out in the production?
- Discuss the status of the character of Lopahkin within the play. Does it change, if so how and why?
- In what ways might Lopahkin’s beliefs reflect some of the central concerns of the play?

Given the social, political and historical contexts of the production it is interesting to also consider the status play between Ranevskaya’s adopted daughter, Varya, and the maid, Dushyana.

- How is this status play conveyed in the play?
- How do the performers Zahra Newman and Nikki Shiels play with expressive skills, and manipulate dialogue in their interactions?
- How does this status play enhance meaning?
- How does status play contribute to the theatrical styles of the production?

Act III, after interval, takes place at the back of the house while we hear a party going on inside. It is the day of the auction. Every character is invited to the party, including the servants (except for poor Firs who still serves champagne) and at one point they are all outside leaning up against the wall.

- Compare the status, roles and relationships that exist in this scene with the status, roles and relationships that existed in the opening scene
- What has changed? What is different? What is the same?

**Stagecraft – set and properties, costumes/hair/makeup, sound**

**Set & Properties**

_I think it is important to note that the space is used ‘transformationally’ across the four acts of the play – Pamela Rabe_

- Discuss the design of the ‘large three sided box’ that is the main set design for this production
- Begin with Act I and discuss size, shape, colour, textures
- How does the set ‘transform’? How does it become different locations?
- In particular, discuss the way the set is manipulated to create the back of the house in Act III
Consider now how the design enables the characters to inhabit the different locations – the nursery, a field on the estate by the river, the back of the house.

*Any kind of ‘dream’ space you create on stage, in this instance a large three sided box, makes the air thick within it* – Pamela Rabe

- What do you think Pamela Rabe means by ‘dream space’? How would you apply this term to the set design in *The Cherry Orchard*?
- Discuss the phrase ‘makes the air thick within it’ in terms of acting and characterisation
- How does space and spatial design impact on atmosphere and mood?

*The set makes it difficult to solve many stagecraft problems for the actors but what it does wonderfully is it makes them connect with each other* – Simon Stone

- How does the absence of set items create connections between the characters in this production?

*I often cripple actors’ abilities to rely on furniture by removing it. This play starts without furniture then the subsequent introduction of furniture comes from the characters rather than from the design* – Simon Stone

- Discuss the interaction of set, space and character in Act I
- What specific set items are brought in by characters?
- Discuss the use of small chairs and the large rocking horse
- What association do we normally have with such items? Do they take on new meaning in this play? How are these used by different characters?
- How do the characters interact with the set in Act III, the party? How does the door function?

Discuss the presence of the basketball ring

- Is this a set item or a prop?
- Who uses it? Why? When?
- Why does Ranevskaya say in the final act that she doesn’t remember ever seeing the basketball ring?
- Discuss the symbolism of this set item/prop. What meaning does it have in the overall play?

Discuss the use of the staircase as a design element, in particular its presence in the first act of the play and in the final act of the play

- How do particular characters use it? How does it act to ‘reveal’ characters or characters’ behaviour?
- How does the presence and use of the staircase contribute to the comedy and/or farce?
- Does the staircase have a greater meaning or symbolism in the play? What could that be?

In Act II, the edge of a field on the estate, there is an outdoor setting, an umbrella, a totem tennis set and eventually a child’s paddling pool

- Discuss the choices of set items in this act.
- Analyse and evaluate the choice of the totem tennis set. Who uses it? What could it represent?
- Comment on the arrival of the pool and how it is initially used – what is the effect?
- Evaluate how particular set items in this act contributed to development of certain characters
- For example, analyse and evaluate the paddling pool in relation to Petya Trofimov – while he is filling it what is he saying?
- Analyse and evaluate how all or some of these set items may represent the idea of ‘nostalgia’
The characters use particular props throughout the play including a train set, handbags, wallets, letters, luggage, champagne glasses, record albums, an old Sony Walkman, cassettes. Several characters also smoke cigarettes and on occasion marijuana.

- Analyse and evaluate the choice of these props and their relevance to the world of the play
- Does the choice of props reflect any particular era or time frame?
- Discuss how particular props may have significance for certain characters – Gayev and his trainset for instance – and how particular props may contribute to the development and establishment of character.

The clerk Yepihodov, in love with Dunyasha, and named a disaster zone by the others, carries a gun.
- Discuss why he might have a gun
- Does it threaten? Is it comic? Farcical?

*All the design choices in this production are attempting to create a site for the drama and the comedy – Simon Stone*

- Discuss this comment by the director
- How did you respond to the presence of the basketball ring, the rocking horse, the blow up pool, the totem tennis, the green tent?
- Evaluate these choices and their contribution to the world of the play.

**Costume, make-up and hair**

*I hope that the costumes just look like the kind of things that people wear, which is really difficult to make work when you need to make decisions – Simon Stone*

- Do the costumes look like ‘the kind of things that people wear’?
- Select two characters and analyse and evaluate the costumes they wear in some detail
- Do their costumes change from scene to scene?
- Do their costumes reference their status or social standing?
- Do their costumes assist in enhancing the character?
- Perhaps consider especially the character of Lopahkin, the upwardly mobile property developer – how does his costume assist in referencing his ambitions?

Consider Simon Stone’s comment above and relate it to ‘make-up’ and ‘hair’

- For example, is the character of Ranevskaya overly made up, natural, age appropriate?
- Is the hair and make-up for Dunyasha the maid in keeping with her role?
- Consider the character of Lopahkin and his motivation to fit in? How does his hair and make-up suggest his role, status and ambition?
- Which other characters stood out for you in relation to the make-up and hair design? Why?
- Was there and overall ‘aesthetic’ or were choices very individual?
- Was there any reference to a particular era, culture or status?

Both the director and the dramaturge comment that the 1960s/1970s are useful references

- Is there any referencing of these eras in the costumes?
- Given that the family and entourage are Russian is there any referencing to that cultural context?

*If the character’s clothing is related to their job we are sticking to the fact they would wear it. So there is a maid’s costume for Dunyasha, and livery for the butler Firs – Simon Stone*

- Discuss the choices made for the servant characters in the production
- Do the costumes relate to their job? Does this assist in enhancing meaning?
- Do the costumes for the servants change? If so, why?
Why do you think that the director and designer have made such specific choices for these characters?

Are you wearing a coat because it is cold? Or are you wearing a coat that reflects something of that person’s relationship with the world? – Pamela Rabe

- What does Pamela Rabe mean in posing these questions?
- Discuss how such choices can be read by an audience
- Select a specific costume choice in the production and apply these questions – for instance Ranevskaya’s brother Leonid Gayev
- As you work towards your own monologue performance, consider how these questions may be relevant to your own costume choice.

**Sound**

Note: At the point in which these resources have been written, the sound design was not discussed with the creative team. However, the following focus questions may be useful in terms of diatonic sound, sound design and composition.

Diatonic sound – sound that exists naturally within the world of the characters that they can hear. It may be useful to consider Act III and the party scene where music is used in a number of ways

- The internal music of the party
- The external sound we hear
- How the characters respond to this music – as they are lined up against the wall of the house, as Lopahkin demands something ‘more modern’ after he announces he has bought the estate
- What does Ranevskaya do to the speakers?
- What other ‘natural’ sounds exist within the world of this play? For instance – the basketball, the totem tennis?
- Comment on the sounds associated with the cherry orchard in the final act

In Chekhov’s original text, there is heard the sound of a taut string or wire snapping. In this production this sound reference remains.

(Draft script, end of Act II)

[The sound of a wire snapping in the distance].

Ranevskaya  What was that?
Lopakhin  Maybe an elevator wire breaking in one of the old mine shafts.
Gayev  Sounded like a bird. A heron maybe.
Trofimov  Or an owl.
Ranevskaya  Whatever it was, I didn’t like it.

- What do you think this sound means for the characters?
- Why doesn’t Ranevskaya like it?
- What is ‘the wire’?
- How does this sound contribute to meaning in the production?

The clerk, Yepihodov (called Disaster Zone because of his clumsiness) sings an ode to Dunyasha at the beginning of Act II, Summer

- What type of sound is this? Diatonic? Composition? Text?
- How does the use of guitar and song contribute to the development or establishment of Yepihodov’s character?

- Analyse and evaluate other sound design and compositional choices that you and your class heard and can recall
- For example, did sound/composition exist inbetween the acts of the play? To what effect?
- Did sound design contribute to particular character’s situations? Dramatically? Comically? Tragically?
- Analyse and evaluate how the sound design and composition represented the theatrical styles inherent in the production

**The central concerns of the play**

I suppose the largest theme running through the play is uncertainty about the future which is one of the reasons why it continues to be so cherished in every era. In the same way that King Lear is about the same theme, Hamlet, Death of a Salesman, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. A lot of great plays are about not knowing what is going to happen next – Simon Stone

- How does The Cherry Orchard explore the concept of ‘uncertainty’?
- Which characters do you think ‘embody’ uncertainty? How is this made apparent?

Lopahkin says of his redevelopment of the estate, ‘Paradise is a simple dream for them’, for the growing middle classes

- How does the concept of paradise manifest in The Cherry Orchard?
- What role does Lopahkin play with regard to creating paradise?

In the final act of The Cherry Orchard Ranevskaya asks everyone to sit and contemplate what their lives have been in the house before they leave to create new lives – Anya to university, Gayev to the bank, Radavskaya to Paris, Varya to a boutique hotel.

- How does the character of Ranevskaya teeter between the past and the future?
- What has her journey been in the four acts you have witnessed?
- Has she changed?

Love is a key theme in The Cherry Orchard. Consider the commentary on love that Petya makes: Love in the modern form is a selfish concept. Two people guard their love jealously against the world, flattering each other, gratifying each other, deluding each other, creating a fortress against community. Love can’t just flow between a human and their reflection; it’s a river with many tributaries, spreading through the world, all-encompassing, universal. Modern love is a commodity. But love has no value at all unless it’s free – [From draft script, Petya Trofimov, Act II]

- Is this just an ‘idea’ of love?
- What place does love have in the play? Is it misplaced?
- How does love act as a motivator for the characters?
- Which characters are unable to express their love, act upon their love?

**Monologue Performance**

As you approach the Performance Analysis Outcome and SAC, consider how the performances you see could inform your monologue examination performance – interpreting text, conveying context, applying theatrical styles, considering the relevance of re-contextualising your chosen monologue
ADDITIONAL LINKS AND FURTHER READING FOR THE OBSESSED

The Cherry Orchard and Anton Chekhov Links

An Introduction to Anton Chekhov
Information about Chekhov, focusing on Three Sisters and Cherry Orchard from The National Theatre.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKKYtByZlY8

An Introduction to 'The Cherry Orchard'
Information about the play with particular reference to the National Theatre production.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uZP6vjLQ5I

Scenes from the Huntington Theatre Company Production in 2006:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGkdcfWbHkE
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nvGvLnJds

Kenneth Branagh reading some of Chekhov’s short stories
http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=92A3C135220A7135

Anton Chekhov
Encyclopaedia Britannica entry for Chekhov. Lots of information about his life and work, including good insights into the theatrical style of the first production of The Cherry Orchard.

Anton Chekhov – Condensed Bio
http://www.online-literature.com/anton_chekhov/

Russian Society and Life in the late 19th Century Links
Interesting podcast on the issues facing Russia in the late 19th Century.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9Pk2SNCvPvU

Women in 19th Century Russia: Lives and Culture
Some info about the treatment and roles of women in the late 1800s and the lead up to the revolution.

Old Believers, Bolsheviks and bourgeoisie
Article and photos (taken by Maxim P Dmitriev) of Russian peasants and aristocrats in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century.

Aristocracy in Late-19th Century Russian Society
Article that asks whether the aristocratic class in Russia was declining or not in the late-19th Century.
Theatrical Styles
Simon Stone TEDxSydney
Interesting Ted Talk delivered by Simon Stone, who unpacks some of his thoughts on constructing a piece of theatre.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6VffGvAVZI&list=PLED458DF61BE2FB9D&index=2

Review of The Wild Duck by Alison Croggon
Analysis of Stone’s production of The Wild Duck that looks at some of his theatrical styles, aesthetics and techniques.

The Moscow Art Theatre and Realism in Russia
Information about the role of Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre in the premiere staging of some of Chekhov’s plays, including The Cherry Orchard.
http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jewestla/6act.htm

PRODUCTION IMAGES
Unfortunately, there are no images available of Act One.
Pictured: David Paterson
Pictured: Nikki Shiels and Gareth Davies

Pictured: Pamela Rabe, Zahra Newman, Toby Truslove and Eloise Mignon
Pictured: Toby Truslove, Roger Oakley and Ronald Falk

Pictured: Toby Truslove, Pamela Rabe, Katherine Tonkin, Roger Oakley and Eloise Mignon
Pictured: Toby Truslove, David Paterson, Nikki Shiels and Pamela Rabe

Pictured: Toby Truslove and Pamela Rabe
Pictured: Robert Menzies, Pamela Rabe, David Paterson, Gareth Davies and Steve Mouzakis
Pictured: Gareth Davies, Steve Mouzakas and Toby Truslove

Pictured: Pamela Rabe, Roger Oakley, Nikki Shiels and Eloise Mignon
Pictured: Katherine Tonkin

Pictured: Zahra Newman, Pamela Rabe and Eloise Mignon