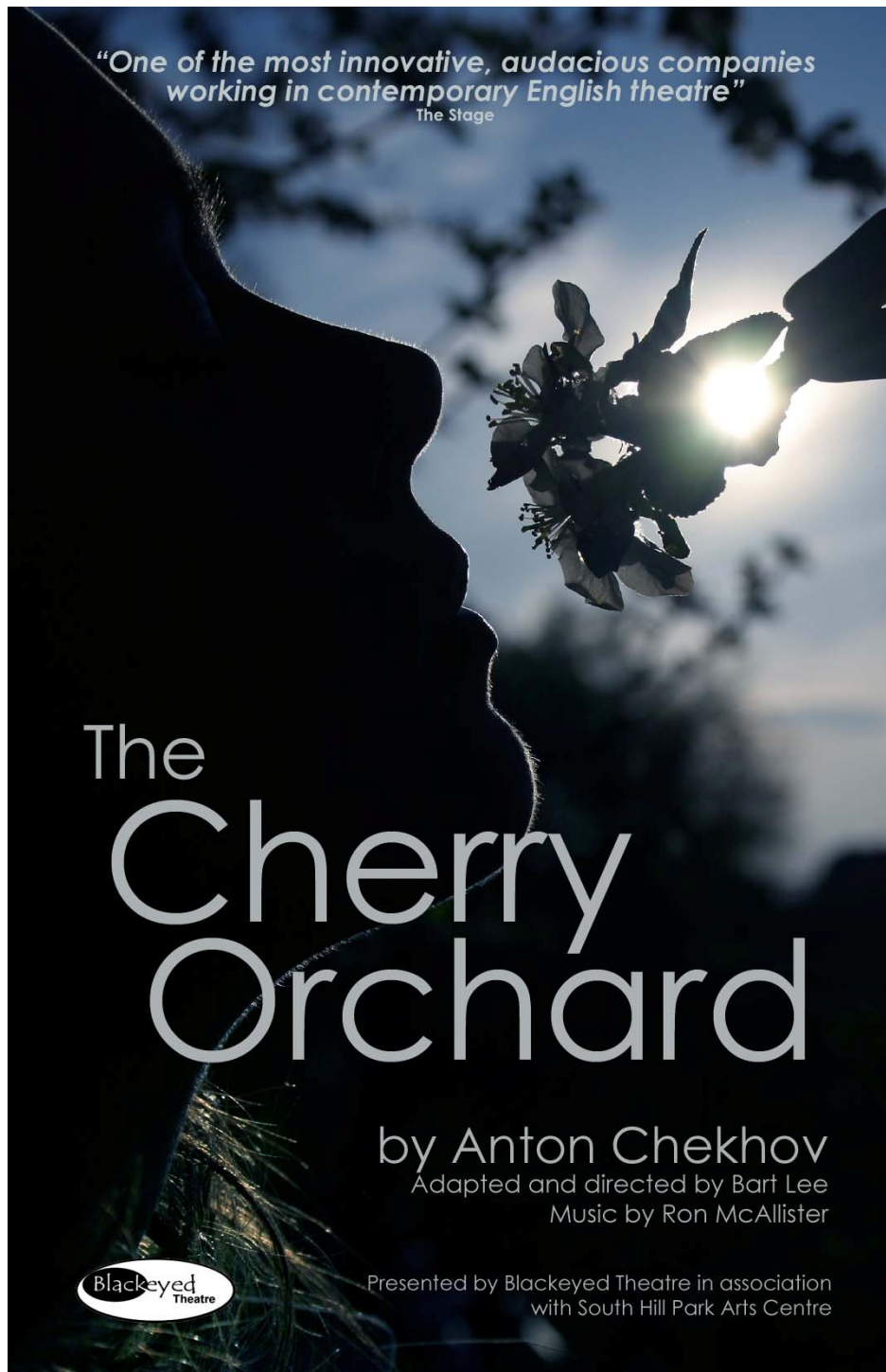


Blackeyed Theatre and South Hill Park Arts Centre Present



Education Pack

CONTENTS

- 1) Welcome
- 2) The Company – All About Blackeyed Theatre
- 3) The Team – Who is making the play?
- 4) The Cast
- 5) The Play – Synopsis
- 6) The Author- Anton Chekov
- 7) The Original Play
- 8) A statement by the Director
- 9) Character Breakdown
- 10) Themes and Context
- 11) The Practitioner – Constantin Stanislavski and the Moscow Art theatre
- 12) The Question – How do you do *The Cherry Orchard*?
- 13) Touring a show
- 14) Activities
- 15) Glossary
- 16) Useful Resources
- 17) Evaluation form

WELCOME...

To *The Cherry Orchard* Education Pack. Here at South Hill Park we're very excited about working once again with Blackeyed Theatre, particularly on this exciting and ambitious re-imagining of one of the classic plays of the twentieth century. The following pages have been designed to support study leading up to and after your visit to see the production. *The Cherry Orchard* will give you a lot to talk about, so this pack aims to supply thoughts and facts that can serve as discussion starters, handouts and practical activity ideas. It provides an insight into the theatrical process of creating and touring a show and is intended to give you and your students an understanding of the creative considerations the team has undertaken throughout the rehearsal process.

If you have any comments or questions regarding this pack please email me at jo.wright@southhillpark.org.uk. I hope you will enjoy the unique experience that this show offers enormously. See you there!

Jo Wright, Education and Outreach Officer, South Hill Park Arts Centre

THE COMPANY

Blackeyed Theatre

Blackeyed Theatre Company was established in 2004 to create exciting opportunities for artists and audiences alike. Our theatre is challenging yet accessible for both new and established audiences. It asks questions and invites reaction. It provokes only as live performance can.

We believe theatre is at its best when an audience is taken out of its comfort zone. That doesn't mean being shocking for the sake of being shocking. It's about making theatre memorable and thought-provoking without sacrificing enjoyment. It's about telling a story in a way that absorbs and moves its audience at every turn. It's about asking questions, not answering them.

Since 2004 Blackeyed Theatre has embarked on national tours of **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui** (Brecht), the world premiere of **Oedipus** (Steven Berkoff) and **Oh What A Lovely War** (Joan Littlewood), as well as regional tours of **Effie's Burning**, **The Caretaker**, **Misery** and **Art**. Our most recent production, **Oh What A Lovely War**, had 64 performances at 32 different venues from Portsmouth to Durham and was seen by over 13500 people.

Blackeyed Theatre has a growing national reputation for creating dynamic theatre using live music and great performances to tell stories with honesty and passion.

“Blackeyed Theatre, one of the most innovative, audacious companies working in contemporary English theatre”

The Stage

THE TEAM

Bart Lee - Writer and Director

Bart trained at Rose Bruford Drama College in acting and with Beryl Jarvis in dancing. Directing credits include **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui** and **Oedipus** for Blackeyed Theatre, **House & Garden**, **Aladdin** and **Dick Whittington** for South Hill Park Arts Centre, as well as **Shakers** and numerous youth productions for Artemis and Bart Lee Theatre.

As a writer his works include **Aladdin**, **Dick Whittington**, **A Christmas Carol**, **Office Rocker** and **Norfolk's Rose**. He has previously enjoyed posts as Artistic Director of The Castle Theatre in Northamptonshire, Theatre Artist in Residence at the South Hill Park and Theatre Artist in Residence at Sherborne College in Dorset.

Bart regularly writes plays and poetry and runs workshops for both students and teachers. He teaches for many Youth Theatres in the South and produces his own theatrical projects as well as freelancing for many companies as a Director/Writer/Producer/Creative Consultant.

Ron McAllister - Composer

Ron was born in Glasgow, studied music at Glasgow University and then went on to complete a post grad in Theatre Studies at University College, Cardiff. He composed music for many shows in Glasgow which were performed at Glasgow Arts Centre (**Agamemnon**, **Woyzeck**, **The Hard Man**) before moving South to take up the position of Head of Music for South Hill Park Arts Centre. At South Hill Park, Ron wrote music for many shows and musically directed many others (**Chicago**, **Girls of Slender Means**, **Trafford Tanzi**). He also received commissions from the Scottish Arts Council to write music for Scottish Youth Theatre's productions from 1984-1988 (including Jonathan Harvey's **The Colonist**, John McGrath's **The Games A Bogey** and Denise Coffey's **Lizzie's Strategy**). He wrote and conducted a large site-specific piece - **Putting The Sun In Its Place**, performed by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra with Scottish Youth Theatre at the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1988.

In 1990 Ron launched an arts centre in the Borders (The Maltings in Berwick Upon Tweed), working as Artistic Director there for two and a half years, and his musical adaptation of **James and The Giant Peach** toured nationally from there in 1991. Later in 1991 Ron moved to Huddersfield to become founder director of the Lawrence Batley Theatre, which he launched in 1994. In 1995 he produced his first opera there, as a co-production with Opera North - **The Picture of Dorian Gray**. Ron has continued to compose for theatre since then, most

recently from his base at South Hill Park Arts Centre, where he was appointed Chief Executive in 2001. Recent productions include **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui**, **Oedipus** (national tour with Blackeyed Theatre in 2007), **Shakespeare's R&J** and the last seven pantomimes in the Wilde Theatre.

John Ginman – Dramaturg

John has been working professionally in UK theatre as a director and writer for twenty-five years, including periods as Associate Director at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry and the Nuffield Theatre, Southampton, as Director of Theatre at South Hill Park Arts Centre, and as Artistic Director at the Swan Theatre, Worcester and at Contact Theatre, Manchester. During the 1990s he wrote and directed extensively for the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham. He specialises in the direction of Shakespeare, the mainstream European repertoire (including Brecht, Molière, and Wedekind), large-scale community projects, and work for children and young people, in addition to developing plays by new writers. In collaboration with the composer Colin Riley, he has also directed and written the libretti for three operas, including **Noir** (Purcell Room, 1995), **Gulliver** (Malvern, 1995) and **Science Fictions** (CD release and the Drill Hall, London, 1998).

John is currently continuing his relationship with Theatre Absolute, working as Dramaturg on new projects, and has just begun to work as translator on a new writing collaboration between the Madrid-based publishers, Caos Editorial, and Rose Bruford College. He is Convenor of the MA Writing for Performance programme at Goldsmiths College, London.

Victoria Spearing – Designer

Victoria became a freelance theatre designer after graduating from Bretton Hall in 2001. She has worked with Blackeyed Theatre on **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui**, **The Caretaker**, **Blue Remembered Hills**, **Misery**, **The Long Lost Legend of Robin Hood** and **Art**. Other set designs include **Summer Holiday**, **Wizard of Oz**, **Around the World in 80 Days**, **Norfolk's Rose**, **Whistle Down the Wind** and **The BFG**. In addition she has designed the sets for the last four pantomimes at South Hill Park and recently for the Broadway Theatre in Barking. She also runs art and theatre workshops for children and adults, and has made props for most of the major London museums.

Alan Valentine - Lighting Designer

Alan has lit numerous shows, including **Cabaret**, **Up 'N Under**, **The Adventures of Mr. Toad**, **Henry V**, **Talking Heads** and the outdoor celebratory arts event **Wildefire** at South Hill Park, Bracknell. He lit Raksha's production of **Arabian**

Nights, which toured Munich and Prague; **Road, 12 Angry Men** and **He Who Says Yes / He Who Says No** at The Castle, Wellingborough, and **Gilgamesh** at Jersey Arts Centre. He lit the British premiere of **Solitary Animals** at The Hackney Empire Studio, and **Never Knowingly Understood** at The Bloomsbury Theatre, London. Recent productions include the dead's **Apollo / Dionysus** cycle, which played at this year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival, as well as **House and Garden**, **Aladdin**, and **Beauty and the Beast**, again at South Hill Park. His most recent production was the national tour of **Shakespeare's R&J**.

Jo Wright - Education Practitioner

Jo has been interested in the theatre since the age of seven when she was cast as 'The Bird Woman' in a school production of Mary Poppins – and has been up to her neck in it ever since, working in design, production and even occasionally on stage. Completing her formal training at the University of Leeds in 2005, Jo has a BA Honours Degree in English Literature and Theatre Studies. She has since worked for York Theatre Royal, The Shakespeare Schools Festival and The Dukes Theatre and Cinema, Lancaster as Education Practitioner, as well as freelancing as a dramaturg and producer. Jo now heads up the Education programme at South Hill Park Arts Centre in Berkshire, running a diverse range of projects and training schemes, as well as working with visiting artists and practitioners. Most recently she has worked on productions of **Shakespeare's R'n'J**, **Oh! What a Lovely War** and **Oedipus** and supported emerging children's theatre company Peut-Être Theatre in their first tour of **This is a That**. This is her third collaboration with Blackeyed Theatre.

THE CAST



Gabrielle Meadows

Gabrielle trained at the Birmingham School of Acting.

Last year she toured the UK with *Heartbreak Productions*, playing Cathy in **Wuthering Heights** (UK tour including Sheffield Crucible) and Puck in an outdoor touring production of **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. Previous credits include Viola in **Twelfth Night** (UK Tour), Sylvia in **Sylvia** (English Theatre of Hamburg), Helen of Troy in **Women of Troy** (*Tightfit Theatre*). She has also toured the south of France with Philip Ayckbourn's theatre company *Quorum Theatre*, playing a wide variety of roles. Gabrielle has worked in children's theatre for *Bigfoot Theatre Co*, and has appeared in several commercials on radio and TV, as well as the short films **Love in a Lecture Theatre** (*Lighthouse Media*) and **Suicide Man** (Produced by David Westhead).

She is really looking forward to working and touring with Blackeyed Theatre for the first time.



Tom Neill

Tom grew up in Wokingham, Berkshire and spent his early years performing with community drama and music groups. He studied Music with Theatre Studies at Huddersfield University and graduated in 2002.

His theatre credits include Sir John French in **Oh What A Lovely War**, Givola in **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui**, Raymond in **Blue Remembered Hills** (*all Blackeyed Theatre*), Kaspar in **Kaspar** (*Atom Theatre*), Mason in **Journey's End** (*J.D. Productions*), Mole in **The Adventures of Mr. Toad** (*South Hill Park*), Theatre In Education tours with Bitesize Theatre Company and pantomimes for various companies.

Tom also works as a music composer, orchestrator and theatre director.



Matthew Rowland-Roberts

Matthew studied Theatre at Middlesex University and the University of South Florida prior to training at Guildford School of Acting.

Theatre Credits include Oedipus in the World Premiere of Steven Berkoff's **Oedipus** (*Blackeyed Theatre*) **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui** (*Blackeyed Theatre*), **An Ideal Husband** directed by Sir Peter Hall (*Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue*), **The Arabian Nights** (*Shakespeare's Globe Theatre*), Saturninus in **Titus Andronicus** (*Wildcard Theatre Company*), **Inside, Outside** (*Arts Theatre*), Don John in **Much Ado About Nothing** (*Holland Park Theatre*), **Romeo and Juliet** directed by Sir Simon Callow and Daniel Kramer (*Al-Bustan Theatre, Beirut*), Malvolio in **Twelfth Night** (*Bath Theatre Royal*), Buckingham in **Richard III** (*High Wycombe Swan*), Title roles in **Romeo and Juliet** and **Macbeth** (*Box Clever Theatre Company*), **Mark And The Marked** (*Theatre Francais, Lille*), **Hansel and Gretel** (*Windsor Arts Centre*), the Dauphin in **Henry V** (*Norden Farm Arts*), Rosencrantz in **Hamlet** and Oliver in **As You Like It** (*R.J. Williamson Company*), **Alfie and The Possibilities for the Steam Industry** (*Finborough Theatre*), **Waiting For Lefty** (*B.A.C.*), **Lorenzaccio** (*Young Vic*), **Newsrevue** (*Canal Cafe*), **Meet Me In The Woods** (*Old Red Lion*) and **Less** (*King's Head*).

Television Credits include **Home and Away** (*Grundy Television*), **Crimewatch U.K.** (*BBC 1*), **When Sex Goes Wrong** (*Sky One*) and Dick Turpin in Channel Five's **Morriss 2274**.



Paul Taylor

Paul has enjoyed being involved in previous Blackeyed Theatre productions: **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui**, **Art**, **Misery** (directed by fellow cast member Tom Neill) and **Blue Remembered Hills**.

His career has included Emcee in **Cabaret**, Mozart in **Amadeus**, Tom Jones in **The History of Tom Jones**, several outings as Oberon/Theseus in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, Norman in **The Dresser**, Peter Quinn/Miles in **Turn of the Screw**, Macheath in **The Beggars Opera**, Dorian Gray in **A Picture of Dorian Gray**, Jesus in **Godspell** and Orin and others in **Little Shop of Horrors**. He has toured extensively around Britain and the rest of Europe, nearly fulfilling his dream of travelling in a troupe, in a caravan, to a town, put up the stage, do the show, pack up and move on.

His film credits include; **Unbelievably British** (nominated in several international film festivals, Short Film category) and **Chocolates and Champagne**. Paul has also turned a hand to directing and some of his favourite productions include; **Barnum**, **Faust**, **Our Country's Good** and **Young Lady of Tacna**.

Christmas shows have always been a favourite of Paul's and have included; **The Snow Queen**, **Cinderella**, **Big Bad Wolf**, **A Christmas Carol**, **Aladdin** and **Beauty and The Beast**. He has been fortunate enough to work with some excellent companies, of which Blackeyed Theatre is one of his favourites.

THE PLAY - SYNOPSIS

The Cherry Orchard is Russian writer Anton Chekhov's last play. It was first produced in the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1904. Although Chekhov considered the play to be a comedy (he subtitled it 'A Comedy in Four Acts'), director Constantine Stanislavski insisted upon directing it as a tragedy. The dual nature of the play has been debated by directors, critics and audiences ever since!

The play concerns the return of an aristocratic Russian woman and her family to their estate, just before it is to be auctioned to pay the mortgage. The estate includes a large and luxuriant orchard of Cherry Trees (hence the play's title). Although the family is presented throughout the play with options to save their family home, they are unable to either recognise the depths of their situation or take actions to save themselves. The play ends with the family leaving the house to the sounds of the Cherry Orchard being cut down.

The play explores a number of themes including;

The changing status of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie
The abolition of serfdom
The ideal versus the realistic

An act by act synopsis of the original play can be found at

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

Blackeyed's Cherry Orchard

Blackeyed Theatre's *The Cherry Orchard* has been re-imagined by director Bart Lee. His adaptation cuts the number of actors from twelve or thirteen to four, necessitating a judicious re-writing of scenes to limit them to four characters, so the *Cherry Orchard* that you will see on stage is not the same as the classic adaptations you may have read or seen performed elsewhere.



THE AUTHOR

Anton Chekhov – Facts and Figures!

- Anton Chekhov was born on 29 January 1860, the third of six surviving children, in Southern Russia.
- He was a short-story writer and playwright, considered to be one of the greatest short-story writers in world literature. His career as a dramatist produced four classic plays: *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*.
- Chekhov's mother, Yevgeniya, was an excellent storyteller who entertained the children with tales of her travels with her cloth-merchant father all over Russia. "Our talents we got from our father," Chekhov remembered, "but our soul from our mother."
- Chekhov attended a school for Greek boys, followed by the Taganrog *gymnasium*, now renamed the Chekhov Gymnasium.
- Even geniuses have their academic failures - at fifteen Chekhov was kept down a year in school after failing a Greek exam!
- He sang at the Greek Orthodox monastery in Taganrog and in his father's choirs.
- As a schoolboy, Chekhov loved to go to the theatre, but he needed special permission to attend from his school which was sometimes refused. Ever the artist, he disguised himself, wearing stage make-up, glasses and a false beard.
- In 1876, Chekhov's father was declared bankrupt after over-extending his finances building a new house, and to avoid the debtor's prison fled to Moscow. The family lived in Moscow in poverty, Chekhov's mother physically and emotionally broken. Chekhov was left behind to sell the family possessions and finish his education, living with the man who had bought his family home (much like Lophakin in *The Cherry Orchard*).
- Chekhov began writing short stories during his days as a medical student at the University of Moscow, under pseudonyms such as "Antosha Chekhonte" and "Man without a Spleen".



- After graduating in 1884 with a degree in medicine, Chekhov began to freelance as a journalist and writer of comic sketches. Early in his career, he mastered the form of the one-act and produced several masterpieces of this genre including *The Bear* (1888) *The Wedding* (1889)
- Chekhov practiced as a doctor throughout most of his literary career: "Medicine is my lawful wife," he once said, "and literature is my mistress."
- At first, Chekhov wrote stories only for the money, but as his artistic ambition grew, he made formal innovations which influenced the evolution of the modern short story.
- On 25 May 1901 Chekhov married Olga Knipper (quietly, owing to his horror of weddings) a former protégée whom he had first met at rehearsals for *The Seagull*.
- *Ivanov* (1887), Chekhov's first full-length play examines the suicide of a young man very similar to Chekhov himself in many ways.
- Like *Ivanov* his next play, *The Wood Demon* (1888) was also fairly unsuccessful. It was not until the Moscow Art Theatre production of *The Seagull* (1897) that Chekhov enjoyed his first success.
- At the opening night of *The Seagull* in October, 1896, the St Petersburg playgoers were expecting a comedy. The audience quickly became bored, and Nina's long monologue at the end of Act One was booed. Chekhov was so upset that he wrote "Never again shall I write plays or have them staged"
- In 1899, Chekhov gave the Moscow Art Theatre a revised version of *The Wood Demon*, now titled *Uncle Vanya* (1899). Along with *The Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), this play would go on to become one of the masterpieces of twentieth century theatre.
- Although the Moscow Art Theatre productions brought Chekhov great fame, he was never quite happy with the style that director Constantin Stanislavsky imposed on the plays and the two often argued about the interpretation of Chekhov's texts.
- Chekhov insisted that his plays were comedies; however Stanislavsky's productions tended to emphasise their tragic elements. In spite of their disagreements over style and interpretation, it was not an unhappy 'marriage', and these productions brought widespread acclaim to both Chekhov's work and the Moscow Art Theatre itself.

- By May 1904, Chekhov was terminally ill. "Everyone who saw him secretly thought the end was not far off," Mikhail Chekhov recalled, "But the nearer Chekhov was to the end, the less he seemed to realise it."
- In 1908, Olga wrote this account of her husband's last moments: "Anton sat up unusually straight and said loudly and clearly (although he knew almost no German): *Ich sterbe*. The doctor calmed him, took a syringe, gave him an injection of camphor, and ordered champagne. Anton took a full glass, examined it, smiled at me and said: "It's a long time since I drank champagne." He drained it, lay quietly on his left side, and I just had time to run to him and lean across the bed and call to him, but he had stopped breathing and was sleeping peacefully as a child."

Some comments on Chekov's work...

'Chekhov often expressed his thought not in speeches but in pauses or between the lines or in replies consisting of a single word... the characters often feel and think things not expressed in the lines they speak'

Constantin Stanislavski

'Chekhov wrote about 6 good stories. But he was an amateur writer'

Ernest Hemingway

'Hearing Chekhov's plays make me want to tear up my own'

George Bernard Shaw



Chekhov is the middle one!

THE ORIGINAL PLAY

Written by Anton Chekhov and first performed in Moscow Art Theatre on 17 January 1904 in a production directed by Constantin Stanislavski, *The Cherry Orchard* was heavily influenced by events in Chekhov's own life, and by social upheaval in Russia.

Russia began to change in the early 18th century, when Tsar Peter the Great carried out a series of reforms with the intent of modernizing Russia in the styles adopted by Western Europe. Imported fashion and art, reading of the Western canon among the nobility, and the adoption of French as the language of cultured discourse permanently changed the face of Russia.

During Chekhov's childhood (in the time of Tsar Alexander II) a second wave of reforms was underway. The most important of these was the Emancipation Declaration of 1861, which freed the serfs from bondage. These reforms caused great controversy, undermining the power of the nobility, and sometimes even impoverishing them. The situation displayed in *The Cherry Orchard*, of a wealthy landowning family, unused to managing their own estates and forced to sell their estate in order to pay their debts, was a familiar one in the Russian society of Chekhov's day.

Inspiration for *The Cherry Orchard* probably came from numerous, over a longer period of time than that for any of Chekhov's other works. Chekhov had known cherry trees from his childhood days in Taganrog, before they were all cleared as a result of Alexander's economic. Also, Chekhov had himself planted a cherry orchard on an estate in Melikhovo that he purchased in 1892; he lost the estate a short while later, and the new owner cut down the cherry trees.



Chekhov had initially intended his last play to be a comedy, vaudeville in fact, and though he may have given up that last idea he still subtitles his play *A Comedy in Four Acts*. Unfortunately for Chekhov, the most common reaction to the play was typified by his wife: "by the fourth act I burst out sobbing". Stanislavsky, the play's director, decided to interpret the play as a drama, against Chekhov's wishes. The debate over whether the play is in fact a comedy or a drama still goes on to this day; even though the subject matter of the play appears to be serious, Chekhov mixes both comic and tragic elements in the text. Though the end of the play is far from upbeat, Ranyevskaya is alive, healthy, and perhaps better off than she was before, having the chance to leave her past behind her. Secondly, there is an element of vaudeville in the play; Yepikhodov is a buffoon, and when Varya hitting Lopakhin is pure slapstick. Also, the humour in *The Cherry Orchard* does not translate nearly as well as the

symbolism. Russian culture, like any culture, has its own unique sense of humor; perhaps this is the reason why there have been so many translations (90!).

A STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR

Director's Vision for the Production

Comedy vs. Tragedy / Servants vs. Masters / Vaudeville vs. Naturalism

The heart of this production lies in the endless debate posed by the following question:

Is the Cherry Orchard a comedy or a tragedy?

Chekhov wrote a comedy. Stanislavski directed a tragedy. And so the discussion begins. Our goal must be to bring the play to life for a new audience. To stir up the debate and to use the theatrical means at our disposal to make good theatre. As a director I wondered...

Where does this question come from?

This led to other questions...

What was happening in Russia at the time of this play?

What were the dominant trends in theatre?

Why did Stanislavski direct a tragedy and not a comedy?

How can we use this information to create a new production?

How does the play support either view?

With research I came to the following hypotheses:

1) Stanislavski with his method acting and psycho techniques was reacting against the dominant popular acting trends of the time. He was a visionary. He wanted to see real people on stage with real feelings in real situations. He hated acting that had no connection to the character presented and despised his actors using gestures for effect instead of from emotional truth.

2) The popular theatre of the time was Vaudeville - In essence a pantomime with characters that were larger-than-life, singing bawdy songs to entertain the masses. These actors would use big sweeping gestures to dictate mood and feeling of the character for an audience as if they were all in a melodrama or a silent movie.

3) Chekhov was a doctor and a comic. He loved entertainment and he possessed a deep love of people. Many say he was a humorous man who had dark moments. He was also a writer and made money from his shows. Therefore

he wanted to sell tickets as well as tell good stories. His work reflects his character.

4) The play is written at a time of change. The servants have been liberated and the ruling classes are on the way out. The Cherry Orchard presents a topsy-turvy world in which social class has a new emerging order - "the middle class". It is very sad for a landowner to lose her ancestral home and yet it is quite wonderful for a peasant boy to buy the estate on which he grew up as a servant.

And so I settled on the following theatrical conclusions:

I believe that the Cherry Orchard is both a tragedy and a comedy and I intend to play both sides of the argument fully in the hope that the audience feels each emotion in turns.

I also believe that the comedy in the Cherry Orchard has been down played over time and so I will look to awaken this theme in the play.

I love the idea of a change play and a topsy-turvy world in which two dominant ideologies exist. The idea of vaudeville and naturalism living side by side in a glorious human mess sounds like good theatre to me.

I understand the history and agree with the reasons for change personally and it must have been wonderful to say to a servant "you are now free" but what if the servant is very old and doesn't want to lose his job? What if the servant has no ambition? What if the servants liked their masters? What if the masters liked their servants? There must have been massive upheaval taking place across the whole country and one can only hazard a guess at some of the human outcomes from such a situation before the dust settles.

In this version I have imagined that the servants have found a new voice, the younger ones in particular pushing themselves into situations that were previously beyond their grasp. I have imagined that the servants are from the world of vaudeville and yet they are real people thrust into the spotlight alongside their masters and the world of naturalism.

I have imagined that the action of the play takes place over a year and that the seasons dictate the journey and emotional tone of the play. All of the characters grow during this time and by the end of the year they are ready for new challenges.

I have imagined that the costume comes from the time in which the play is set. I have imagined that Vaudeville has an influence on the servants' dress to heighten them.

I have imagined that the setting of the play is timeless. A reality is created theatrically which presents 1901 for the four acts and yet in between the acts lives a Vaudeville time in which the actors sing to the audience, change the set and comment on the play.

I have imagined that Vivaldi-esque music sets the tone of each act and vaudeville balalaika–esque music comments on the action at the end.

I have imagined that the actors adopt Stanislavski's method for creating fully rounded characters and that each character is a real person and their actions are plausible. We should not see an actor change character on stage and we must present each character truthfully even though we know it is the same actor playing two characters. I can't wait to start work with the actors to develop these wonderful characters.

Rehearsals start in two weeks...

Bart Lee 3/1/09

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Below you will find the characters that appear in *The Cherry Orchard*. Under each description is Bart Lee's (director and adapter of this production) description of how he has imagined the character to be. This is an interpretation of Chekhov's original script.

ACTIVITY: Why not compare Chekhov's original text with the character descriptions you see below? Do you think these interpretations are correct? Would you have made other choices? Select three characters and write your own interpretations of their motivations and character traits.

Ranyevskaya (Mimi) *a Land owner*

An aristocratic and theatrical woman in her forties. Sensitive to atmosphere and nostalgia, Ranyevskaya is very theatrical in her approach to life.

'I have imagined that Mme Ranyevskaya is fascinated with vaudeville. She is incredibly human and lives life to the full. She is aware of change but there is nothing in her upbringing that has given her the means to deal with the situation presented so she does what she knows best. She concentrates on her emotions and loses herself in the people around her. She oozes class and intelligence without the slightest hint of "street wise".'

Anya (Anichka) *Her daughter, aged 17*

Young and in some ways very childlike, Anya has an innocent approach to life. Her love for Trofimov is idealistic and pure, and she sets out on a new life with him with real hope.

'I have imagined Anya as a good caring daughter. She is a product of her upbringing and so marries for love. I see hope in Anya.'

Varya (Varvara Mihailovna) *Her adopted daughter, aged 24*

Older and more cynical than Anya, she is somewhat careworn by the responsibilities of running the estate in the face of her family's carelessness and inability to understand the realities of their situation. Although in love with Lopakhin, she sometimes expresses a wish for a religious life, free of social entrapments.

'I have imagined Varya completely in love with Lopakhin but she doesn't realise that he lacks the ability to love her back. She should find another lover but can't. Varya is stuck and depressed.'

Gayev (Pipi) *Brother of Ranyevskaya*

A little younger than Ranyevskaya, Gayev appears a care-free bachelor. He is adapting better than his sister to the changing world around him and genuinely tries to find solutions for the problems presented to him, but ultimately cares too little to save his families estate.

‘I have imagined Gayev as a public school boy who didn’t study too hard with a witty sense of humour and as genuinely up-beat. Gayev will end up working in the bank in town. He doesn’t see much of a bigger picture and is quite happy when he ends up living with Dunyasha. In time I think she’ll get her husband and they are a product of this new topsy-turvy world.’

Lopakhin *A Business Man*

Lopakhin is the character, more than any other, constantly in charge of driving the play forward. He informs us of the trouble the estate is in, creates a plan to save the estate, offers a loan and ends up by buying the Cherry Orchard himself. He has raised himself from peasant stock to become successful, and is more driven by acquisitiveness and money than any of the other characters. He is frustrated and does not understand the family’s lack of action and his subsequent insensitivity to Ranyevskaya is not merely the result of his peasant upbringing.

‘I have imagined Lopakhin as emotionless, vulgar and rude. He is wonderful in business but has no warmth of character at all. If you put Mme Ranyevskaya and Lopakhin together you would have the most amazing human being, in the same way that Marc Anthony and Caesar together would make the perfect ruler; but one knows that can never be.’

Trofimov (Petya) *A student*

‘The eternal student’, Trofimov has chosen to live his life in a philosophical manner, rejecting the confines of a changing society. The former tutor of Ranyevskaya’s drowned son, he is in love with Anya, and has been at university for most of his adult life. His rejection of the material and the aesthetic life make him a foil for both Lopakhin and Ranyevskaya

‘I have imagined Trofimov as a visionary above money and yet with the knowledge that he will have to work for a living to support his bride to be and their future family – I see hope for Trofimov.’

Pischik *A landowner*

Like Ranyevskaya, Pischik is in financial difficulties. He is constantly upbeat; sure that money will appear in time to save him, which indeed it does. Something of a caricature; Pischik's name, in Russian, means "squealer," appropriate for someone who never stops talking.

'I have imagined Pischik as an optimist. Because he thinks that things will work out for him they do.'

Charlotta Ivanovna *A German Governess*

Anya's governess, Charlotta traveled from town-to-town as part of a circus when she was very young. Charlotta is something of a clown, performing tricks for the amusement of the elite around her, while at the same time, subtly mocking their pre-occupations. She seems to have a real fondness for Anya.

'I have imagined Charlotta as a nomad. She moves from one time to another, one role to another without care. She could be 100 she could be 30. She is without time and searches for a greater truth.'

Yepikhodov *A clerk on Ranyevskaya's estate*

One of those unfortunates who have no luck at all, Yepikhodov is the 'sad clown' of the piece. In love with Dunyasha, who has no interest in him, he sets himself up as the hopeless lover and romantic.

'I have imagined that Yepikhodov is a tragic clown, hopelessly in love with Dunyasha and yet the only man she does not fancy in the slightest. Yepikhodov gets a big role in this play. I hope that in the years to come he manages to untangle himself and move on.'

Dunyasha *A parlour maid*

A parlour maid who has lived for a long time without a mistress, Dunyasha has got slightly above herself, aping the gentry. She spurns Yepikhodov's affections and chases after Yasha, who has no interest in her.

'I have imagined Dunyasha desperate for a husband but with no desire at all to see a bigger picture. '

Firs *A man-servant, aged 87*

Firs is representative of the decay of the old world. A freed serf he is unable and unwilling to leave the family he has served for so long, particularly Gayev whom he sees as a son. Mumbling and possibly senile, his reminiscences of the estates glorious past only go to show how times have changed.

'I have imagined Firs as a caring old man who believes in fixing things rather than throwing them away. He truly loves Gayev as a son and it is his character to give of himself for others'

Yasha *a young man-servant*

Yasha is a cynical city servant who resents being brought back to the country by Ranyevskaya. He teases and baits Dunyasha and Yepikhodov, openly tells Firs he should die and is always complaining about how uncivilized Russia is when compared to France. Most of the characters besides Ranyevskaya regard him as repulsive and obnoxious. He has a strong taste for acrid-smelling cigars.

'I have imagined Yasha as a chav turned yuppie. I have also imagined that Mme Ranyevskaya employs him because he is gorgeous and she indulges in his company. He takes the money.'

A Tramp

'I have imagined the Tramp as a wealthy landowner who has lost everything and is living off the land. His situation has made him wise.'

Bart Lee, director of Blackeyed Theatre's production

THEMES AND CONTEXT

- **CHANGE**

A recurrent theme throughout Russian literature of the nineteenth century is the clash between the tip into modernism and the values of old Russia. When we talk about modernism in the context of *The Cherry Orchard* we refer to the 'westernisation' of Russia begun by Tsar Peter the Great in the early 18th Century. Much of late nineteenth-century Russian literature was written in reaction to this change, and in praise of an idealized vision of Russia's history and folklore. Western values are often represented as false, pretentious, and spiritually and morally bankrupt. Russian culture by contrast is exalted as honest and morally pure. How far you believe this applies to *The Cherry Orchard* however depends largely on your reading or the director's interpretation.

The conflict between Ranyevskaya on the one hand and Lopakhin on the other can be seen as symbolic of the disputes between the old feudal order and Westernisation. The conflict is made most explicit in the speeches of Trofimov, who views Russia's historical legacy as an oppressive one, something to be abandoned instead of exalted. First, the aging man-servant could also be seen to represent Russia's past; well-meaning and honourable but ultimately archaic, decayed and forgotten.



- **Nature**

Nature, as represented by the orchard has significant value in *The Cherry Orchard*, both as something of inherent beauty and as a connection with the past. Even Lopakhin, who destroys the Orchard, calls it the "most beautiful place on earth", and though he doesn't save it, he talks with joy about 3,000 acres of poppies he has planted and looks forward to a time when his cottage-owners will enjoy summer evenings on their verandahs, perhaps planting and beautifying their properties.

The orchard is the undisputed centre of the play. Even though no on-stage action takes place in the orchard itself, everything else revolves around and is drawn towards it. From the sheer scale of it, the idea that it would not sustain Ranyevskaya and her family is absurd, but absurd for a reason. The orchard used to produce a crop every year, which was made into cherry jam, but, as Firs informs us, the recipe has been lost. It is thus a relic of the past, an artifact, of no present use to anyone except as a memorial to or symbol of the time in which it was useful.

THE PRACTITIONER

Constantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski (Russian: Константин Сергеевич Станиславский) – Facts and Figures



- Born on January 5, 1863 in Moscow, Russia.
- Died on August 7, 1938 (aged 75) in Moscow, Russia
- Stanislavski was born Constantin Sergeievich Alexeiev—"Stanislavski" was a stage name that he adopted in 1884 in order to keep his performance activities secret from his parents.
- Stanislavski had a privileged youth, growing up in one of the richest families in

Russia, the Alekseievs. Stanislavsky's excellent classical education included singing, ballet, and acting lessons as well as regular visits to the opera and theatre. He joined the family business after finishing his education.

- While Constantin was still very young, the family organized a theatre group called the Alekseievs Circle. They later built two theatres in their town and country houses.
- Stanislavski experimented with the ability to maintain a characterization in real life, disguising himself as a tramp or drunk and visiting the railway station, or disguising himself as a fortune-telling gypsy; he extended the experiment to the rest of the cast of a short comedy in which he performed in 1883, and as late as 1900 he amused holiday-makers in Yalta by taking a walk each morning "in character".¹
- In 1885, Stanislavski briefly studied at the Moscow Theatre School, where students were encouraged to mimic the theatrical tricks and conventions of their tutors. Disappointed by this approach, he left after little more than two weeks.
- He married an actress named Maria Petrovna Perevostchikova (stage name: Maria Liliana)
- As an actor, Stanislavski starred in several classical plays. His most notable stage performances, such as Othello in the Shakespeare's

'Othello', and as Gayev in Chekhov's 'The Cherry Orchard', were acclaimed by critics and loved by public.

- Arguably, Stanislavski (often known affectionately within the theatre as 'Stan') laid the foundations of modern theatre.
- In 1918 Stanislavsky established the First Studio as a school for young actors and in his later years wrote two books, 'My Life in Art' and 'The Actor and His Work'. Both have been translated into over 20 languages.
- Stanislavsky's system is based around an actor "living the part" but always staying one step away from complete belief. He felt that it is important that, whilst the actor should experience and show the emotions of the character, it is very important the actor still stay detached. His theories are often discussed as a theatrical ideology known as 'the system'. The system was made as a flexible structure, a thing that actors may use as much or as little as they please in their rehearsals, and was intended to be modified for the individual.



THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

Moscow Art Theatre is a theatre company in Moscow, Russia, founded in 1897 by Constantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. It was created as a venue for naturalistic theatre, in contrast to the melodramas that were Russia's dominant form of theatre at the time. The theatre quickly became famous when it staged productions of Anton Chekhov's four major works, beginning with *The Seagull*. This play has been so firmly associated with the Moscow Art Theatre that the seagull became its emblem.

NATURALISM (as described by Wikipedia)

Naturalism is a movement in European drama and theatre that developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It refers to theatre that attempts to create a perfect illusion of reality through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies: detailed, three-dimensional settings

Everyday speech forms (prose over poetry)

A secular world-view (no ghosts, spirits or gods intervening in the human action)

An exclusive focus on subjects that are contemporary and indigenous (no exotic, otherworldly or fantastic locales, nor historical or mythic time-periods)

An extension of the social range of characters portrayed (away from the aristocrats of classical drama, towards bourgeois and eventually working-class protagonists)

A style of acting that attempts to recreate the impression of reality (often by seeking complete identification with the role, understood in terms of its 'given circumstances', as advocated by Stanislavski).

MELODRAMA (as described by Wikipedia)

Melodrama refers to theatre in which music is used to increase the spectator's emotional response or to suggest character types. It is a word, formed by combining the words "melody" (from the Greek "melōidía", meaning "song") and "drama"(Classical Greek: δράμα, dráma; meaning "action"). While the use of music is nearly ubiquitous in modern film, in a melodrama these musical cues will be used within a fairly rigid structure, and the characterizations will accordingly be somewhat more one-dimensional: Heroes will be unambiguously good and their entrance will be heralded by heroic-sounding trumpets and martial music;

villains are unambiguously bad, and their entrance is greeted with dark-sounding, ominous chords.

Melodramas tend to be formulaic productions, with a clearly constructed world of connotations: a villain poses a threat, the hero escapes the threat (or rescues the heroine) and there is (generally) a happy ending. However, the term is also used in a broader sense to refer to a play, film, or other work in which emotion is exaggerated and plot and action are emphasized in comparison to the more character-driven emphasis within a drama. Melodramas can also be distinguished from tragedy by the fact that they are open to having a happy ending, but this is not always the case.

THE QUESTION - HOW DO YOU DO *The Cherry Orchard*?



Or more generally 'How do you do a classic text that has been done hundreds of times before?' This is a question that faces almost every director at some point in their career, and has resulted in some amazing reinterpretations of familiar stories... and some abysmal flops. It has been suggested by many directors that the mark of a good play is that it 'speaks' to people born generations after it was written; that it is still relevant in any age it is performed.

This is one of the many reasons we chose *The Cherry Orchard* to perform this year – what could be more relevant in a time of money troubles and social upheaval, than a play about money troubles and social upheaval! The same problems that face Ranyevskaya and her family face many families today. Other choices we, and indeed many other theatre companies, have to make in order to stage a classic include:

1) What style of show is it?

There has been debate ever since the first performance of *The Cherry Orchard* as to the nature of the play; Chekhov insisted that it was a comedy, even titling the play 'A comedy in four acts'. However, his contemporaries including his wife and Director Constantin Stanislavski saw the play as a tragedy, the slow entropy of a lifestyle. Stanislavski's commitment to representing real emotion and actors 'living the part' onstage led him to reject the vaudeville style prevalent at the time, and he presented the show for tragic effect, infuriating Chekhov in the process.

Blackeyed Theatre have chosen to represent both sides of the argument by using both Stanislavskian methods of rehearsal and performance and vaudeville songs and heightened character representation as part of the performance.

2) Decide when to set it

Do we set the play in its original context (when it was written), or do we update it to a later date or modern period? Would it be more effective if we set it in the 1930's for example?

We have decided to place this production in its original time period the early 1900's. We felt that the context would allow us to play with the style of the piece, using both the dramatic Stanislavskian style and the bawdy, larger than life humour of the vaudeville, as well as draw on the context of the changing society in which Chekhov's characters live.

3) Aim for consistency

Once you have decided on a style and time period, try and stick to it as closely as possible. Be coherent in your aims – what do you want the audience to understand by seeing this production?

TOURING A SHOW

There tend to be (generally speaking) two types of theatre in this world; receiving houses, which programme touring work made by other people, and producing houses, which make their own work from scratch.

QUESTION: - Are you seeing this production in a producing, or a receiving house? What departments and members of staff do you think a producing house will have that a receiving house does not? Have a look at the staff breakdown of your local theatre and see what sorts of roles are available.

South Hill Park is both a producing AND receiving house. The Wilde Theatre only 'goes dark' (closes) on Christmas day; the rest of the year we are up and running with theatre, dance and music events. Some of these are done by visiting outside companies, but we also produce our own work in-house, often collaborating with independent theatre companies. *The Cherry Orchard* is a collaborative project between Blackeyed Theatre and South Hill Park, with the arts centre supporting the company with rehearsal space, staff time, lighting design and marketing.

The Cherry Orchard has been rehearsed and produced in Berkshire but has been designed with touring in mind – you may be reading this in a completely different part of the country. There are lots of challenges inherent in touring a show

ACTIVITY: - Imagine you are a producer planning on touring a production of your choice (perhaps your set text?). What do you think you will need organizing? What choices will you have to make about the show? Does this put any limits on your vision?

Touring Choices and Issues

- ACTORS

When touring, and often when rehearsing, actors will need to stay away from home. So, the more actors you have, the more digs you will need to pay for and the more wages you will need to pay! For this reason the casts of touring shows (other than musicals) are often small, with many actors doubling parts. Obviously this will have implications on what sort of play you do and who you are able to cast.

Another effect this might have is the need for misdirection – making the audience look in the opposite direction while you change the scene or alter costume to change characters. Look for examples of misdirection during *The Cherry Orchard* – what do the actors do to distract you?

- SET AND COSTUME

Touring shows often have small budgets which means that set designers must be very creative with what is available to them. Also the set must usually fit in one or two vans/cars so as to be easily transportable.

Costume must be kept in a decent state for each show. As it is rare that a wardrobe mistress or designer will travel with you actors or stage managers will need to be taught how to wash and iron their own costume; because of the nature of stage costume, which may have been specially made or take more wear than usual, means that the upkeep may be quite time-consuming and specialized. For example, corsets would usually need to be handwashed rather than machine-washed, and if clothing is period then it may be too fragile to stand up to modern washers.

ACTIVITY: - Look at *The Cherry Orchard* set. What decisions do you think have been made because this is a touring show? What effect do these have?

- PLANNING

Touring theatre is not a glamorous life – apart from living on the road it is very difficult to budget to make a profit or sometimes even break even on a tour! You must work out how many shows you need to do at different venues to make the show cost effective, and negotiate contracts with these venues. A theatre may only have certain nights available in their calendar, as most spaces book up to six months in advance, so you may find yourself in Yorkshire one day and Dover the next. This means allowing for travel time, tired and possibly grumpy actors and budgeting for petrol or train tickets.

- VENUE

If you are touring to a number of venues then they will all have different technical specifications, which the company will need to adapt to – so you might have a huge stage space in one venue and a tiny stage at the next. Being able to adapt your piece at short notice is essential, as well as a quick get-in and get-out time.

ACTIVITIES

Character

Stanislavski said Character must come from a position of truth. Form three groups of the characters from the Cherry Orchard; the family, their friends and the servants. Pick a stance for each character and then find a reason for them to stand or move in that way; it may be that their shoes pain them or that they are tense from worry, for example.

Motivation

Select character and chart their motivation in each act – how does it change?

Credit-crunch theatre

In the current financial climate, the cheaper you can do a piece the better. Go through the script and decide what you cannot do without (props, costumes, set etc.) and see how cheaply you can do this show! What is the minimum budget you need? (Don't forget to take into account paying actors, directors and designers as well as for room hire, props, costume and set).

Casting

The theatre is one of the only industries who can discriminate based on appearance, for purposes of casting, although modern directors often subvert expectation by casting unanticipated actors – for example, a large bald man as Ariel in *The Tempest*.

- 1) Think about who your ideal cast for *The Cherry Orchard* would be and make a list of requirements. Do you want them to have special skills – should they be able to sing or play an instrument?
- 2) Now look at your class/group. If you have to select ONLY from them who would you select to play which character? Why, and what change would you have to make to your original 'Wish List'?

Review

Write a review of the production. Comment on elements such as the success of the actors in playing multiple roles, the use of music and the re-imagining of the story as a comedy. (And by all means e-mail them to us when you are done!)

POST SHOW CHALLENGE

Following the production write as much as you can about each of these elements:

Period of Production

Costume

Light and sound

Set

Class Difference

Song and Dance

Doubling of Roles

GLOSSARY

Motivations – Why a character does something. For example, Ranyevskaya may cry because she is sad, or because she is happy. What emotion is she drawing on? Why is she crying? These are her motivations.

Producing House – A theatre building which produces its own work from scratch.

Receiving House – A theatre building which does not produce new work, but brings in work from outside companies.

Digs – Slang for actors lodgings when away from home – these range from hotels to BnB's to rented houses or rooms in people's homes.

Doubling parts – When an actor plays more than one part in the same show they are said to be 'doubling'. For example, the same actor will often play the parts of Theseus and Oberon in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*.

Period Costume – clothing items made in the style of the time in which the show is set.

Genuine period costume - items of clothing actually from the time in which the show is set. E.g. a Mary Quant Dress from the sixties, rather than a new dress made in that style.

Technical Specifications – Or tech specs. Detail things like, size of the venue, number of seats, availability of lighting and sound equipment, dressing room space, green room facilities etc.

Pseudonym – Or pen name. A fictitious name under which an artist might produce work.

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

WEBSITES

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeFMWSbincc> – Judy Dench in the Cherry Orchard

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

www.sparknotes.com/drama/cherryorchard

<http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/ac/chorch.htm> - an online script of *The Cherry Orchard*

<http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/c#a708> – Works by Chekhov at Project Gutenberg

BOOKS

Benedetti, Jean. 1989. *Stanislavski: An Introduction*. London: Methuen.

Benedetti, Jean. 1998. *Stanislavski and the Actor*. London: Methuen

Merlin, Bella. 2007. *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*. London: Nick Hern.

Stanislavski, Constantin. 1936. *An Actor Prepares*. London: Methuen, 1988

CONTACT

South Hill Park Arts Centre
Education and Outreach Officer

Jo Wright on **01344 416206** or jo.wright@southhillpark.org.uk

We hope you and your pupils enjoyed the show. Please feel free to contact us if you would like any more information about this show, education pack or upcoming productions.

Blackeyed Theatre

blackeyedtheatre@yahoo.co.uk

<http://www.blackeyedtheatre.co.uk/>

TEACHER'S EVALUATION FORM

We would appreciate your feedback. Please take a few moments to review the pack and please return the evaluation form to Jo Wright, South Hill Park

NAME, SCHOOL.....
Year group.....

Please tick the following:-
Outstanding/Good/OK/Bad/Terrible

The Quality of the content
Suitability for use within the classroom
Layout
Adequate information
Suitability for your pupils

Did you find the Education pack was beneficial for your pupil? If so why?

.....
.....

Are there any other elements that you would like to see included?

.....
.....

What pages in the education pack were most helpful to your work and why?

.....
.....

Please add any other comments

.....
.....

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out this evaluation form. Please get in touch if you have any further feedback or would like to talk more about the education department and what we do.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts. Many thanks.