

ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE



***The Cherry Orchard***  
**Study Guide**

# ***The Cherry Orchard* Study Guide**

**Artists Repertory Theatre April 22, 2011 – May 22, 2011**

By Anton Chekhov, Adapted by Richard Kramer

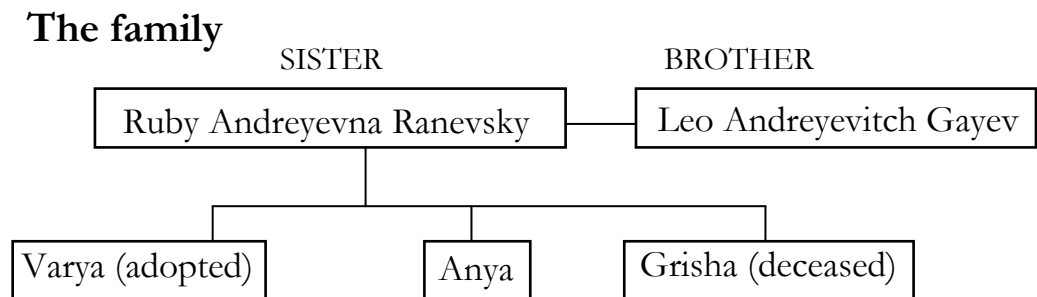
Directed by Jon Kretzu

## **Synopsis:**

*The Cherry Orchard's* central characters return to their ancestral home and its most beloved feature – the cherry orchard – on the eve of its sale at auction to pay the delinquent mortgage. Ghostlike and ethereal, this striking new adaptation is a unique and avant-garde fantasia on the story's themes of the rising bourgeois and the fall of aristocracy.

This production completes Artists Rep's Chekhov Project. The company has commissioned new adaptations for three of the playwright's four major plays. Adapters include Joseph Fisher (*The Seagull*), Tom Wood (*Vanya*), and Tracy Letts (*Three Sisters*). *Vanya* had its world premiere at The Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta. Artists Rep produced the United States premiere.

## **Who's Who:**



### The Landed Gentry

Leo Andreyevitch Gayev

Ruby Andreyevna

Ranevsky

-Varya (adopted)

-Anya

-Grisha (deceased)

### Merchant Class

Yermolay Lopakhin,

merchant

Boris Pischik, landowner

Peter Trofimov, a student

### Serving Class

Firs, an old footman

Dunyasha, a maidservant

Simon Yepikidoff, a clerk

Yasha, a young footman

Charlotta, a governess

In Richard Kramer's production:

Lubov Andreyevna Ranevskaya is Ruby Andreyevna Ranevskaya

Leonid Andreyevitch Gaev is Leo Andreyevitch Gayev

Ermolai Alexeyevitch Lopakhin is Yermolay Lopakhin

Boris Borisovitch Simeonov-Pischin is Boris Pischik

Simeon Panteleyevitch Epikhodov is Simon Yepikidoff

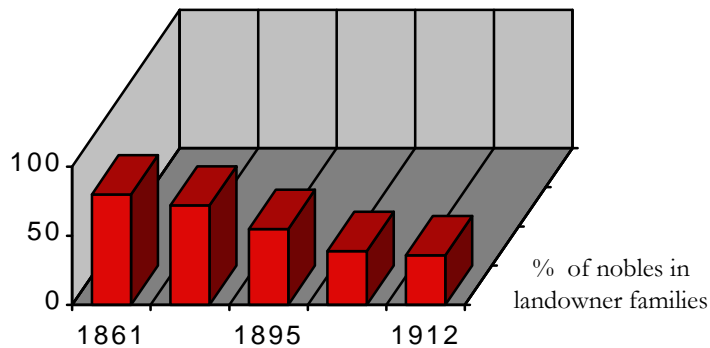
## Background/Context of the Play:

### The State of Russia:

According to the census of 1857 the number of private serfs was 23.1 million out of 62.5 million Russians—that is 37.7% of the population. Serfdom evolved from agricultural slavery of the Roman Empire and spread through Europe around the 10th Century. A serf is a laborer who is bound to the land. Serfs differed from slaves in that serfs were not property themselves and could not be sold apart from the land on which they worked. Serfdom was dominant during the middle ages. In England, serfdom lasted up to the 17th Century, and in France until 1789. The last European country to abolish serfdom was Russia, in 1861. With the emancipation, serfs on private estates and household serfs were given the rights of free citizens. The manifesto stipulated that farm peasants would be able to buy land from their landlords. Household serfs, however, gained their freedom but no land—one of several reasons emancipation did not solve the problem of peasant unrest.

### In the news:

This year Russia observes the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Manifesto, which liberated millions of serfs. The manifesto, proclaimed by Tsar Alexander II on February 19, 1861, reportedly influenced United States President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.



In the 1870s the gentry still owned one-third of all arable land, but by 1905 its share had declined to 22 percent, of which one-third was rented to the peasantry. Few landowners had any grasp of agriculture or accounting and many of them spent long periods away from their estates, often leaving their affairs in the hands of corrupt or incompetent managers. Many of these estates then fell to bankruptcy. In *The Cherry Orchard* the responsibility is shared between the 24 year-old adopted daughter Varya and the clerk Yepikidoff.

By 1903, almost one-half of all private land in Russia (excluding peasant land) was mortgaged, forcing the landed gentry to sell their estates and join the professional or commercial classes, as Leo does at the end of this play.

## **Production History:**

The next play I write will definitely be funny, very funny – at least in intention.

Anton Chekhov  
Letter to Olga Knipper  
March 7, 1901

This play is neither the comedy nor farce you said you wrote – it is a tragedy, no matter the escape to a better life you open up in the last act. I wept like a woman when we read it – I tried to stop myself, but I couldn't control myself.

Konstantin Stanislavsky  
Letter to Chekhov  
October 22, 1903

The play opened on January 17, 1904, the playwright's birthday, at the Moscow Art Theatre under the direction of legendary actor/director Konstantin Stanislavsky. Famously contrary to Chekhov's wishes, Stanislavsky's version was, by and large, a tragedy. Chekhov disliked the Stanislavsky production intensely, concluding that Stanislavsky had "ruined" his play. During rehearsals, the entire structure of Act Two was re-written (to include the passer-by and the twang from the string dying away). The Moscow Arts Theatre rehearsed it for only six months, unlike their usual practice to rehearse for 18 months, or even more. In contrast, plays in most American Regional theaters today rehearse from periods between four to six weeks.

### Productions of Note

- The modest and newly urbanized audiences attending pre-revolutionary performances at S. V. Panin's People's House in Saint Petersburg reportedly cheered as the cherry orchard was felled onstage.
- A 1925 production at the Oxford Playhouse by J. B. Fagan and a 1934 production at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London, directed by Tyrone Guthrie and translated by Hubert Butler, were among the first English-language productions of the play.
- A production directed by Peter Hall, translated by Michael Frayn (*Noises Off*) and starring Dorothy Tutin as Ranevskaya, Albert Finney as Lopakhin, Ben Kingsley as Trofimov and Ralph Richardson as Firs, appeared at the Royal National Theatre in London in 1978 to nearly universal acclaim.
- In 1981, renowned director Peter Brook mounted a production in French with an international cast including Brook's wife Natasha Parry as Ranevskaya, Niels Arestrup as Lopakhin and Michael Piccoli as Gayev. The production was remounted at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1988 after tours through Africa and the Middle East.
- The Steppenwolf Theatre Company performed a version that was translated by Associate Artistic Director Curt Columbus and directed by ensemble member Tina Landau. The play premiered on November 4, 2004 and ran until March 5, 2005 at the Downstairs Theatre, Chicago.

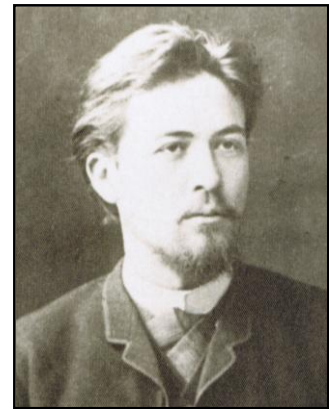
- Libby Appel adapted and directed the play in 2007 for her farewell season as artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.
- In 2009, a new version of the play by Tom Stoppard was performed as the first production of The Bridge Project, a partnership between North American and U.K. theaters. Sam Mendes directed the production with a cast including Simon Russell Beale, Sinéad Cusack, Richard Easton, Rebecca Hall and Ethan Hawke.
- In April 2010 at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh the Scottish playwright John Byrne staged a new version of the play as a Scottish ‘social comedy’ under its original title.
- Artists Rep’s adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* premieres April 22, 2011.

## **Background/Context of the Playwright:**

### Biography:

Born on January 29, 1860, in Taganrog, Russia, on the Sea of Azov, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov would eventually become one of Russia’s most cherished storytellers. Especially fond of vaudevilles and French farces, he produced some hilarious one-acts, but it is his full-length tragedies that have secured him a place among the greatest dramatists of all time.

Chekhov began writing short stories during his days as a medical student at the University of Moscow. After graduating in 1884 with a degree in medicine, he 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) in which a creditor hounds a young widow, but becomes so impressed when she agrees to fight a duel with him that he proposes marriage, and *The Wedding* (1889) in which a bridegroom’s plans to have a general attend his wedding ceremony backfire when the general turns out to be a retired naval captain “of the second rank.”



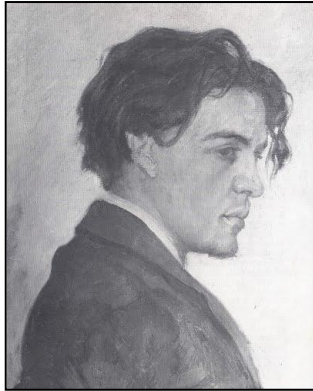
*Ivanov* (1887), Chekhov’s first full-length play, a fairly immature work compared to his later plays, examines the suicide of a young man very similar to Chekhov himself in many ways. His next play, *The Wood Demon* (1888) was also fairly unsuccessful. In fact, it was not until the Moscow Art Theater production of *The Seagull* (1897) that Chekhov enjoyed his first overwhelming success. The same play had been performed two years earlier at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg and had been so badly received that Chekhov had actually left the auditorium during the second act and vowed never to write for the theater again. But in the hands of the Moscow Art Theatre, the play was transformed into a critical success, and Chekhov soon realized that the earlier production had failed because the actors had not understood their roles. 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 the modern theater. Chekhov considered his mature plays to be a kind of comic satire, pointing out the unhappy nature of existence in turn-of-the-century Russia. Perhaps Chekhov's style was described best by the playwright himself when he wrote:

“All I wanted was to say honestly to people: ‘Have a look at yourselves and see how bad and dreary your lives are!’ The important thing is that people should realize that, for when they do, they will most certainly create another and better life for themselves. I will not live to see it, but I know that it will be quite different, quite unlike our present life. And so long as this different life does not exist, I shall go on saying to people again and again: ‘Please, understand that your life is bad and dreary!’”

In March of 1897, Chekhov had suffered a lung hemorrhage, and although he still made occasional trips to Moscow to participate in the productions of his plays, he was forced to spend most of his time in the Crimea where he had gone for his health. Chekhov married actress Olga Knipper, of the Moscow Art Theatre, on May 21, 1901. He died of tuberculosis in a German health resort a few years later on July 14, 1904, at the age of 44, and was buried in Moscow.

### **Chekhov's Timeline:**



**1860** Anton Pavlovich Chekhov is born, the son of a grocer, in Taganrog. In the U.S., Abraham Lincoln is elected president and South Carolina secedes from the Union. The Civil War continues until 1865.

**1868** Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, moves to Germany and produces some of his most famous work. Ibsen is known as “the father of modern realism.”

**1869** *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy’s novel, is published. Tolstoy took six years to write it.

**1875** Chekhov’s father flees Taganrog due to bankruptcy; Chekhov’s family is kicked out of their house.

**1876** In the U.S., Lt. Col. George A. Custer’s regiment is wiped out by Sioux Indians under Sitting Bull at the Little Big Horn River, MT.

**1877** *Anna Karenina* is published four years after Tolstoy began writing it.

**1879** Chekhov rejoins his family in Moscow and enrolls in University to study medicine. Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* premieres in Copenhagen, Denmark on December 21.

**1882** Chekhov is a regular contributor to a St. Petersburg humorous journal with short stories and sketches.

**1884** Chekhov begins practicing medicine.

**1886** In the U.S., the Statue of Liberty is dedicated.

**1887** Chekhov is a literary success in St. Petersburg with his first play, *Ivanov*.

**1888** Chekhov begins publishing his stories.

**1889** In the U.S., Oklahoma is opened to the settlers.

**1890** Chekhov begins to see himself as a serious writer. In the U.S., last major battle of the Indian Wars occurs at Wounded Knee in SD.



Above: Chekhov reads to members of Moscow Art Theatre

**1895** Moscow Art Theatre opens. Chekhov writes *The Seagull*.

**1896** *The Seagull* opens. It survives only five performances after a disastrous opening night.

**1897** Chekhov realizes he is suffering from advanced tuberculosis.

**1898** *The Seagull* is produced successfully by the Moscow Art Theatre. The U.S. annexes Hawaii.

**1899** *Uncle Vanya* is produced successfully by the Moscow Art Theatre.



**1900** In the U.S., Galveston hurricane leaves an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 dead.

**1901** *Three Sisters* is produced to poor reviews. Chekhov marries actress Olga Knipper.

**1903** In the U.S., Wright brothers make the first controlled, sustained flight in heavier-than-air aircraft at Kitty Hawk, NC.

At left: Chekhov with wife Olga Knipper

**1904** *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov's last play, is produced. After two heart attacks, Chekhov dies in a hotel bedroom on July 14 at the age of 44. His last words: "I haven't had champagne for a long time."

**1924** Konstantin Stanislavsky publishes his memoirs, *My Life in Art*, in Boston, MA in English. It was later revised and published in Russian in Moscow. His acting system for achieving true-to-life believability onstage has enormously influenced modern theater and film.

## What's with the Names?

Russian names have three parts: the given name, the patronymic name (based on the father's first name) and the family name (based on the father's last name). Most Russian names have a variety of forms:

For example, the name Mikhail, in this form, is used in formal relationships and in official documents (passport, birth certificate, contracts). The short name Misha is used by friends and family members. The affectionate form is Mishenka; Mishunya is used by parents and grandparents. The rude form, Mishka, is impolite. Russian male patronymic names are formed by adding endings such as -evich, -ovich (Nikolayevich, Mikhailovich)- for example, *Lyev Nikolayevich Tolstoy*. Russian female patronymic names are formed by adding endings such as -ovna, -evna (Nikolayevna, Mikhailovna)- for example, *Lyudmila Aleksandrovna Putina* is the wife of Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin.

Ruby Andreyevna Ranevskaya

A given name: Ruby

A patronymic name identifying one's father: Andreyevna (daughter of Andrey)

A surname: Ranevskaya

The Russian language is written in the Cyrillic alphabet. For example, the word "Russia" in Cyrillic is: Россия. English translations of Chekhov plays use the European alphabet for the character's names, which cannot be translated, to sound like the names in Russian. As a result, different translations and adaptations may spell character names differently. In fact, Madame Ranevskaya's given name in several translations of the play is Lyubov, which means "love."

To a Russian ear, certain associations can be made with the names. Lyubov obviously suggests the kind of indiscriminate love that characterizes Ranevskaya. Gaev suggests *gaer*, buffoon, while Lopakhin may be derived either from *lopata*, shovel, or *lopat*, to shovel food down one's throat. Simeonov-Pishchik combines an ancient autocratic name with a silly one reminiscent of *pishchat*, to chirp. A *pishchik* is a "swizzle," or pipe, used by puppeteers to produce the voice of Petrushka, a stock character of Russian folk puppetry, generally portrayed as a jester.

***What would your Russian name be?***

At right: Petrushka



## **Glossary/Key Terms:**

### Money:

- The ruble has been the Russian unit of currency for about 500 years. From 1710, one ruble was divided into 100 kopeks.
- At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, one ruble was worth 0.0373 troy oz. gold, or 0.771 US dollars.

### A College Education:

- Radical student dropouts, such as Peter Trofimov, were far from uncommon. The saying went, “It takes 10 years to graduate—five in study, four in exile, and one wasted while the University is shut down.”
- Marrons glacés: A confection consisting of chestnuts candied in sugar syrup and glazed, they were popularized during Louis XIV’s reign at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.
- Caligula: Also known as Gaius, Caligula was Roman Emperor from 37 AD until 41 AD when he was assassinated by members of the Guard. His favored horse, Incitatus, was named not only a citizen of Rome, but also a member of the Roman Senate.
- Nietzsche: Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), was a 19<sup>th</sup> Century German philosopher and classical philologist. His philosophy encourages a new ‘master’ morality and instigates revolt against the conventional constraints of Western civilization.
- Pushkin: Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin (1799-1837) was a Russian author of the Romantic era who is considered by many to be the greatest Russian poet. He pioneered the use of vernacular speech in his poems and plays.
- Goethe: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German writer. His works span the fields of poetry, drama, literature, philosophy and science. *Faust*, a tragic play in two parts, is his most famous work and considered by many to be one of the greatest works of German literature.
- Tolstoy: Count Lyev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828-1910) was a Russian writer of realist fiction and philosophical essays. His works *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* represent, in their scope, breadth and vivid depiction of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian life and attitudes, a peak of realist fiction.

- Feast of the Holy Trinity: Also called Trinity Sunday, it is a feast in honor of the Trinity celebrated in Christian churches on the Sunday following Pentecost (the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Easter). It is known that the feast was celebrated on this day as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> Century.

Konstantin Stanislavsky decided that the estate in *The Cherry Orchard* was located in the Oryol Province near Kursk, possibly because the area is rich in potter's clay and would justify the Englishmen in Act Four finding "some sort of white clay" on Pishchik's land.

Right: An old map of the Oryol Province



## **Themes:**

### **Memory:**

Memory is seen both as a source of personal identity and as a burden preventing the attainment of happiness. Ranevsky wants to seek refuge in the past from the despair of her present life but the estate contains awful memories of the death of her son. For Lopakhin, memories are oppressive, for they are memories of a brutal, uncultured peasant upbringing. They conflict with his present identity as a well-heeled businessman.

Trofimov is concerned more with Russia's historical memory of its past, a past which he views as oppressive and needing an explicit renunciation if Russia is to move forward. Firs lives solely in memory—most of his speeches in the play relate to what life was like before the serfs were freed. At the end of the play, he is forgotten by the other characters.

Each character sees a different aspect of the past, either personal or historical, in the cherry orchard. Ranevsky, for example, perceives her dead mother walking through the orchard in Act One; for her, the orchard is a personal relic of her idyllic childhood. Trofimov, on the other hand, near the end of Act Two, sees in the orchard the faces of the serfs who lived and died in slavery on Ranevsky's estate. For Lopakhin, the orchard is intimately tied to his personal memories of a brutal childhood.

### **Social change and progress:**

Ironically, when the estate is auctioned, it is purchased by Lopakhin. He used to be a slave at the orchard, but after he won his freedom, he became a successful merchant and could afford to purchase the estate. The sale of the cherry orchard exemplifies the old order giving way to the new.

Several characters address the potential differences between social change and social progress. Firs and Trofimov question the utility of the emancipation. As Firs notes, it made

everyone happy, but they did not know why they were happy. Society has changed, but Firs' life, and the lives of countless others, have not progressed. Both characters insinuate that the emancipation is not enough to constitute progress.

### **Independence, Emancipation, Freedom:**

This play deals with the theme of independence in many different ways. The play may be seen to ask: "What does it mean to be free?" The play's characters demonstrate the different degrees of freedom that result from the emancipation. On opposing ends of this question are Lopakhin and Firs. One man has been able to take advantage of his emancipation to make himself independent; the other, although he is technically free, has not changed his position at all and is subject to the whims of the family he serves.

Madame Ranevsky is not free in a very different way: she had enough assets to be able to control her own destiny, but she has been a slave to her passions, spending extravagantly and making poor decisions in romance. Trofimov, the play's idealist, offers one definition of freedom: he is a free man because he is beholden to no one, just his own concept of morality. The play suggests that there are two sources that control freedom: economics, which comes from without, and control over oneself, which comes from within.

### **The Cherry Tree:**

In Japan, cherry blossoms (sakura) are a metaphor for life: a brief blooming followed by the inevitable fall. It is the official flower of March, and symbolizes prosperity, wealth and riches. It is also an emblem of bushido, the warrior code of the samurai. Because the blossom is so short-lived, the fallen flower stands as a symbol to warriors who died young. Westerners think about death and rebirth in the fall. The Japanese think about it in April.



In China, the cherry blossom is the official flower of April, and symbolizes good education, hope, youth (and the upheavals of puberty), virility and feminine beauty. It is considered lucky. To some, it symbolizes the fact that humans are born into this world naked and without possessions, and that we return the same way.



Cherry tree symbols mean death and rebirth and new awakenings. Because of their considerable value as both food and ornamental plants, many cherry and other fruit tree species have been introduced to parts of the world to which they are not native. Many of the Old World species are grown for ornament or fruit, and have been planted throughout the world. Some

have become naturalized beyond their native range.

“To a less literal-minded and more receptive audience, the cherry orchard takes on...symbolic qualities: it represents an economic and social dinosaur approaching extinction. A cherry orchard that could glut the world with cherries and yet cannot earn its owners a living symbolizes a decrepit world, a decrepit Russia for which ordered destruction is the only alternative to disordered ruination.”

-Donald Rayfield. Professor at Queen Mary, University of London

For Lopakhin, the orchard represents both an ‘economic dinosaur’ and an unmissable business opportunity, as well as embodying the oppression suffered by his father and earlier generations before the emancipation. Paradoxically, it is also for him ‘the most beautiful place in the world’ – a beauty that ... he can only ever dream of possessing, and which through possessing he is bound to destroy.

*Loveliest of trees, the cherry now  
Is hung with bloom along the bough  
And stands about the woodland ride  
Wearing white for Eastertide.*

*Now, of my threescore years and ten,  
Twenty will not come again,  
And take from seventy springs a score,  
It only leaves me fifty more.*

*And since to look at things in bloom  
Fifty springs are little room,  
About the woodlands I will go  
To see the cherry hung with snow.*

*By A.E. Housman*

### **The Snapping String:**

The most famous effect of the play, the breaking string, has a history. The image occurs in the epilogue of Leo Tolstoy’s epic novel, *War and Peace*, warning of revolt to come:

“Why, everything is going to ruin. Bribery in the law-courts, in the army nothing by coercion and drill: exile—people are being tortured, and enlightenment is suppressed. Everything youthful and honourable—they are crushing! Everybody sees that it can’t go on like this. The strain is too great, and **the string must snap**,’ said Pierre (as men always do say, looking into the working of any government so long as governments have existed).”

## **Director's Notes:**

Director Jon Kretzu finds rehearsal inspiration in many sources. Here are some of the quotes he shared with his cast in the rehearsal hall. Take a look and consider how they might inform the actors' or the director's perspective.

Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose garden.

"Four Quartets"  
T. S. Eliot

Chekhov's characters act out a drama that is generic rather than historically specific: a time of social change, the passing of an old order, middle-aged regrets for the squandering of life, the bold, if possibly deluded, hopes of a younger generation – all of it simultaneously pathetic and absurd.

*Translatable Chekhov*  
Nicholas Grene

Endlessly I gaze at you in wonder, blessed ones, at your composure  
At how in eternal delight you bear your vanishing beauty  
Ah, if only we knew how to blossom: our hearts would pass  
Beyond every small danger, and would find peace in the greatest danger of all.

"The Almond Trees In Blossom"  
Rainer Maria Rilke

His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey improbable world: the solid world itself, which those dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling.

It had begun to snow again...it was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the bog of Allen and, further westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly, drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned as he heard the snow falling, faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of the last end, upon all the living and the dead.

"The Dead"  
James Joyce

The past is a foreign country – they do things differently there.

*The Go-Between*  
L. P. Hartley

If you want nothing, hope for nothing, and fear nothing,  
You cannot be an artist.

Anton Chekhov

The best way to imagine what may come is to remember what is past.

George Savile

One of the things that interested Chekhov in his last play, with his own death only months away, is not so much the finality of terrible events as their survivability, their way of slipping out of mind, once they have occurred, and of disappearing in the endless wash of further events. The irony of his observations remained with him to the end.

Michael Frayn

I remember waking,  
a February morning leprous with frost  
above the dregs of a halfhearted snowfall,  
to find the grey world of adulthood  
everywhere, as though there never  
had been any other, in that same house  
I could not bear to leave, where even now  
the child who wept to leave still sits  
weeping at the thought of exile.

“Black Buttercups”  
Amy Clampitt

Seeing her, I thought her very beautiful, still rich in hopes, full of laughter, formed from the very years which I myself had lost. She was like my own youth. Time - colourless and inapprehensible. Time - so clear that I was almost able to see it and touch it, had suddenly materialized before me...It was time to begin.

*Remembrance of Things Past*  
Marcel Proust / Harold Pinter

Life can only be understood backwards;  
But it must be lived forwards.

Soren Kierkegaard

### **Questions for Consideration:**

- What is the significance of the play's setting?
- How is the cherry orchard perceived by the servant class?
- Compare and contrast the main sets of characters, in terms of personality, speech and language, actions, morality. The sets: Ranevsky and Lopakhin; Anya and Varya; and Trofimov and Lopakhin.
- What love relationships are developed in the play and how do they each end?
- Many of the most important and traumatic events in the play either happen before the play's action or off-stage. Why would Chekhov stage some of the most dramatic events outside the confines of the play itself? What effect does this have on the play?
- How does the playwright present the characters? Do you think he is hard/critical to any one of these characters? For example, do you feel Lopakhin, the merchant, is unpleasant, or do you like/dislike Madame Ranevsky because of the way she acts or is treated in the play? Why or why not?
- What does the old servant Firs suggest about the supposed emancipation of the serfs? Why or why not? How does that compare, for example, to the emancipation of the slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century America? Were the slaves and the serfs truly liberated?
- Was the Ranevsky family doomed to lose the cherry orchard? What does Trofimov suggest are the historical causes behind the loss?
- Why does Trofimov say that he is not interested in love? Why is love a target of criticism of the play? Why is love perceived as a problem?
- What does the play say about work?

### **After Viewing Artists Repertory Theatre's Production:**

- A production of a play must make many choices not specified in the text about tone, emphasis and theme. What choices have the director, designers and actors made in this particular production of the play? How might the class have staged the play differently?
- How does this adaptation compare to other adaptations that you may have seen?
- How was costuming used by the designers to reflect the differing backgrounds, activities and opinions of the varied characters?
- Was anything seen on stage surprising, given what the students had read before seeing the play?
- How are the themes of the play reflected in the scenic design?
- What did you make of Anton Chekhov appearing as a character on the stage? How does it affect your understanding of the material?
- In what ways is *The Cherry Orchard* similar to movies you would see today? How is it different?

## Study guide research compiled by Stephanie Mulligan and Cambria Cloud

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