

The Cherry Orchard Audition pack



Performing Tues 5 March - Sat 9 March 2019 Chapter Arts Centre Main Stage

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1. Audition dates + format

Auditions are:

Fri 19th Oct

Slot 1 6.30-8

Slot 2 8-9.30

Sat 20th Oct

Slot 1 10-11.30

Slot 2 11.30-1

Slot 3 2-3.30

Slot 4 3.30-5

Mon 22nd Oct – The Green Room, Chapter

Slot 1 6.30-8

Slot 2 8-9.30

Tues 23rd Oct – The Green Room, Chapter

Slot 1 6.30-8

Slot 2 8-9.30

Fri 26th Oct

Slot 1 6.30-8

Slot 2 8-9.30

All auditions in the Clubroom apart from where indicated.

There will be up to 6 auditionees per slot

Recalls will be held in the week Tues 6th Nov

Please get in touch via cherryorchard@everymantheatre.co.uk if you wish to book a slot.

The format is open workshop with no need to prepare anything. In the workshop you will be asked to read/act through a number of scenes with the other attendees for that slot. Please indicate if there are certain characters that you would like to read for. The slots are 1 ½ hours in length.

Following auditions there will be call-backs which will follow a similar format. However, please do not think if you are not called back it necessarily means that you have not got a part – call backs are where the director has a number of actors in mind and need to see them work together to get the best possible combination.

2. Background to the play/themes

The play was written during the last year of Chekhov's life - 1903/1904. This was a time of great upheaval in Russia with the beginnings of the strikes and civil unrest which would culminate in the unsuccessful revolution of 1905 and the later, successful revolutions of 1917. Russia was at a

crossroads – Capitalism was in its infancy, the feudal system having been finally brought to an end with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. At the same time there was a growing but very weak middle class, and a large and more assertive working class with no mediating labour movement to channel their grievances in a parliamentary or purely industrial direction. In other words@ a powder keg.

Chekhov touches on all of these themes in *The Cherry Orchard*. He had to cut out a number of speeches which would have been censored by the Czar's official theatre censor, but following his death these passages have been put back in.

In the UK there has been a tradition of seeing the play as an elegy for a dying class – much akin to *Brideshead Revisited*, a kind of angst in the drawing room. Although these sentiments exist in the play so too does an excoriating critique of Russian society and the vibrant challenge of a pure market economy or a socialist vision of the future. This is the basis of Trevor Griffiths' 1977 version which was first performed at Nottingham Playhouse. It was revived for television in 1981 starring Judi Dench as Mme Ranevsky. This television version is available on youtube.

The other aspect of the translation is to anglicise the text to make it more immediate. Stuffy Russian patronymics are dispensed with as are Russian names (eg. Pyotr) where an English one would suffice (eg. Peter). Similarly esoteric drinks such as 'kvass' are rendered as 'cider'.

3. Synopsis

Chekhov writes in great sweeps of fly-on-the-wall action which unfold in real time with large gaps of time between them. His four acts of *The Cherry Orchard* cover four key moments in the tragedy of the Ranevsky family from May until October.

Act One - The old nursery in the Ranevsky house. 2am. Dawn. May. (This means they must be quite far North but far enough South to grow Cherry trees!)

Mme Ranevsky returns from Paris as the whole estate is up for auction in August if they do not raise money to pay the interest on their mortgage. Ranevsky left 5 years earlier following the deaths of her husband and young son. She has travelled abroad to France where she has been involved with a ne'er do well who has drained her financially. She returns with her daughter, Anya (who has recently travelled out to visit her), to her estate managed by her older brother Gaev and adopted daughter Varya (who is the one who has really been managing the estate).

A local businessman, Lopakhin, the son of a serf, friend of the family and official suitor to Varya, is there to meet them and has a plan to save them financially: sell the land off piecemeal to developers who will build holiday cottages for the rising middle-class. This plan would involve demolishing the house and chopping down the Cherry Orchard, so large it has its own entry in the all-Russian encyclopaedia. This plan goes down like a lead balloon.

Peter Trofimov arrives, ex-tutor to the dead son and still, at the age of 30, a student. His arrival causes consternation for Mme Ranevsky and welcome yet unwelcome reminder of her dead child.

The act ends with the sun coming up and striking the head of the now sleeping Anya – Trofimov moved by such a vision of beauty.

Act Two – the outskirts of the Cherry Orchard, also next to a local cemetery and location for the Ranevsky family picnic! An August day – early evening.

The act starts with servants and a love triangle: maid Dunyasha and her new beau, the ne'er do well Yasha, as well as the highly strung clerk, Epikhodhov. Epikhodhov, who is known as 'Million Miseries' because of his Eeyore-like temperament and inherent clumsiness has professed love to Dunyasha who is besotted by Yasha who is going to leave with Mme Ranevsky for Paris as soon as he is able. Epikhodov brandishes a pistol which he threatens to use against himself if she continues to reject him. It is a false threat.

Mme Ranevsky and Gaev arrive along with Lopakhin and Firs, the old servant who bemoans the worst day of his life – the day the serfs were freed. Also present are Trofimov and Anya. A row soon develops – when are Ranevsky and Gaev going to come to their senses and sell the land? The answer, of course, is never. In an impassioned speech Ranevsky recounts the shock of losing her husband and child before being thrown over by her lover. She explains how she had yearned to be back in mother Russia – by extension she is arguing that the Cherry Orchard is all she has left. Trofimov joins the row and accuses them of just talk – but Lopakhin retorts that with everything mankind has accomplished, we should be regarded 'as giants.'

A homeless ex-soldier appears and begs money in a threatening manner – Ranevsky overtips him much to everyone's consternation. Ranevsky plans to have a final ball – like in the old days.

Everyone leaves – bar Trofimov and Anya. It becomes very clear that Anya is extremely taken by Trofimov's speech. She has never heard rhetoric like that before. Thus encouraged, Trofimov tells her that although the Cherry Orchard, as Ranevsky has intimated, 'represents all Russia' it also symbolises all the countless generations of peasants and workers who planted and tended it. A whole people who were slaves – the property of the Ranevsky family. Anya solemnly sears to throw the keys to the estate down a well and start a new life. She suggests they run off to the river.

Act Three -the ante-room to the ballroom, late August, the night of the auction.

The dance is in full swing – a local Jewish band.

A series of conversations – Ranevsky takes Trofimov to task, he is too ascetic, can he really believe he has no interest in love? Has he no mistress (and by extension – is he a virgin?). Epikhodov declares his love once more to Yasha who had given him an understanding they they would get married. She only has eyes for Yasha, though – who pleads with Ranevsky to take him with her when she returns to Paris.

Varya has a row with Epikhodov – what is he even doing at the dance?! Who invited him? And she tries to hit him with a stick nearly braining Lopakhin in the process who has just returned from the auction. He has news – he has bought the estate himself. The rest are in shock and refuse to talk to him.

Act Four – October, the now empty nursery as the house is being shut-up prior to its demolition.

The family are leaving, all of them. Varya to being little more than a housekeeper at another great family, Gaev to a job at the bank that no one think he can keep down, Lopakhin and Epikhodov to Lopakin's house where Epikhodov will start working for him as his clerk to oversee the demolition, Trofimov and Anya to a new life on the road, Ranevsky and Yasha to Paris and Dunyasha to god know where. Lopakhin is encouraged to make clear his declaration to Varya. But he bottles it. The family and their entourage leave.

Left alone and in the house, the aged servant, Firs. He runs to the door but has been locked in. He sits to rest on a remaining stick of furniture and then has a stroke – he falls dead off the chair as the axe fells the first of the cherry trees.

4. Characters – descriptions in *italics* and cast requirements in **bold**

Mme Ranevsky – f. 45+ *owner of the estate, possibly jointly with her brother. Incapable of action as 'frozen' by the death of her beloved child, Grisha .*

Gaev – m Ranevsky's brother. 51 *Might be co-owner of the house. Left to look after it but made a bad job of it – estate now in terrible debt with an unpaid mortgage. An eternal optimist (and dreamer/fantastist that a solution will magically appear) until those terrible moments where reality come crashing in. Has a curious verbal tick where he speaks in billiards metaphors.*

Pischik – m. 50s/60s *local landowner, forever in debt asking for small loans. Always seems to land on is feet however. Some comic moments of business eg. when he panics having mislaid some money.*

Lopakhin – m. Mid/late 30s or early 40s. *local businessman, son of a peasant. A 'good' and positive character – however his overstated joy at eventually owning the house and estate reveals a darker side and class hatred. Has ongoing 'loose engagement' with Varya which comes to nothing.*

Anya – f. 17. *Ranevsky's daughter and only surviving biological child returning home with Her mother whom ashe has been spending some time with. She is a wide-eyed innocent who has a visceral reaction against Ranevsky's conspicuous consumption in Paris so laps up Trofimov's revolutionary sentiments whome she is besotted with.*

Varya – f. late 20s. early 30s. *Ranevsky's adopted daughter – very moral and has considered taking holy orders. However very much in love with Lopakin with whom she is 'loosely engaged.'* Very straight-headed and has been trying to run the estate.

Charlotte – f. 30+ *Anya's governess. Very quicky and very much her own person. Enjoys mocking others. **A ventriloquist and amateur conjuror. German accent.***

Epikhodov – m. Mid-20s to mid 30s. *Highly strung, morose and clumsy clerk. Nicknamed 'Million Miseries.'* In love with Dunyasha who has returned his affections – until she meets Yasha. **Plays guitar.**

Dunyasha – m Late 20s. *Ranevsky's manservant and a rogue. However, he does show a vulnerable side in Act Three where he begs Ranevsky to be kept on when she returns to Paris.*

Firs – m Mid/late 80s. *Servant to the estate. Wedded to the past and the old social order citing the emancipation of the serfs as the worst day of his life. **Must be able to fall forward off a chair.***

Yasha – f 18-21. *Maid servant to estate. In love with Yasha but already 'loosely engaged' to Epikhodov.*

Trofimov – m 26-30. *The perpetual student sent down from university after university for his revolutionary activity. But he is no Bolshevik – more of a Tolstoyan revolutionary (he sounds almost puritan about work) or a Menshevik.*

Stationmaster – 40+ *A comic cameo – invited to the party, as Firs states, against his will, he attempts to recite a poem but loses his audience and leaves the stage with as much dignity as he can muster.*

A homeless beggar ex-soldier – m. 30+ *Very pushy and the only genuinely working class person (excluding the servants) in the play so an unsettling glimpse of the powder keg of wider Russian society.*

Accents – not decided yet but, apart from the RP of the Ranevsky family and other posh types, it ought to be northern given the latitude (the BBC version has Scottish accents.) but could be South Wales, perhaps?

- 5. Audition form (see below)** There will be some audition forms at the audition, if you can, please print out and bring along already completed.

Everyman Theatre
The Cherry Orchard 5-9 March 2019
Audition Form

(Attach
photo
here)

Name.....

Address

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.....
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Postcode

E-mail address

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Tel. No.(Home)

Work/mobile

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Previous Experience/skills (eg. sing/play musical instrument)

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Any Unavailable Dates

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Preferred Role (if any).....

Are you already a member of Everyman Theatre YES/NO

Please do not write below this line

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