

For immediate release
November 5, 2004

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U.Va Drama Department Glows with its Lively Production of *The Cherry Orchard*

Acclaimed as one of Anton Chekhov's greatest works, *The Cherry Orchard* continues the U.Va Drama Department's 2004-2005 season. Although productions often emphasize its tragic social insights, the upcoming production rediscovers its farcical wit. Audiences will be surprised and entertained by this innovative rendition, running November 18-20 and December 1-4 at 8 p.m. in the Culbreth Theatre.

Written in 1904, *The Cherry Orchard* responds to the social reforms of nineteenth-century Russia; particularly, the emancipation of the country's serfs. Madame Ranyevskaya, (portrayed by Jeannie Cahill) returns from France to her cherry orchard estate shortly after this historic liberation. While abroad, Madame Ranyevskaya had acquired a considerable debt, and now struggles to pay off the estate's mortgage. As Madame Ranyevskaya schemes to save her property, the play examines the romantic intrigues of her household-- including Ranyevskaya's daughters, (played by Scottie Caldwell and Jaclyn Dilauro), neighbors, and servants. The potential of these relationships to transcend class lines further points to a crumbling social order. Her neighbor, a merchant named Lopakhin (Jeben Marshall), tries to help Madame Ranyevskaya find a way to prevent the sale of the estate, but ultimately finds a solution of his own that reflects the changes sweeping through Russia.

Renowned modern playwright Anton Chekhov was born in Russia in 1860, just a year before the nation overturned its social order. Perhaps because of his own grandfather's serfdom, Chekhov often emphasizes class division as a central theme within his work. Beginning in 1896, Chekhov earned national acclaim for his first play, *Uncle Vanya*. Over the next eight years, Chekhov wrote numerous pieces, including *The Sea Gull*, *The Three Sisters*, and finally *The Cherry Orchard* in 1904. While Chekhov's last play criticizes the old-fashioned class mentality of certain characters, it also recognizes their underlying compassion, allowing for its playful approach.

Clinton Johnston, an MFA candidate in the University of Virginia's directing program, heads this insightful production. Mr. Johnson received his B.A. in English at Haverford College. He most recently directed the U.Va Drama Department's production of *Les Blancs*, as well as *The Baltimore Waltz* for the department's Helms Theatre.

"It will be untraditional, but appropriate," Johnston said. Although often portrayed as a tragedy, "Chekhov's specific instruction was that it was to be done with a light touch and should at times approach farce... So, we've tried to go there and present this play as a full-blown 'people should laugh out loud' comedy."

Tickets for *The Cherry Orchard* are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and \$7 for students; full-time U.Va students can use their ART\$ Dollars to purchase tickets. For more information, call the Drama Department Box Office at 434-924-3376. The box office is open from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.