

WORLD PREMIERE ADAPTATION

A Seagull in the Hamptons

Written and directed
by **EMILY MANN**

Freely adapted from
Chekhov's *The Seagull*

MAY 2 – JUNE 8, 2008

Berlind Theatre



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A McCarter Theatre production | **Venue:** Berlind Theatre | **AUDIENCE GUIDE STAFF:** Editor for Literary Content: Carrie Hughes | Editor for Education Content: Paula Alekson | Editorial Administrator: Francine Schiffman | Web Design: Dimple Parmar | Contributors: Elizabeth Edwards, Paula Alekson, Adam Immerwahr, Christopher T. Parks, Laurie Sales

Introduction to *A Seagull in the Hamptons*

In October of 1895, Anton Chekhov wrote to his friend and publisher Alexei Suvorin and let him know that he was again working on a play. “I am writing it with considerable pleasure, though I sin frightfully against the conventions of the stage. It is a comedy with three female roles, six male roles, four acts, a landscape (a view of a lake), much conversation about literature, little action and five tons of love.”

Chekhov did not yet know all the details of the play he was writing, but the outline is there for what would become the first of his four major plays: *The Seagull*. Sins against convention. Characters. A landscape. Five tons of love.

By disregarding the stage conventions of his time, Chekhov was writing what even today feels like a remarkably modern play. The first production was a notable failure for reasons unconnected to the script itself (it was under-rehearsed, and the audience, most of whom had come to support an actress best known for her success in light French farces, did not know what to make of the play). Yet the actress M.M. Chitau recalled that “backstage...it was already being said that *The Seagull* was written in completely, totally new tones.”

“Chekhov’s tone in *The Seagull* is bantering, excited, matter-of-fact, or affectionate, but never somber and never cold. He’d enjoyed writing the play, he let it be known, something rather rare for him, and the pleasure permeates the text,” observes critic Richard Gilman in his book *Chekhov’s Plays: An Opening Into Eternity*. The noted translator Paul Schmidt notes that Chekhov’s language is “ordinary language.” Because of Chekhov’s innovative style, the play easily translates to modern times and a contemporary vernacular.

Chekhov was inspired by the lives of people he knew—largely fellow artists—and for a modern artist, the same is true. Adapter/director Emily Mann reflects that “every single one of these characters is someone I know. The older actress, her troubled son, the young writer who is really, really full of himself and isn’t quite as good as he wants to be and can’t quite commit to a woman—I know them all too well. The young girl who wants to be an actress and falls madly, insanely in love with the older man who uses her and throws her away—these beautiful, simple, completely true and real characters—they were true then; they’re true now. Wherever or whenever you set this play, you will find the truth in it, because that was Chekhov’s genius.”

Chekhov also took the time to consider the landscape, a sometimes underappreciated element. He believed in the value of a country retreat; “Congratulations on your new purchase,” he wrote to his friend Nickolai Leikin in 1885. “I am awfully fond of everything that goes by the name ‘estate’ in Russia. That word has not yet lost its poetic overtones. You should enjoy a rest then this summer.” In Mann’s play, the lake becomes an ocean, but the estate is still an estate—on the shores of Long Island in the constantly shifting social scene that is the Hamptons.

Indeed, the Hamptons is a natural fit for *The Seagull*—there is the water, of course, and the estates, the interplay of those who live and work there and those who visit on vacation. And there are, and always have been, the artists; Pollock, de Kooning, Vonnegut, Lichtenstein,

Albee and Capote all spent (or spend) significant time there. "I set it in the Hamptons because it's where theater folk go, where intellectuals go, in our area, anyway...The Hamptons is a certain class of New York theater people and New York writers, and people with money and all of that, and I've gone there, so I know it," explains Mann.

The Hamptons also struggles (and has long struggled) with shifting identities. The generational divide is apparent there, as the steady increases in real estate values and development of the twentieth century have accelerated into the dramatic spikes of the twenty-first. As recently as the 1980s, a moderately successful theater artist might have been able to buy a small escape in some towns; now long-time visitors find themselves surrounded by the super-rich (as opposed to the comfortable, or merely rich). More and more people arrive, but many of the artistic and intellectual New Yorkers who might have gone to the Hamptons in the 1960s or 70s (or even 80s or 90s) now find it inaccessible.

In 1973, Truman Capote mourned that "some of the potato fields, so beautiful, flat and still, may not be here next year. And fewer the year after that. New houses are steadily popping up to mar the long line where the land ends and the sky begins." The worry was the same, but the urgency a bit stronger, in 2002, when Edward Albee wrote in the forward to *Hamptons Bohemia*, "To walk along the beach in the Hamptons or Montauk (preferably off-season) with the wind and the sand blowing, the gulls wheeling, and the surf crashing is cleansing and revivifying. I don't think that whatever creativity I possess would come into proper focus without it, and if I become churlish over the suburbanizing of the area, its preposterous excesses, its denaturalizing, it is simply because fewer and fewer of the young, still poor, not yet famous creative artists on whom our culture depends are able to know its wonders..."

Still, while its presence may be fading, this artistic history resonates in the Hamptons. It is a location that reminds visitors of its history, a bit like a contemporary adaptation recalling its original. Richard Gilman, in his essay on *The Seagull*, notes that "theater...is the most cannibalistic of the arts, forever chewing on its own history." We regularly set out to re-explore classics. *A Seagull in the Hamptons* is such an exploration: at once a new, contemporary play and a timeless classic, true to Chekhov's vision of "a comedy with...four acts, a landscape...and five tons of love."

"I gave myself total freedom to just write and respond," Mann explains as she describes her adaptation process, "and what came out was actually very faithful to Chekhov and yet also very contemporary." While the background is interesting, and the history rich for both the setting and the original source, *A Seagull in the Hamptons* also stands alone, ready for its own responses. Says Mann: "I want the audience to come to it absolutely fresh and with no preconceptions, and just see how it hits them."

- Carrie Hughes, production dramaturg

Character Profiles

MARIA

(Arkadina in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)

A famous actress in denial of the fact that she is past her prime. She has acquired a certain amount of wealth, which allows her to maintain a home in the Hamptons, but feels pressured by the many people who look to her for financial support. She loves her son but does not understand him, and feels threatened by his disdain for "her" type of theater. Highly insecure, she has a driving compulsion to be the center of attention at all times.

You know, I'll share something with you, darling—woman to woman. Do you know I would never dream of leaving my bedroom—even to go downstairs to get my morning coffee—without first having showered, dressed, done my hair just so, and—most important, put on my make-up...carefully? ... I'll tell you another secret, dear. I still believe I can get any man I want—truly! And believe me, that's half the battle. Oh, and yoga! I do it every morning. Look at me!

SHE STARTS TO SKIP DOWN THE BEACH, ARMS AKIMBO.

I could still play Juliet! (Act 2)

NICHOLAS

(Sorin in Chekhov's *The Seagull*).

Maria's brother. A retired attorney frustrated by his own unfulfilled dreams of being a writer. A confirmed bachelor, he is neurotic, self-obsessed, and perpetually tormented by what could have been. He adores his sister and depends on her financially.

You see, Alex, when I was your age, I only really wanted two things in life—one: to be a writer, and two: to have a passionate love affair with a gorgeous, talented woman, marry her and be hopelessly in love with my wife for the rest of my life, Unfortunately, I didn't do that either...Take heed, my friend... I've ended up a boring, old, retired lawyer—with nothing to do...and no one to love... It's actually pretty funny when you think about it— (Act 1)

ALEX

(Konstantin Treplev in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)

Maria's son. Plagued with melancholy and self-doubt, he is constantly trying to win his mother's attention and affection. He is fed up with commercial theater and wants to create a new kind of theater that is "vibrant and young and dangerous and passionate." He is also madly in love with Nina, a neighbor.

Why do we have to have theater? I mean, I love my mother but she leads such—a stupid life! She dedicates every waking hour to something that just doesn't matter! And you can imagine how utterly revolting it feels to be me! Here I am at all her stupid parties full of celebrities and people who have all won prizes for something or other—you know, it's ridiculous! Pulitzers and Nobels, and book awards, and Oscars and Tonys and all that crap and here I am! I have nothing to say for myself; I can't even understand what they're talking about half the

time; and they're all wondering how Maria could have spawned such a pathetic little loser.
(Act 1)

NINA

(Nina in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)

The daughter of one of Maria's neighbors. Young and innocent, she is in love with Alex, although she does not always understand his abstract approach to theater. She is an aspiring actress herself, but her family disapproves, labeling theater types like Maria and her set as "perverted liberals" and "Bohemians." Nina is in awe of established artists like Maria and Philip.

Nina

Do you see that house with the flag-pole and the garden in front—down the beach?

Philip

Yes.

Nina

I grew up in that house. You've traveled all over the world, I know, and I've never really lived anywhere else. Maybe when I go to college next year—I'll go someplace far away...(Act 2)

PHILIP

(Trigorin in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)

A successful writer somewhat younger than Maria. He is Maria's boyfriend, but this does not stop him from running around with "every available woman in New York," and "the technically unavailable ones, too." Though whatever he needs seems to fall easily at his feet, he is disillusioned with his own success, and suffers from the ennui of the overly admired.

Well, the truth of the matter is, I'm not in control of my life. I'm obsessed by one thought: the same thought day and night—and that thought is: I should be writing. I should be writing. I should be writing. ... I'm not living. I'm observing living. I am talking to you here and I look up at the sky for a moment and notice the shape of that cloud formation. Hmmm, I think. It's shaped like a grand piano! I should make a note of that ... It's like I'm devouring my own life. (Act 2)

BEN

(Dorn in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)

A local doctor, friend to Maria and Nicholas. He is handsome, easygoing and perceptive—the person everyone trusts to hear their problems. In his younger days he was "the biggest Don Juan of them all," and he still has a way with the ladies. However, he is now too set in his ways as a bachelor to actually settle down with anyone.

Milly

Can I talk to you?

HE SIGHS

Ben

Why not? It seems to be the night for it.

Milly

Well, I'm sorry to ask, but I just need some advice from someone who isn't completely crazy

like everyone else in this house. And—and I don't know why, but I've always felt close to you... [...]

Ben

Just tell me what's wrong, Milly. (Act 1)

LORENZO

*(Shamrayev in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)*

Caretaker and cook at Maria's summer home. A strong-willed, "impossible" man who is not afraid to go against Maria, and has no patience for her foolishness or that of anyone else in the house. He is despised by his wife and daughter.

A SLOW BURN:

The best I can do to have you...chauffeured into New York is the beginning of next week. And since I, myself, am not a chauffeur I will have to arrange it so that Jose can be freed to drive you. But not today. Today is impossible, as I've explained. Jose is fully booked! (Act 2)

PAULA

*(Paulina in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)*

Lorenzo's wife, Milly's mother. She hates her husband, and is desperately in love with Ben, who returns her affections, though to a lesser degree. She has been waiting for Ben to agree to her leaving her husband for him for years, and now it is too late. She fluctuates between angry jealousy and nostalgic sorrow.

Paula

You were with Maria all morning, weren't you?

Ben

IRRITATED:

Well, yes, I was with Maria all morning. So?

Paula

I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I just get so jealous. It's killing me. (Act 2)

MILLY

*(Masha in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)*

Daughter of Lorenzo and Paula. She is in love with Alex and deeply depressed and unhappy with her lot in life, which drives her to heavy drinking and other self-destructive behavior. She takes little care of her appearance, and mopes around the house.

Harold

Why do you always wear black? It's summer for Chrissake!

Milly

I'm in mourning...for my life. I'm unhappy, Harold.

HAROLD

(Medvedenko in Chekhov's *The Seagull*)

A schoolteacher who lives in town near Maria's home in the Hamptons. A relatively poor man surrounded by the wealthy, he is preoccupied with his lack of wealth. He is out of place in Maria's circle, and hopelessly devoted to Milly despite her complete indifference to him.

Harold

Oh, God... can you imagine what it must feel like to be them? ... Some people are just born with it all—looks, talents, money...PLUS they're madly in love with each other.

Milly

Don't make me sick.

Harold

I know. Who wants to marry a man who can't afford his own funeral?

Milly

Look!—Harold! I'm well... touched by your affection; I just can't return it, okay?

Chekhov Bio

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. The son of a grocer and the grandson of a serf, young Chekhov began working at an early age in his father's grocery store. When his father fled Taganrog in 1876 to escape his creditors, 16-year-old Chekhov was left to care for his home and family, which included his mother and three younger siblings. Chekhov's own family home and shop were auctioned off.

In 1879 Chekhov enrolled as a medical student at the University of Moscow. During his years in school he wrote humorous stories and sketches under a pen name to help support his family. 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."

His first full-length play, *Ivanov*, an immature work when compared to his later plays, was produced in 1887 in Moscow, with not much success, although a subsequent production in St. Petersburg in 1889 was popular and praised. His next play, *The Wood Demon* (1889), had trouble finding a producer and was critically panned. Through the success of his stories and articles, by 1892 he was able to fulfill his lifelong dream of buying an estate at Melikhovo, near Moscow. There he entertained himself with gardening, planting entire forests and a cherry orchard of his own. It was during his stay in Melikhovo in 1895 that Chekhov wrote *The Seagull*. Its first performance at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1896 was so badly received that Chekhov actually left the auditorium during the second act and vowed never to write for the theatre again. But in the hands of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898, *The Seagull* was transformed into a critical success.

It was also at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898 that Chekhov saw the actress Olga Knipper and soon after wrote to a friend, "Were I to stay in Moscow, I would fall in love with her." By 1901 Chekhov and Knipper were married.

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), it cemented Chekhov's important place in the history of modern theatre. However, although the Moscow Art Theatre productions brought Chekhov great fame, he was never quite happy with the style that director Konstantin Stanislavsky imposed on the plays. While Chekhov insisted that most of his plays were comedies, Stanislavsky's productions tended to emphasize their tragic elements. Still, in spite of their stylistic disagreements, it was not an unhappy marriage, and these productions brought widespread acclaim to both Chekhov's work and the Moscow Art Theatre itself.

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 poet 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."

During Chekhov's final years, he was forced to live in exile from the intellectuals of Moscow. In March of 1897, he 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 for the sake of his health. He died of tuberculosis on July 14, 1904, at the age of forty-four, in a German health resort and was buried in Moscow.

Adapted from the *Uncle Vanya study guide*, by Laurie Sales

ARTISTS IN THE HAMPTONS — by Elizabeth Edwards

Emily Mann's *A Seagull in the Hamptons* transports Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, a play about theater artists and writers on a Russian lakeside estate, to the modern American seaside. Mann herself notes the aptness of her selected setting: "I set it in the Hamptons because it's where theater folk go, where intellectuals go, in our area, anyway. The Hamptons is a certain class of New York theater people and New York writers, and people with money and all of that, and I've gone there, so I know it."

Indeed, this haven of beach and farmland has long attracted artists of all varieties, who come seeking a place of retreat from nearby New York City. As early as the nineteenth century, writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Walt Whitman have found inspiration in the picturesque locale, and their depictions of the place in their novels and poems have enticed other artists to the region in turn.

A cyclical pattern has since developed: a handful of artists find some corner of the Hamptons, fall in love with the area, and settle in. They form societies which draw fellow and aspiring artists to the area, who are soon followed by the admiring and the curious. Many who come for a brief visit end up deciding to stay, caught up in the famed Hamptons "landlust." Then the next generation of artists arrives and are either unable to get along with the previous group of artists for aesthetic reasons, or unable to afford the ever-rising real estate prices. They find a new corner of the Hamptons in which to settle, and the cycle repeats itself once more.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the first major organized group of artists traveled to the Hamptons to explore the southern coast of Long Island. They called themselves the Tile Club (because of their tradition of painting ceramic tiles when they gathered together in one another's studios), and in 1874 they rode the relatively new Long Island Rail Road from Babylon to Montauk, chronicling their trip in an article in *Scribner's Monthly*. Their favorite village was East Hampton, which they identified as a place "marked with the artistic consciousness," where inhabitants "set out their milk-pans to drain in beautiful compositions" and "are all the time posing for effect."

This glowing description drew artists in droves, and by 1883 the easels and sunshades that dotted the nearby countryside had earned the village a reputation as "the American Barbizon" (a reference to the French hamlet forty miles southeast of Paris that was itself a well-known artists' haven). Many of East Hampton's artistic visitors formed informal societies to learn new techniques and critique one another's work. Thomas Moran, famed painter known for his panoramas of Yellowstone and friend of several of the "Tilers," erected his own studio-residence in East Hampton, which became a natural center of artistic gatherings whenever his many creatively talented relatives came to visit. His son and nephews would provide musical entertainment on guitar, mandolin, and violin, and family and friends alike would pose in period costumes to present *tableaux vivants*, or "living pictures."

Meanwhile, a Tile Club member named William Merritt Chase was establishing the Hamptons' first formal school of outdoor painting, the Shinnecock Summer School of Art, over in Southampton. Students biked along country roads until they found a subject for painting that appealed to them, then returned to the school's main building for personal critiques by Chase himself, which were conducted with such dramatic flair that they became a draw for local spectators.

Another wave of artists arrived in the 1920s, when five New York City writers—Ring Lardner, Grantland Rice, Irwin S. Cobb, Percy Hammond, and John Wheeler—moved to East Hampton in

search of clean air and a quiet country life. These five were good friends, and their presence in the Hamptons brought numerous other New York journalists to the area for weekend visits.

The Great Depression placed a temporary damper on the artistic development of the Hamptons, but World War II had the opposite effect. As upheaval swept across Europe, many artists, writers, and intellectuals traveled to America to flee Nazi persecution. These included poet André Breton, printmaker Stanley Williams, and painter Max Ernst—members of the newly developing Surrealist movement. New York City, America's acknowledged cultural capitol, was the most natural destination for these exiles, and the Hamptons provided the perfect retreat for Europeans accustomed to migrating from city to countryside in the summer months.

With more abstract emphases than their artistic predecessors, these experimental artists did not require the coastal scenery and charming villages of the Hamptons' traditional resort sections (which, in any event, were by now generally prohibitively expensive) to inspire them. Instead, they settled in smaller hamlets further inland—like Springs, where Stanley William Hayter, head of the experimental Parisian printmaking studio Atelier 17, rented a primitive shack. In the summer of 1945, Hayter's assistant invited his friends Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner to the shack for the month of August, and they, too, fell under the sway of Hamptons landlust. Within months, they had purchased a residence of their own and moved in, becoming the center of a new influx of artists from the school of Abstract Expressionism, including Conrad Marca-Relli, William de Kooning and Alfonso Ossorio.

By this point an infrastructure of galleries, critics, and collectors had been solidly established in the Hamptons, making the area a natural destination for members of subsequent visual arts movements—particularly those eager to test the boundaries of artistic experimentation outside the high-pressure scrutiny of the urban art world. These included Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, as well as a number of unclassifiable sculptors, photographers and artisans like William King and Dan Flavin, all of whom found freedom and acceptance as visitors or residents of the Hamptons during the 1960s.

In addition to visual artists of all varieties, a number of influential writers also congregated in the Hamptons in the mid-twentieth century. John Steinbeck rented a house in Sag Harbor in 1953 to work on his novel *Sweet Thursday*. By 1975 Hamptons residents included such well-known authors as Kurt Vonnegut, Peter Matthiessen, P. G. Wodehouse, Joseph Heller and Truman Capote. The Bridgehampton saloon Bobby Van's served as a watering hole for these and many other literary giants of the era.

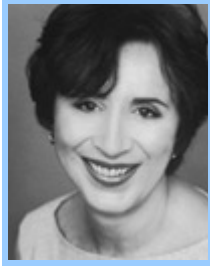
Theater artists, too, have long been drawn to the Hamptons. In 1962, playwright Edward Albee drove to Montauk to visit actress Uta Hagen, and felt compelled to purchase his own parcel of land there. In 1967 he also purchased a former stable in the area, which he turned into a seasonal retreat for artists and writers that is still in operation today. During the late 1960s, actress and Off-Off-Broadway producer Gaby Rodgers staged a series of theatrical events in the backyards of some of her friends in East Hampton. Painters, writers, and other artists would be drafted to participate in these free-ranging displays of performance art. In the early 1990s, fabric designer Jack Lenor Larsen built the LongHouse Reserve—landscaped gardens that host performances of music, dance and theater. And in the hamlet of Water Mill, avant-garde stage director Robert Wilson has built a laboratory specially designed for experimental theater and design projects.

Expansion and rising prices in the Hamptons have in recent years diminished both the natural views that have long drawn artists to the East End, and the capacity for up-and-coming writers, painters, poets and theater-makers to join the ranks of Hamptons residents. Many former artists' studios have been destroyed or converted to private homes. A select few, however, such as the former home of Jackson Pollock and the Moran studio, still remain as memorials, and many artists with homes in the area that are of historic interest are making arrangements

to preserve their property for posterity. A final testament to the artistic history of the Hamptons is Green River Cemetery, the resting place of choice for East End artists including Jackson Pollock, James Brooks, Jimmy Ernst, A. J. Liebling and Frank O'Hara. The cemetery has become so popular that the management has had to purchase additional land, and many visitors make their way to the cemetery each year to pay their respects to some of the trailblazers who have kept the artistic spirit of the Hamptons alive over the past hundred years.

Who's Who in the Production

CAST



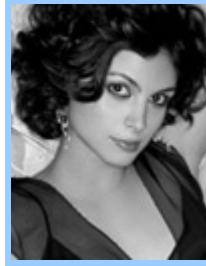
Maria Tucci
Maria, an actress



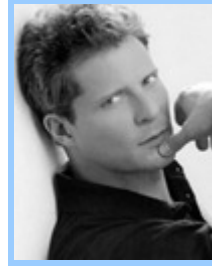
Brian Murray
Nicholas, her brother



Stark Sands
Alex, her son



Morena Baccarin
Nina, the daughter of a neighbor



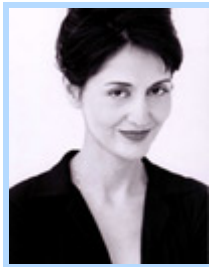
David Andrew Macdonald
Philip, a writer



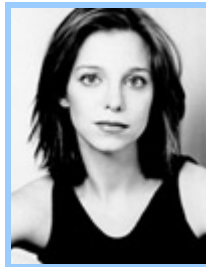
Larry Pine
Ben, a doctor



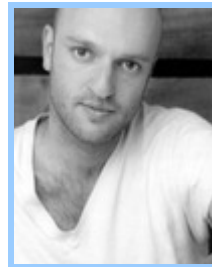
Daniel Oreskes
Lorenzo, the caretaker and cook



Jacqueline Antaramian
Paula, his wife



Laura Heisler
Milly, their daughter



Matthew Maher
Harold, a school teacher

ARTISTIC STAFF

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Adapter/Director</i> | Emily Mann |
| <i>Set Design</i> | Eugene Lee |
| <i>Costume Design</i> | Jennifer von Mayrhauser |
| <i>Lighting Design</i> | Jane Cox |
| <i>Composer</i> | Baikida Carroll |
| <i>Sound Design</i> | Karin Graybash |
| <i>Producing Director</i> | Mara Isaacs |
| <i>Director of Production</i> | David York |
| <i>Production Stage Manager</i> | Cheryl Mintz |
| <i>Casting Director</i> | Laura Stanczyk, CSA |
| <i>Stage Manager</i> | Alison Cote |

Interview with Emily Mann



Artistic Director Emily Mann's productions of Chekhov's plays—*The Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *Uncle Vanya*—are among McCarter's most renowned. As a director and adaptor she seems to have a natural ear for understanding Chekhov and translating it into a world that is all at once accessible, entertaining, touching and hilarious. For the final play of McCarter's 2007-2008 season she will direct the fourth of Chekhov's major plays, *The Seagull*, in her own free adaptation, *A Seagull in the Hamptons*. She spoke with McCarter Literary Manager Carrie Hughes about the play and her long collaboration with Chekhov.

CH: This will be your fourth production of Chekhov's major work, and you have adapted three of them yourself. Maybe we could just start by talking about Chekhov.

EM: I suppose what's most interesting to me about my relationship with Chekhov is I've been thinking about him most of my conscious life. I read *The Seagull* in high school and I loved it because I understood the young people--Nina, of course, and Treplev-- and how awful the adults were, and how they'd all betrayed the children. I just thought it was 'a cool play'. Of course, I didn't really understand the play, not in its entirety. I didn't feel ready to direct any of Chekhov's plays until I was almost 40. Ironically, *The Seagull* is the last one I feel ready to direct. Until I understood the adults-- really understood them -- I couldn't do it.

So I've been thinking about *Seagull* since I was 17 or 18 years old, and I realized a couple of years ago I didn't want to see it done in the old way. For me it is a very modern play. It hasn't dated. For the last few summers we've been going out to our friends' in the Hamptons, and I suddenly one day pictured the play on the beach, set now. I could picture the house and I could hear the scenes.

We went off to Ireland two summers ago, and I brought some old terrible translations of *Seagull* that were in the public domain with me. I gave myself total freedom to just write and respond and what came out was actually very faithful to Chekhov and yet also very contemporary. I think because I knew the play so well, it came out in a flood. It was effortless and thrilling and I thought, you know, this feels right.

CH: What made you start doing your own adaptations of Chekhov?

EM: The simple answer is I wanted to get closer to him. I felt that Lanford Wilson [whose translation of *Three Sisters* I directed], as beautiful as his translation was, Lanford was between me and Chekhov. I wanted to get directly in contact with Chekhov as if he were in the room with me, as if we were in conversation-- and the only way I knew how to do that was by wrestling word for word with him.

I had to work with someone who knows the language intimately, so I sat down with [Princeton Russian literature professor] Ellen Chances and a million literal translations and went through every line with her. The first one I adapted was *Cherry Orchard* in 2000, and when I did a draft without her, just with the clunky translations, she had a note on every line. By the time I showed her *Seagull*, which is actually the most free, she said, this is the most accurate translation of this play I can imagine. I had the essence of it. I think it's from having gotten to know Chekhov that intimately on a word to word level on those other adaptations that *Seagull* could just fly out of me.

CH: Why set this play in the present day?

EM: Every single one of these people is someone I know. The older actress, her troubled son, the young writer who is really, really full of himself and isn't quite as good as he wants to be and can't quite commit to a woman--I know them all too well. The young girl who wants to be an actress and falls madly, insanely in love with the older man who uses her and throws her away--these beautiful, simple, completely true and real characters, they were true then; they're true now. Wherever or whenever you set this play, you will find the truth in it, because that was Chekhov's genius.

I also wanted to blow off the dust that has covered up the fun, the humor and all the deep, deep drama of his work and be simple and alive and now. That is what he wanted when he wrote it. If I see another one of these *Seagull*'s that doesn't get a laugh and everyone's in a corset, I'm going to scream. Chekhov was a stage rat. He knew what a funny line was. He knew actors. He understood what would and wouldn't work on stage. He understood the humor in everyday misery. Everyday joy. Theater people revere him because he was the ultimate humanist.

CH: Do you have anything else you want the audience to know?

EM: You know the way Edward Albee said that I wish you'd come to see this play as if this were the first play you'd ever seen...I feel the same way, and if you can't do that than at least come as if this is the first *Seagull* you've ever seen. I want the audience to come to it absolutely fresh and with no preconceptions and just see how it hits them. I think that if you come with your idea of what Chekhov should be or what *The Seagull* should be or what a play should be, for that matter, you'll miss out on a real experience.

Emily Mann Bio



Emily Mann (*Director, Adapter, Artistic Director/Resident Playwright*) Multi-award-winning Director and Playwright Emily Mann is in her 18th season as Artistic Director of McCarter Theatre. Under Ms. Mann's leadership, McCarter was honored with the 1994 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theater. Directing credits include Nilo Cruz's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Anna in the Tropics* with Jimmy Smits (also on Broadway); the world premiere of Christopher Durang's *Miss Witherspoon* with Kristine Nielsen (also off-Broadway); *Uncle Vanya* with Amanda Plummer (also adapted); *All Over* with Rosemary Harris and Michael Learned (also off-Broadway; 2003 Obie Award for Directing); *The Cherry Orchard* with Jane Alexander, John Glover and Avery Brooks (also adapted); *Three Sisters* with Frances McDormand, Linda Hunt and Mary Stuart Masterson; *A Doll House* with Cynthia Nixon and *The Glass Menagerie* with Shirley Knight. Her plays include the award-winning *Execution of Justice*; *Still Life* (six Obie Awards);

Greensboro (A Requiem) and *Annulla, An Autobiography*. Ms. Mann wrote and directed *Having Our Say*, adapted from the book by Sarah L. Delany and A. Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearth (Tony nominations, Best Director and Play; NAACP Award; Joseph Jefferson Award; Peabody and Christopher Awards for her screenplay). A winner of the Dramatists' Guild Hull-Warriner Award, she is a member of the Dramatists Guild and serves on its Council. In 2002, she received an Honorary Doctorate of Arts from Princeton University. A collection of her plays, *Testimonies: Four Plays*, has been published by Theatre Communications Group, Inc. Her latest play, *Mrs. Packard*, was the recipient of the 2007 Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award and will be published by TCG in Spring 2008. Most recently, Ms. Mann directed the world premiere of Edward Albee's *Me, Myself & I*.

EDUCATORS INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the McCarter Audience Guide educator materials for *A Seagull in the Hamptons*. This guide has been assembled to complement both your students' theater-going experience and your class curriculum by offering a variety of interesting and edifying activities for both pre-show and post-performance instruction and enjoyment.

This production of *A Seagull in the Hamptons*, Emily Mann's adaptation of Anton Chekhov's classic Russian comedy, affords opportunities for enrichment in historical and cultural studies, language arts, theater and media/visual arts. Students can explore the play's characters and themes as presented by the nineteenth-century playwright in his original work, and consider and critique those characters and themes as transposed and interpreted by a twenty-first-century adaptor/director in a production much closer to home in time and place; make investigations into the world of the Pre-Revolutionary Russian Intelligentsia-- the rich historical culture in which Chekhov lived and worked, and which he represented on stage. They will be encouraged to creatively contemplate these topics and themes in imaginative, artistic activities. Teachers can also link their classroom directly with McCarter Theatre via McCarter's Blog (www.mccarter.org/blog), which can be used to gain insight into the artistic process and post comments regarding the production as it moves from pre-production into rehearsal and performance.

Our student audiences are often our favorite audiences at McCarter, and we encourage you and your students to join us for a live and lively conversation with members of the cast after the performance. Our visiting artists are always impressed with the preparation and thoughtfulness of McCarter's young audiences, and the post-performance discussion offers a unique opportunity for students to engage intellectually with professional theater practitioners. We look forward to seeing all of you for a wonderful discussion with artistic director, resident playwright, adaptor and director Emily Mann about *A Seagull in the Hamptons*.

CORE CURRICULUM STANDARDS

According to the NJ Department of Education, "experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education." Our production of *A Seagull in the Hamptons* and the activities outlined in this guide are designed to enrich your students' education by addressing the following specific Core Curriculum Standards for Visual and Performing Arts:

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| 1.1 | All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater and visual arts. |
| 1.2 | All students will refine perceptual, intellectual, physical and technical skills through creating dance, music, theater and/or visual arts. |
| 1.3 | All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theater and visual arts. |
| 1.4 | All students will demonstrate knowledge of the process of critique. |

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| 1.5 | All students will identify the various historical, social and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts. |
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| 1.6 | All students will develop design skills for planning the form and function of space, structures, objects, sounds and events. |
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Viewing *A Seagull in the Hamptons* and then participating in the pre- and post-show discussions suggested in this audience guide will also address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy:

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| 3.2 | All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes. |
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| | |
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| 3.3 | All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes. |
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| 3.4 | All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations. |
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| 3.5 | All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, non-print and electronic texts and resources. |
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In addition, the production of *A Seagull in the Hamptons*, as well as the audience guide activities, will help to fulfill the following Social Studies Core Curriculum Standards:

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| 6.1 | All students will utilize historical thinking, problem solving and research skills to maximize their understanding of civics, history, geography and economics. |
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| 6.6 | All students will apply knowledge of spatial relationships and geographic skills to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment. |
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PRE-SHOW PREPARATION, QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION, AND ACTIVITIES

Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions and activities to prepare for Emily Mann's A Seagull in the Hamptons and to introduce your students to Anton Chekhov's The Seagull and its intellectual origin, historical context, and themes, as well as to engage their imaginations and creativity before they see the production. The first three exercises below do not require reading Anton Chekhov's The Seagull. The remaining exercises are based upon a reader's familiarity with the original text. [We recommend the English language translations by Paul Schmidt and Laurence Senelick.]

1. **PROFILING THE CHARACTERS BEFORE THE SHOW.** Have your students read the "Character Profiles" section of this audience guide to familiarize themselves with the characters they will meet in *A Seagull in the Hamptons*.

- Discuss with them what expectations they have of the play and its dramatic content based upon the character descriptions.
- Have students brainstorm a list of themes and potential conflicts that could arise in and between characters in the course of the play given the descriptions of each character's personality.
- Ask students if any of the character descriptions remind them of a character they have encountered before in literature, on film, in a play or personally.
- Ask them to imagine what each character looks and acts like and how they might speak. You can have your students take this one step further by having them go online to find photographs of people to cast in their own fantasy production of *A Seagull in the Hamptons*.

2. **HISTORICIZING THE CHEKHOVIAN LANDSCAPE.** To prepare your students for Emily Mann's *A Seagull in the Hamptons*, and to deepen their level of understanding of Anton Chekhov's original play along with the period, place and culture which inspired it, have them research, either in groups or individually, the life, times and works of Chekhov. Topics for a study of Chekhov and late-nineteenth century Russia and Russian culture might include:

- Anton Pavlovich Chekhov
 - birth, family and education
 - adulthood, life and work
 - Melikhovo period: 1892-98
 - Yalta period: 1899-1904
 - death and legacy
- The first night of *The Seagull* (17 October 1896) at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg
- Moscow Art Theatre
- Konstantin Stanislavsky
- (Theatrical) Realism
- Russian History (second half of the nineteenth century)
- Intelligentsia/Russian Intelligentsia
- Serfdom
- (Theatrical) Realism
- Chekhov's other masterworks:
 - *Uncle Vanya*
 - *Three Sisters*
 - *The Cherry Orchard*
- Russian History (second half of the nineteenth century)
- Intelligentsia/Russian Intelligentsia
- Serfdom
- The Romanov Dynasty
 - Nicholas I
 - Alexander II
 - Alexander III
 - Nicholas II

Have your students teach one another about their individual or group topics via oral and illustrated (i.e., posters or PowerPoint) reports. Following the presentations:

- Ask your students to reflect upon their research process and discoveries.
 - Ask them to consider, given their newfound knowledge of the original play's historical context, what challenges an artist would face in attempting to adapt a play written for this time to a modern setting for a modern audience.
3. **DUELING (AND ACTING) SEAGULLS: PUTTING *A SEAGULL IN THE HAMPTONS* AND CHEKHOV'S *THE SEAGULL* ON THEIR (WEBBED) FEET.** To fully appreciate both Emily Mann's artistry as an adaptor and Chekhov's original play (and its complex characters, comedy, mood and attitude), break your students up into scene-study groups and assign them the same dramatic portions from Act II of *A Seagull in the Hamptons* (*Seagull in the Hamptons play excerpt*) and *The Seagull* to rehearse on their feet for presentation for the class. Each group should divvy up parts and elect an "actor-manager" to run the rehearsal(s). Following scene presentations (you might choose to have the Chekhov performed prior to Mann's version), lead students in a discussion of their experience in performing both the contemporary adaptation and its Chekhovian predecessor. Questions might include:
- What are the pleasures and challenges of performing in Chekhov's original version?
 - What was your experience of performing in the more contemporary version?
 - What insights regarding any of *A Seagull in the Hamptons's* or *The Seagull's* characters did you gain from putting or seeing them on their feet?
 - What about the characters struck you as particularly realistic when performing the roles?
 - Was there any moment that felt strange or awkward in bringing your character to life?
 - Where do you think the comedy lies in either version?
 - If you were required to perform in a production of *A Seagull in the Hamptons* or *The Seagull*, which version would you choose and which character would you be most interested in playing and why?
4. **ON THE PAGE: CHEKHOV'S *THE SEAGULL*, CIRCA 1895.** Have your students read Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in translation either aloud in class or as a homework assignment. Following their reading, explore with them the various avenues of dramatic/dramaturgical and thematic reflection below through discussion and/or short answer and essay writing.
- Ask your students to make an annotated cast of characters list (on paper or on the board) in which they provide a detailed description of each character, including his or her occupation or personal pursuit, characteristics of personality, and relationship to the central characters of the play.
 - Ask your students to collaborate (in large or small groups) on a ten-sentence play summary of *The Seagull*. Note that a "plot" summary describes the play in terms of a sequence of events (e.g., this happens, then this, etc.). They should write a "play" summary which considers the overall story or journey of the play and its key events and characters, themes, ideas, etc. They can't or shouldn't mention everything; they only have ten sentences. Summaries can be shared aloud and students can

choose which summary most effectively captures the overall essence of the dramatic journey of *The Seagull*; students should be encouraged to indicate what made the winning composition an effective play summary.

- Ask your students to discuss the central themes of the play, which include: generational conflict (between parents and children); the artistic experience (i.e., its splendors and miseries); artistic idealism vs. commercialism; facility/ability vs. aspiration and talent vs. lack of talent (i.e., purposeless talent vs. diligent mediocrity); accepting one's lot vs. destroying one's self; what is remembered vs. what is forgotten. Have them select moments from the play in which these themes are dramatically presented.
 - Ask your students if any of these themes seem more important to them than others. Urge them to explain their responses. Can they identify personally with any of these themes? Ask them to provide examples from their own experience.
 - Discuss other plays or works of literature your students have read or studied with similar themes.
5. "DEAR DIARY: SO, HERE I AM AT SORIN'S ESTATE AND YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT JUST HAPPENED!..." After having your students read Chekhov's *The Seagull*, have each of them select a pair of characters from the play—one old and one young (i.e., Konstantin Treplev and Arkadina, Nina and Arkadina, Nina and Trigorin, Konstantin Treplev and Trigorin, Medvedenko and Dorn, etc.)—and have them write two or three "diary entries" from each character's perspective describing life (or vacation) out in the country. Have them consider which happenings each character would know about from first-hand experience, what each would focus upon and how their perceptions and attitudes would differ. Students should try as best they can to stay true to their characters' personalities and to the general ideas and world of the play. Students' diary entries may be read aloud for the class's pleasure and discussed for the merits of their content, attention to dramatic and character detail, and the imagination and originality of their authors.
6. ENVISIONING *THE SEAGULL*: DESIGN COLLAGE PROJECT. Theatrical visual designers, such as those who create a play production's scenery, costumes, makeup and lights, must find ways to communicate their preliminary design ideas to the director with whom they collaborate. One form of visual communication is collage, in which cutout images and text, material/fabric and other small objects are glued to a piece of paper to symbolize the spirit of the play. Ask your students make a design collage for Chekhov's *The Seagull*.
- First, students should read Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Instruct them to record their visual, intellectual and psychological/spiritual impressions of the play—its world, inhabitants, mood and theme—in words as they read. In other words, they should document the images, ideas and feelings or emotions invoked in them as they experience the play through reading.
 - Next, students should think of ways to communicate their initial impressions visually, keeping in mind place, time, theme mood, style, color, texture, scale and movement. They should seek out images online and in magazines, and collect small objects and fabric/material for their design collage.

- They will need an 8½" x 11" sheet of paper (either colored paper or paper that can be painted), scissors, glue, additional colored paper for cutouts, and magic markers, colored pencils or paint for a background.
- Students should consider the placement of collage materials. What do they intend to employ to grab the viewer's eye? How do they want the viewer to look at and experience the collage?
- Educators might also opt to have their students create electronic collages by utilizing PowerPoint technology and images gleaned from the Internet.
- Students should be given time to show their finished collages to the class and to explain how the objects, images and words in their collages express and symbolize *The Seagull* for them.

Please send any noteworthy collages to McCarter Theatre, Education Department, 91 University Place, Princeton, NJ 08540; we would love to see them!

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

*Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions and activities to have students evaluate their experience of the performance of *A Seagull in the Hamptons*, as well as to encourage their own imaginative and artistic projects through further exploration of the play in production. Consider also that some of the pre-show activities might enhance your students' experience following the performance.*

1. **A SEAGULL IN THE HAMPTONS: A DISCUSSION.** Following their attendance at the performance of *A Seagull in the Hamptons*, ask your students to reflect on the questions below. You might choose to have them answer each individually or you may divide students into groups for round-table discussions. Have them consider each question, record their answers and then share their responses with the rest of the class.

Questions to Ask Your Students About the Play in Production

- a. What was your overall reaction to *A Seagull in the Hamptons*? Did you find the production compelling? Stimulating? Intriguing? Challenging? Memorable? Confusing? Evocative? Unique? Delightful? Meaningful? Explain your reactions.
- b. What were the most compelling themes in the play? If you read *A Seagull* beforehand, did experiencing the play heighten your awareness or understanding of the play's themes? [generational conflict (between parents and children); the artistic experience (i.e., its splendors and miseries); artistic idealism vs. commercialism; facility/ability vs. aspiration and talent vs. lack of talent (i.e., purposeless talent vs. diligent mediocrity); accepting one's lot vs. destroying one's self; what is remembered vs. what is forgotten.] What themes were made even more apparent in performance? Were there any other themes you could come up with that were pervasive throughout? Explain your responses.
- c. Do you think that the pace and tempo of the production were effective and appropriate? Explain your opinion.

Questions to Ask Your Students About the Characters

- a. Did you personally identify with any of the characters in *A Seagull in the Hamptons*? Who? Why?
- b. What qualities were revealed by the action and speech of the characters? Explain your ideas.
- c. Did any characters develop or undergo a transformation during the course of the play? Who? How? Why?
- d. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the play? Explain your responses.

Questions to Ask Your Students About the Style and Design of the Production

- a. Was there a moment in *A Seagull in the Hamptons* that was so compelling or intriguing that it remains with you in your mind's eye? Can you write a vivid description of that moment? As you write your description, pretend that you are writing about the moment for someone who was unable to experience the performance.
- b. Did the style and design elements of the production enhance the performance? Did anything specifically stand out to you? Explain your reaction.

- c. How did the production style and design reflect the themes of the play?
 - d. What mood or atmosphere did the lighting design establish or achieve? Explain your experience.
 - e. How did the sound design enhance your overall experience?
 - f. Did the design of the costumes and makeup serve to illuminate the characters, themes and style of the play? How?
2. "GET[TING] DIRECTLY IN CONTACT WITH CHEKHOV": ADAPTING/TRANSPOSING/ TRANSFORMING *THE SEAGULL*. Have your students read the "Interview with Emily Mann" in this audience guide to familiarize themselves with Mann's interest in, reasons for and process of adapting Chekhov.

Theatrical adaptation involves the rewriting of a dramatic text, utilizing the original work as raw material. Adaptation can entail the relatively straightforward transposition of a play's original place and time with minor changes in character and/or dialogue necessary for the play's new context—*A Seagull in the Hamptons* is this sort of adaptation. Other approaches to adaptation involve extensive changes to text, narrative content and even meaning (e.g., cuts in text/dialogue, rearrangement of narrative/story, stylistic changes, a different dramatic focus, elimination/addition of characters or locations, a collage of foreign elements/texts, a different ending. Lookingglass Theatre's *Lookingglass Alice* and Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* are both this latter sort of adaptation.)

Considering Mann's *A Seagull in the Hamptons*

- If your students have not already read Chekhov's classic Russian comedy *The Seagull*, have them do so. (You might choose to use either Paul Schmidt's or Laurence Senelick's translation)
- Then ask your students to compare Emily Mann's adaptation of *A Seagull in the Hamptons* with their experience of Chekhov's original (in translation). The following questions might be helpful as jumping off points:
 - How effective was the transposition of the play's setting from a Russian country estate circa 1895 to a Hamptons beach house in the present day?
 - Did these changes alter your perception or reception of the play, its characters, world and themes? Explain your response.
 - Given your experience with Chekhov's original work (in translation) do you think these adaptation choices by Emily Mann worked? Why or why not?
 - Did some aspects of the adaptation work better than others for you? Explain your response by providing examples.
 - Did the experiencing of viewing the performance of *A Seagull in the Hamptons* give you a better understanding of or insight into Chekhov's *The Seagull*? Explain your response.
 - Would you be interested in seeing a production of Chekhov's *The Seagull* for purposes of comparison?

Considering Your Seagull

- Get your students "directly in contact with Chekhov" through the process of writing their own simple adaptations of a dramatic moment from *The Seagull*. Working in small groups, students should choose one of the

following dramatic moments for present-day adaptation (or they may adapt a dramatic moment of their own choosing):

- Act I, the dramatic moment just after the interrupted performance of Treplev's play, beginning with Treplev's line, "Enough! Curtain!," and ending with Dorn's speech alone which begins with, "I don't know, maybe I'm confused or I'm crazy," and ends with "Oh, I think he's coming this way."
 - Act II, the dramatic moment in which Sorin enters with Nina and Medvedenko behind him with the wheelchair, beginning with Sorin's line, "Are we? Are we having fun? Are we happy today, when's all said and done?" and ending with Sorin's line, "Yes, yes, this is awful...But he won't leave, I'll talk it over with him. (*THEY leave.*)"
 - Act IV, the dramatic moment in which Treplev enters back into the drawing room from outside with Nina beginning with Treplev's line, "Nina! Nina! It's you...you..." and ending at the play's end.
- In addition to choosing a dramatic moment for adaptation, each group of adaptors should choose where they would like to set the play, and should feel completely free to modify the characters and dialogue accordingly for the play's new context.
 - Conduct readings of each adaptation followed by a class discussion (urge your students to focus their analysis and critique on the adaptations themselves and not the performances). Ask your students if there was an adaptation that they thought was best. Ask them to explain why it is that they found it to be superior to the other adapted dramatic moments.

***Seagull*machine: The Advanced (and Radical) Adaptation Project.**

- Interested in an extreme adventure in adaptation? Have your students read and compare Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with Heiner Müller's radical adaptation *Hamletmachine* (online at www.efn.org/~dredmond/Hamletmachine.PDF). After exposing students to Müller's brand of adaptation and discussing the compelling aspects of *Hamletmachine* and its dramatic merit and challenges/problems, have your students consider one of the above moments from *The Seagull* for a new radical interpretation/adaptation. Students should be able to explain (and defend if necessary) their approach and choices. [*Warning: This exercise is not for the faint of heart adaptor. Adapt at your own risk!*]
3. **WHAT'S SO (NOT) FUNNY?: CHEKHOVIAN COMEDY.** In the plays of Chekhov, comedy never actually manifests itself in jokes, zany characters, humorous situations, ridiculous behavior, ludicrous occurrences or happy endings as it did in the popular stage comedies of his day or does today in the popular comedies of stage and screen. Comedy to Chekhov was less about structure, humorous ingredients and the provocation of laughter, and more about style, philosophy, the audience and recognition of the human condition and disease.

Ask your students to consider the two following quotations from Vera Gottlieb's chapter on "Chekhov's Comedy" from *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*:

"First of all I'd get my patients in a laughing mood - and only then would I begin to treat them" Chekhov's words sum up the motivation for his comedy: laughter as medicine, and a vital prerequisite for any treatment of his fellow human beings. Implicit is the sense that laughter— and comedy—are restorative, and that the objectivity and detachment which laughter may produce could inoculate us against such human diseases as pomposity, hypocrisy, self-centredness, laziness, or—the worst of all—wasting life. [...]Chekhov's comedy is therefore not only a stylistic feature in his works, but is also a vital part of his philosophy. It is the point where content and form meet, the one usually inseparable from the other. And this, in turn, relates to the subject matter of his works [...] the daily lives of ordinary people. (Gottlieb, 228.)

* * *

...the "comedy" lies in the disparity between aspiration and reality, or between desire and fulfillment. In most cases, there is little to stop the characters from doing what they want—except themselves. And this, centrally, is where the keynote of Chekhov's comedy lies.

Lead your students in a discussion of their experience *A Seagull in the Hamptons* in light of Gottlieb's elucidation of the nature of Chekhovian comedy. Questions might include:

- Do you understand Gottlieb's explanation of Chekhovian comedy and can you appreciate it having read and/or seen one of Chekhov's plays? Explain your response.
 - Can you think of any moment from the play/performance that provides a good model for Gottlieb's theses? What are they?
 - Were there any moments in *A Seagull in the Hamptons* that you found to be comical in the popular (vs. Chekhovian) sense of the word? Explain your answer.
 - What "human diseases" are plaguing the characters of *A Seagull in the Hamptons* and what might prove the proper treatment for each?
 - [Another approach to the preceding question is: What does each individual character in *A Seagull in the Hamptons* want and what stands in the way of them getting it?]
4. **A SEAGULL IN THE BLOGOSPHERE.** Either as a class or individually, have your students access McCarter Theatre's web site (www.mccarter.org) to post their thoughts about *A Seagull in the Hamptons* on McCarter's Blog. The blog has been designed to connect McCarter Theatre and its staff (production, literary, artistic, education, etc.) with subscribers, students, educators and anyone interested in reading and writing about theater, and it provides an up-to-the-minute forum for news and information on McCarter plays in pre-production, rehearsal, and performance. Students can access the blog at www.mccarter.org/blog/index.php and select "*A Seagull in the Hamptons*" under "Categories" to read archived and recent postings, post questions and comments on previous bloggers' entries and share their own experience of the play.
5. **A SEAGULL IN THE HAMPTONS: THE REVIEW.** Have your students take on the role of theater critic by writing a review of McCarter Theatre's production of *A Seagull in the Hamptons*. A theater critic or reviewer is essentially a "professional audience member," whose job is to provide reportage of a play's production and performance through active and descriptive language for a target audience of readers (e.g., their peers, their community or those interested in the arts). Critics/reviewers provide analysis of the theatrical event to provide clearer understanding of the artistic ambitions and intentions of a play and its production; reviewers often ask themselves, "What is the playwright and this production

attempting to do?" And, finally, the critic offers personal judgment as to whether the artistic intentions of a production were achieved, effective and worthwhile. Things to consider before writing:

- Theater critics/reviewers should always back up their opinions with reasons, evidence and details.
- The elements of production that can be discussed in a theatrical review are the play text or script (and its themes, plot, characters, etc.), scenic elements, costumes, lighting, sound, music, acting and direction (i.e., how all of these elements are put together). [See the "Theater Reviewer's Checklist".]
- Educators may want to provide their students with sample theater reviews from a variety of newspapers.
- Encourage your students to submit their reviews to the school newspaper for publication.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Hamptons:

Dolgon, Corey. *The End of the Hamptons: Scenes from the Class Struggle in America's Paradise*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Fearon, Peter. *Hamptons Babylon: Life Among the Super-Rich on America's Riviera*. Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998.

Harrison, Helen A. and Constance Ayers Denne. *Hamptons Bohemia: Two Centuries of Artists and Writers on the Beach*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002.

Long, Robert. *De Kooning's Bicycle: Artists and Writers in the Hamptons*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

Turner, Newell and Lockhart Steele, eds. *Hamptons Havens: The Best of Hamptons Cottages and Gardens*. New York: Bulfinch Press, 2005.

Anton Chekhov:

Bartlett, Rosamund. *Chekhov: Scenes From A Life*. London: The Free Press, 2004.

Callow, Philip. *Chekhov: The Hidden Ground*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998.

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