

After the Orchard

by Jason Sherman

inspired by Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

Study Guide

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE
PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES
2005-2006 SEASON

Marti Maraden
Artistic Director, English Theatre



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This Study Guide was written and researched by **Jim McNabb** for the National Arts Centre, English Theatre, July 2005. It may solely be used for educational purposes.



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About This Guide

This study guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages. They may be used separately or in any combination that works for your classes. Here is an outline of the contents of each page with suggestions as to its use.

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About the Play – pages 2-4
Period, location, synopsis, the characters, a glossary

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May be Used To:

Aid students appreciate the action of the play and understand the relationships of the characters

Aid students to write a review of the play; provide material for a research activity

Provide student enrichment

Provide student enrichment

Provide enrichment and appreciation of how the play came to be written; provide material for an activity

Provide resource material for a scene writing activity

Help prepare students to appreciate the performance and enhance their appreciation of the script

Provide student enrichment

Prepare the class for the theatre experience

About the Play – page 1 of 3

After the Orchard is an echo of *The Cherry Orchard*, a play written almost exactly 100 years ago in 1904 by Russian playwright Anton Chekhov shortly before he died. Chekhov's plays are considered by many to be some of the finest examples of Naturalism in the world of theatre. Like Chekhov's play, this one is about ordinary people, a family unable to communicate effectively and unable to make effective decisions in times of crisis. Its focus seems more on providing a family portrait, a series of character studies, than on relating a narrative of important events. This production of *After the Orchard* at the National Arts Centre is a world premiere, the piece having been commissioned by the NAC.

Location and Time: Jason Sherman sets this play in “Ontario cottage country” about a two-hour drive north of Toronto. The setting is in and around a somewhat run-down cottage built in the 1960s beside a small quiet lake during the summer of 1999, just before the change of the millennium. The time passage over the course of the four scenes is from late July to the end of September.

Who the Characters Are: Although he died three years before the play is set and therefore never appears on stage, perhaps the central character is Sidney Levy. His unseen presence seems to dominate the conversations and actions of the rest of the characters and his death precipitates the crisis of the play. Sidney emigrated alone from England to Toronto following World War II. Although he was a highly principled labour activist, he worked at a number of trades but never became wealthy. His three adult sons jointly own the cottage and its large piece of land as part of their father's will. The characters who do appear in the play are as follows:

Rose Levy – Sidney's widow, mid 60s and mother of three grown sons; a Jewish matriarch who seems incapable of looking after her limited finances and who is visiting the family's summer home for what turns out to be their last summer there.

Len – Rose's older brother, a retired accountant who seems even less tied to reality than Rose.

Sasha Levy – Rose and Sidney's eldest son, aggressive and somewhat successful in business and now living with his family in Montreal. He has become somewhat estranged from the rest of the Levy family.

Caroline – Sasha's wife whose well-off Montreal Jewish family set Sasha up in business and through subtle remarks won't let anyone forget it.

David Levy – the 40 year old middle son who is a moderately successful playwright and writer for TV. David and his wife are having a trial separation.

Andrew Levy – Rose and Sidney's youngest son, a teacher.

Donna – Andrew's wife, a stay-at-home mother.

Jeremy – Sasha and Caroline's teenage son and one of Rose's grandchildren, ready to go to college.

Aunt Faye – Sidney's older sister whose forgetfulness suggests she is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. Her late husband Lou helped Sidney to build this cottage almost forty years ago when Rose's family was young.

(continued on next page)

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Who the Characters Are (continued):

Jack Skepian – a very successful local real estate agent in his 60s who dated Rose many years ago in Toronto before she met and married Sidney; level-headed and practical, but regarded by the Levys as money-grubbing.

Morris Siegel - a jolly elderly Jewish friend of the Levys' who owns a cottage and property on the same lake.

Trish Siegel – Morris' teenage granddaughter, a young activist and environmentalist.

Plot Synopsis: Scene 1. On the late July afternoon that Rose Levy and all her somewhat dysfunctional family is due to arrive at the family cottage, Jack Skepian, a local realtor and old friend of Rose's, shows up. The family is gathering to decide what to do about the cottage: it must either be moved back from the lakeshore to comply with new municipal regulations - a very expensive operation which no one can afford - or torn down and rebuilt. It has great sentimental value for some of the family but not for others. Rose has gone through the money resulting from the sale of her Toronto home and none of the sons has the money to save the cottage. Jack Skepian hopes to convince them that the wisest thing would be to sell the property to him, whereupon he would tear down the cottage and have the land developed into rental cottages, a thought that repulses most of the family members.

Scene 2. A few days later tensions between various family members have built. The three brothers who are joint owners of the property disagree on what to do with it, but it is clear that Sasha favours its sale and has encouraged Skepian to pressure the others into selling. Jack tries to talk sense into them, warning that the land office may legally take over the land by the end of August if they don't comply with the new regulations. The others continue to ignore him or belittle his crass commercialism. Jack indicates to Rose that he still holds a soft spot in his heart for her.

Scene 3. It is late August and the family holds a party while waiting to hear the decision of the land office concerning the property. Caroline is trying to patch up the rift between her husband Sasha and the other brothers, but word comes that in a surprise move Sasha has bought out his brothers' shares in the cottage to save it from being seized by the municipality. The others are further shocked when it is revealed that he then plans to sell the property to Jack Skepian and turn a profit. Rose is devastated and David is infuriated.

Scene 4. It is the end of September and the furnishings of the cottage are being removed as the Levys move out. For a moment we think that perhaps Jack and Rose will renew their old romance but the chance is missed; Jack is caught up in his building plans and Rose in her family matters. Some of the tensions within the family have dissipated as they prepare to carry on.

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Glossary of Terms:

Menorah - an eight-branched candelabrum lit on Hanukkah, the Feast of Lights.

Tallis – prayer shawls

Payess – the long, ear-ringlet hair and sideburn-locks worn by very Orthodox Jewish males.

Shiva - the seven solemn days of mourning following a funeral.

Nu - a very versatile interjection or expletive often meaning “so” or “well”.

Shekel - money; a Biblical silver coin.

Zaydie - grandfather

Macher – someone who arranges things; a “big wheel”.

Schmuck - a dope, a jerk (vulgar term)

Passover – the most cherished of Jewish holidays comprising eight days of feasting and religious services; it falls sometime in March/April.

Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year falling in September or early October.

“Olev ha’shalom” - “And unto you, peace.” Answer to the greeting “Shalom”.

Klezmer band – a local band playing traditional Jewish music.

Johnny Weismuller – handsome Olympic gold-medalist swimmer in the 1920s who became a famous movie star playing Tarzan throughout the 1930s.

Caligula’s horse – There is a legend that Caligula, a first century Roman emperor, loved his horse so much that he appointed it as a senator. This term refers to taking patronage to a ridiculous extreme.



A menorah



A tallit or prayer shawl

Who Helped Put the Production Together? - page 1 of 3

This National Arts Centre English Theatre production of *After the Orchard* by Jason Sherman is a world premiere.

The Company

Director:	Marti Maraden
Set and Costume Designer:	Christina Poddubiuk
Lighting Designer:	John (Jock) Munro
Sound Designer:	Peter McBoyle
Assistant Director:	Abebe Addis
Stage Manager:	Laurie Champagne
Assistant Stage Manager:	Jane Vanstone Osborn

The Cast (in alphabetical order)

Caroline:	Ellen David
Jeremy:	Paul Dunn
Jack:	Jerry Franken
Len:	Peter Froehlich
Aunt Faye:	Carolyn Hetherington
Donna:	Niki Landau
Rose:	Nicola Lipman
David:	Patrick McManus
Trish:	Michelle Monteith
Morris:	Harry Nelken
Sasha:	Alex Poch-Goldin
Andrew:	Philip Warren Sarsons

After the Orchard is a play about an ordinary family, sometimes close, sometimes dysfunctional, and the loss of their communal summer cottage.



Who Helped Put the Production Together? - page 2 of 3



Christina Poddubiuk, the **Set and Costume Designer**, has been based in Stratford for over 20 years. She has designed many shows there, but as a free-lance designer, she works in all parts of the country. Her most recent design in Stratford was for the widely acclaimed Paul Gross production of *Hamlet*. She designed the costumes for the Shaw Festival production of *Candida* which toured to the NAC in 2002, the same year she designed the set and costumes for *Mary's Wedding*. After High School in Montreal, Christina earned a degree in English Literature with the aim of becoming a teacher. However, because of her experiences with the theatre group at McGill University, she decided to enroll in Theatre Design at Montreal's National Theatre School and has been steadily in demand ever since.

John (Jock) Munro, the **Lighting Designer**, is one of Canada's most successful lighting designers, having worked in Canada, the U.S., Europe and South America in the fields of theatre, dance and opera. In October 2000, he was appointed Associate Artist-in-Residence at the NAC where he has designed lights for over 60 productions, most recently: *Vanya*, *Pélagie*, *Arms and the Man*, *The "Vaudevilles" of Chekhov*, *Mary's Wedding*, *Vinci* and *Twelfth Night*. Mr. Munro has lit productions for most of the major theatre companies from coast to coast, including ten seasons at the Stratford Festival and ten world premieres for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal.

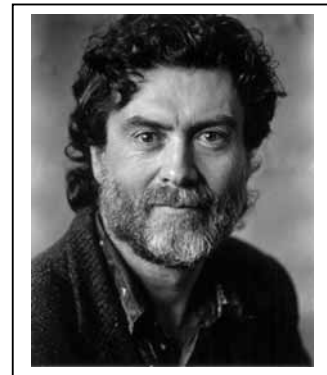


photo courtesy of the Shaw Festival

Peter McBoyle, the **Sound Designer** is a member of the Audio Engineering Society and the Associated Designers of Canada. He holds a degree in Music and a Master's in Sound Recording from McGill and currently teaches theatre sound at Ryerson University. He has designed the sound at the NAC for *Trying*, *Arms and the Man*, *Mary's Wedding* and *An Enemy of the People*. He is the resident sound designer at the Stratford Festival where he has designed the sound for almost 30 productions including this year's *Hello Dolly!*, *The Lark* and *Orpheus Descending*. He designed sound for this year's Shaw Festival production of the musical *Gypsy* at Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Who Helped Put the Production Together? - page 3 of 3

Some Cast Members You May Recognize



Ellen in real life

Ellen David who plays **Caroline** is appearing at the NAC for the first time. She has acted extensively in Montreal where she grew up, mainly with the Centaur Theatre where she appeared as Anna in *Mambo Italiano* in the longest running English language play in Montreal history. She also played the same role in the film version of *Mambo*. For a girl who grew up in a Jewish neighbourhood, she plays Italian most convincingly. She portrays a middle aged mother in the current CBC-TV “dramedy” *Ciao Bella*.



Ellen as Sophia in *Ciao Bella*



Lipman in *Simpl*

Nicola Lipman who plays **Rose** and **Peter Froehlich** who plays her brother **Len** most recently appeared at the NAC together in *Simpl* (2003/04 season) a play written by Mr. Froehlich. Although Ms. Lipman resides in Halifax, she has appeared leading roles in theatres from coast to coast. She has taught at the National Theatre School and been a board executive for both Canadian Actors Equity and ACTRA. Mr. Froehlich, who teaches Theatre at the University of Ottawa, has appeared many times at the NAC as well as acted and directed across Canada.

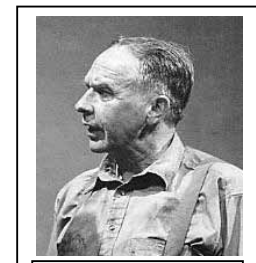


Froehlich in *Simpl*



Hetherington in *Written on Water*

Carolyn Hetherington who plays **Aunt Faye** appeared at the NAC earlier this year in *Half Life*, and in *Written on Water* (2003/04 season). **Jerry Franken** who plays **Jack Skepian** also appeared in *Written on Water* and before that in the much acclaimed *The Drawer Boy* on tour and at the NAC (2001/02 season). Ms. Hetherington has appeared on television in *Road to Avonlea*, *Blue Murder*, *Street Legal*, and *Night Heat*, as well as many stage performances across Canada, including *Wit* and *Hedda Gabler* at Ottawa’s Great Canadian Theatre Co.. Mr. Franken has appeared at CanStage, Blyth Festival, Theatre London, and Manitoba Theatre Centre.



Franken in *The Drawer Boy*

Marti Maraden, Director – page 1 of 2

Marti Maraden, Artistic Director, National Arts Centre English

Theatre and one of Canada's foremost stage directors, was appointed to this position eight years ago. Ms. Maraden began her directing career in 1985 in Toronto and since then has directed extensively for major theatres across the country and in the U.S., including the Stratford Festival, the Shaw Festival, Canadian Stage Company (Toronto), the Manitoba Theatre Centre (Winnipeg), The Grand Theatre (London), and The Children's Theatre of Minneapolis, as well as the NAC. As an actor, Ms. Maraden spent six seasons at the Stratford Festival and seven at the Shaw Festival, and has appeared at major theatres across Canada and the United States. Ms. Maraden has in the past been an Associate Director of the Stratford Festival Theatre, Director of the Stratford Festival Young Company, and President of the Board of Equity Showcase Theatre, and has served on the board of The Canadian Stage Company. Besides this world premiere of *After the Orchard*, she has directed 16 productions at the NAC, three of them world premieres. Last season she directed *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Trying* and the season before, *Hamlet* and *Arms and the Man*. Marti leaves her position as Artistic Director at the end of October to direct *Much Ado About Nothing* in Chicago, and then settle down for a rest in her Stratford home.



Commenting on the departure of Ms. Maraden as Artistic Director, Peter Herrndorf, President and CEO of the NAC said, "*Marti Maraden has been a force of nature while at the National Arts Centre. Marti's contributions to the life of the NAC and to theatre across Canada during her eight years with us have been nothing short of extraordinary. Marti captivated our theatre audiences with her vision and artistic sensibility. Marti embraced storytelling in all its forms and her legacy of Shakespearian productions while at the NAC, is complemented by her passion for Canadian works. Marti did so much to enhance the NAC's reputation as a catalyst for theatre across Canada, while nurturing young artists and creating interest in theatre by new audiences that the NAC will continue to benefit from her legacy.*"

While leading English Theatre at the NAC, Ms. Maraden played a major role in helping the NAC deliver on its strategic goals, including bringing a greater focus on the NAC's national presence and its youth and education activities. During her tenure the NAC became a much greater force in coproductions with theatre companies across the country. In addition, with colleague Lise Ann Johnson, Ms. Maraden made *On the Verge* into a significant annual national festival of new play readings, and was a key figure in bringing to life the *Magnetic North Theatre Festival*, a national arts festival that showcases some of the best contemporary Canadian theatre in English. Ms. Maraden also was at the forefront of education initiatives at the NAC, including conducting master classes with young actors through broadband technology.

Marti Maraden, Director – page 2 of 2

Director's Comments:

Asked how she came to commission a play by Jason Sherman, Marti Maraden replied, *"I've never worked with Jason Sherman before, and I haven't directed any of his plays, but I've seen almost all of his works, and I've admired him for a very long time. What happened was that about four and a half years ago I went to him with an idea for a project, which is not the usual way that one approaches a playwright in the theatre. In films and television people go to writers with a project and say, we want you to write a story about this. But in theatre generally speaking a playwright comes up with something of his own and presents it. But I went to Jason and said, 'Here's an idea for a piece and you'd be the one to write it if it were of interest. But I also want you to think about it, and if this isn't something you want to do, is there something else that you've always wanted to do?' He liked the idea and he thought about it seriously, but he'd been thinking about an idea for a play for a long time, which would be a modern echo of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard. Now, his play, I should say, is its own play. If you know The Cherry Orchard, you'll recognize the dilemma and you'll recognize a few of the characters having common traits. But it's by no means Chekhov or an adaptation of that play. If you know Chekhov, you have the fun [of recognizing] not just The Cherry Orchard but little sneaky echoes of his other plays as well. But if you've never read a Chekhov play or seen one in your life, this play would still have its own integrity in life.*

"This is a very personal family play. Jason, in many of his plays, has very strong political ideas and definitely has a voice on how we conduct our lives. Sometimes it's very strongly about Israel and the Palestinians, other times about other issues. This play is so family based. I wouldn't want to put words in his mouth that any characters are reflected in his own personal family, but certainly his lively observation of the world and human nature is very apparent. It's essentially about a family that is quite dysfunctional - as are most families - but in the end, I believe, there's a great deal of love, too.



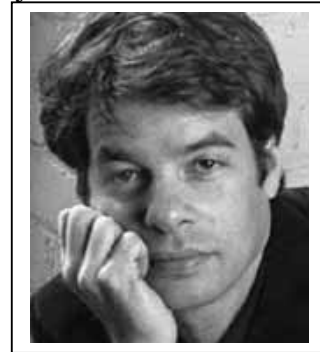
playwright Jason Sherman

"So, essentially I recognized a playwright that is very good and I wanted him to be writing something for us. I also said to him not to worry about cast size. Some of our theatres have to allow playwrights to write the play they need to write. This play has twelve characters which nowadays is a fairly large cast. But he needed those voices in order to tell his story. I've had the pleasure of being there for all but one of the workshops where we developed the script very lovingly over the last few years. At first it needed time to incubate but now we have a wonderful rehearsal draft and we're all ready to go."

Jason Sherman, Playwright

A Bio

Jason Sherman was born in Montreal in 1962, but moved with his family to Toronto in 1969 where he still lives. After graduating from York University's Creative Writing Programme in 1985 he worked as an editor and journalist for several years with his essays and reviews appearing in such publications as *The Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Theatre Review* and *Theatrum*. He then turned to playwriting and has had his work produced in Toronto and around the country steadily since 1991. He has on four separate occasions been nominated for the Governor General's Award in Drama, including a win in 1996 for *Three in the Back, Two in the Head*. He has also been nominated three times for the Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award, which he won in 1992 for *A League of Nathans*. This season's Stratford Festival premiere of his adaptation of the huge Russian novel *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky has received standing ovations. His latest work, *After the Orchard*, in which he revisits Anton Chekhov's works (particularly *The Cherry Orchard*), has been four years in the writing and now makes its premiere at the NAC. Jason Sherman has become one of Canada's leading and most prolific playwrights. He has worked as playwright-in-residence at Tarragon Theatre and Soulpepper Theatre, both in Toronto.



“Dubbed the ‘enfant terrible’ of the Canadian stage, his work is uncompromising, challenging, and driven by an unerring sense of dialogue and theatricality. His plays, always political to some degree, encompass characters rarely seen in today’s drama, characters who face the tough questions, the big issues, and the difficult journeys many dramatists shy from. In the words of the late Canadian theatrical legend, Urjo Kareeda, ‘*The theatrical vitality of Jason Sherman’s plays starts from the sheer size of his central characters: the size of their desires, the size of their imagination, the size of their intelligence.*’”

<http://www.doollee.com/PlaywrightsS/ShermanJason.htm>

Some Other Jason Sherman Plays:

An Acre of Time - The play combines actual events and locales in Ottawa history combined with a moving story of a woman's search for love and forgiveness.

It's All True - This is the fabled story of Marc Blitzstein's and Orson Welles' New York production of *The Cradle Will Rock* and the controversy which surrounded it in 1937 when the US government padlocked their theatre.

A League of Nathans - Three boys, all named Nathan form a league for life, then split up in their late teens. Seven years later they reunite in Spain to find that the different path each has taken leads to soul searching.

Remnants (A Fable) - An imaginative retelling of the biblical tale of Joseph and his brothers, set in the years before and during the Second World War. Sent to Canada against his will by his jealous brothers, Joseph Taylor rises to become an important advisor to Prime Minister MacKenzie King. However, when a boatload of European Jews lands on Canadian Shores seeking shelter, Joseph is sent to turn them away - only to discover his brothers are among the refugees.

Anton Chekhov – page 1 of 2

A Biography

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) is one of Russia's most beloved storytellers and recognized as one of the greatest playwrights of modern times. He won the Pushkin Prize and he is known for his short stories and his plays, works which often combine elements of both comedy and tragedy. His longer more serious plays established him as one of the world's most influential dramatists of all time. In all, he wrote almost 500 short stories, most of them of a comic nature, ten short comedies and six full-length plays.

Anton Chekhov was born on January 17, 1860, in the port town of Taganrog in the Ukrainian part of Russia near the Black Sea. Although he was confident and outgoing as a child, he was also a quiet observer and imitator of human traits even at a young age, a quality that stayed with him throughout his life. When he was 15, his father abandoned the family and they were forced to live with relatives in Moscow.



Eventually Anton was able to enroll in Moscow University on a scholarship and study medicine. Throughout university he supported the family by writing short humorous stories which became very popular in the literary magazines of the day. By the time he graduated as a Doctor in 1884, he had, with unbelievable speed and skill, written almost 500 short stories, some of which he sold to journals but most of which he published in collections. He often depicted silly social situations, marital problems, farcical encounters between husbands, wives, mistresses, and lovers, and the whims of young women. Chekhov was quoted as saying that medicine was his lawful wife and literature was his mistress, and he remained devoted to his two professions throughout his life.

Chekhov developed his concept of the dispassionate, non-judgmental author and outlined his ideas in a letter to his brother Aleksandr: "1. *Absence of lengthy verbiage of political-social-economic nature*; 2. *total objectivity*; 3. *truthful descriptions of persons and objects*; 4. *extreme brevity*; 5. *audacity and originality*; avoid the stereotype; 6. *compassion.*" This writing style was a complete departure from the melodramatic style of the theatre of his day.

His early full-length plays – *Ivanov* and *The Wood Demon* – were not successful but around the turn of the century, he wrote four full-length plays which were commentaries on Russian society and which gained him lasting acclaim: *The Sea Gull* in 1896, *Uncle Vanya* in 1896 (a derivative of his play of 1889, *The Wood Demon*), *The Three Sisters* in 1901, and *The Cherry Orchard*, his last great play, in 1904. These were produced in association with directors Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko of the Moscow Art Theatre. Chekhov used ordinary conversations, pauses, non-communication, non-happenings and incomplete thoughts to reveal the truth behind daily life. This Naturalistic style challenged actors and required a revolutionary movement in acting and play production. His characters belong often to the provincial middle class, petty aristocracy, or are landowners of pre-Revolutionary Russia. They contemplate their unsatisfactory lives but are unable to make decisions and help themselves when a crisis arises.

By 1904, the tuberculosis that he had contracted several years earlier became critical and he was ordered to spend time at a German spa but he died there in July, soon after the successful opening of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Moscow Art Theatre. The style of his stories, novels, and plays, emphasizing internal drama, characterization, and mood rather than plot, and focusing on the tragicomic aspects of ordinary events, had great influence on later writers.

Anton Chekhov – page 2 of 2

Echoes of His Works in *After the Orchard*

Jason Sherman has visited the works of the great Russian playwright Chekhov to find inspiration in the stories, characters and style for his modern *After the Orchard*. Although his play is definitely its own piece, living independently of those of the earlier master, he has captured the essence of Chekhov, particularly as seen in his last work, *The Cherry Orchard*. In Chekhov's play a family of once-wealthy landowners, led by the romantic and wistful matriarch Mme. Ranevsky, reluctantly comes to terms with the loss of the country estate. Their impractical and indecisive nature is contrasted with a strong willed and level-headed neighbour, Ermolai Lopakhin, who eventually buys the estate and chops down the aging cherry orchard to make way for modern progress. The play deals in part with missed opportunities and dissatisfaction with changing times.

There are parallels between characters in the two plays: Jack Skepian is the modern counterpart of Lopakhin, buying the Levys' family cottage and lakefront property to build rental cottages; Rose Levy is the modern sentimental matriarch to Chekhov's Lubov Ranevshy; Leonid Gaev becomes Len; Boris Pischin, the neighbouring landowner becomes Morris Siegel from the next cottage; the doddering old manservant Fiers has parallels with Aunt Faye; Trish, Morris' granddaughter, sometimes resembles the student Peter Trofimov; and Caroline expresses some of the ideas of Charlotta Ivanova, the governess.

Events and scene structure sometimes parallel those of *The Cherry Orchard*, such as the constant urging of Jack/Lopakhin to find a practical solution to the impending loss of the property, the party thrown the night that the property finally changes hands, the missed romance between Jack and Rose, and the tearful farewell to the family cottage at the end of Scene 4, to name only a few.

However, we also find echoes of some of Chekhov's other plays. For instance, the three Levy brothers possibly parallel Olga, Masha, and Irina in *The Three Sisters*, one being a tired school teacher, one in an unsatisfactory marriage, and the third dreaming of a better life elsewhere – Irina in Moscow and David in L.A. Some faint echoes of *The Seagull* come with references to the children's performance of their play and Len's story of the frustrated actress/waitress who breaks into tears when he compliments her.

A complete text of *The Cherry Orchard* translated by Julius West can be found at <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/ac/chorch.htm>. To compare the scene from *After the Orchard* found on pages 13 -16 of this Study Guide, scroll down to about halfway through Act 1 of *The Cherry Orchard* and begin at Lopakhin's line: "I've got to go off to Karkov by the 5 o'clock train ..."

A complete text of *The Seagull* can be found at <http://vtheatre.net/plays/seagull.html> and of *The Three Sisters* at <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/ac/sisters.htm>.

Several movie versions of *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull* are available on video and DVD.

Who Wants to Be a Playwright? – page 1 of 2

So you want to join the ranks of such people as Sophocles, William Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Tennessee Williams, Neil Simon, Michel Tremblay and Jason Sherman? You want to make people laugh or cry? Dream of impossible worlds? Come to terms with powerful problems or gut-wrenching emotions? Maybe even change the world or start a riot? Maybe the pen really is mightier than the sword. Maybe you actually can make a difference to our way of life, bring awareness to social ills or impeding disasters, or simply help everyone forget their troubles and get happy. Maybe your name will end up in lights on Broadway or in scrolling credits on the screen. What about appearing at the Oscars? Or maybe you just have some pet peeves that you want everyone to know about.



Nowadays many more people are making a living, - and often a very good one - at writing for stage, television or movies than ever before. With 500 channels to fill with material and hundreds of theatre stages across North America hungry for scripts, there just might be a spot for you. And right now is the time to start.

Here's what a few established playwrights have to say about their craft:

"The only way to learn how to write plays is to see your plays done. And particularly to see them done in an environment where you're learning for yourself whether they work or not and determining the terms on which you consider whether they are effective or not."

-- Arthur Kopit, Tony Award winning American playwright

"Playwriting classes are good for getting over the terror of writing, ... for getting started. [However], playwrights ... can and maybe should learn their craft by reading every play ever written, seeing lots of shows, and by being involved in theater production, in the rehearsal room, as an actor, stage manager, stage hand or assistant to a director; and of course playwrights learn by writing a lot, and finding actors to read their work out loud."

-- Tony Kushner, Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner for *Angels in America*, NYTimes, June 4, 2004

"A great quote Charles Ludlum has is: 'If you are going to tell people the truth, you better make them laugh.' Nobody wants to feel like they're going to be preached at in the theatre. You want to feel like you are going to recognize something of yourself in what's going on stage otherwise, you feel left out."

-- Jason Sherman, CBC Interview, November 2, 1999

"Theatre can be about political history (it isn't very often, which is a shame). But unless theatre is also about the place of the individual within that history, and unless that history is more or less similar to something going on in our own time, no one is going to take anything away from it, except a souvenir program."

-- Jason Sherman, Interact Theatre interview, 2001.

Who Wants to Be a Playwright? – page 2 of 2

Getting Started:

1. Write a list of the things you really care about. Write a line that reads something like "*I get so damn mad when...*" and then fill in the blank. Then write about the issue from two opposing perspectives. The important thing, I think, is to write about things that are very important to you and to identify what those things are.

2. Always question (or challenge yourself). That means that you always push your writing further by asking WHY? So a man and a woman have a fight in a park and the woman storms off. WHY did they have this fight? Because the man killed the family dog. WHY did he kill the dog? Because he was jealous. WHY was he jealous? Because the woman was spending all her time with the dog. WHY was she spending all her time with the dog...?

3. Keep writing. That's probably the most important point. Even if what your writing that particular day is horrible, the simple act of writing is what's important.

-- David Nugent, young Ottawa playwright and recent graduate of Yale U.
Playwriting.

More Advice:

1. Theatrical excitement is a product of the playwright's passion and commitment. Think of your play as a personalized statement of your inner core, who you are, what you believe, your vision of the world around you. Before you begin writing, identify what is most important to you. Your written statement of convictions is deeply personal – there are no right or wrong beliefs – and focuses on topics that are highly important to you. For example, your credo may deal with such matters as family, love, or marriage; an individual's ambitions, goals, and future; the significance of past experiences, loves, or hates; what it means to be selfish or giving; social problems such as AIDS, unwanted pregnancy and abortion, drugs, or the homeless; ethical dilemmas between right and wrong; and aspects of religion, relationship with a deity, or attitudes about false prophets.

2. Writing plays is like designing and building bridges. Like the bridge builder, you are involved in planning, designing, crafting, and constructing – in a very real sense plays are "built" more than "written" – and you focus on frame, shape, and style. Both playwright and bridge builder are visionaries, imagining a connection where none exists; both seek to take people where they've never been; both want the journey to stimulate the traveler's eye, mind and spirit.

-- Louis Catron, author of *The Elements of Playwriting*, Macmillan Co.

Interesting Websites:

<http://www.playwriting101.com/> lots of advice on how to write a play and format the script so that it's easy to read by the actors, producers and directors.

<http://www.nycplaywrights.org/default.asp> a website devoted to developing new scripts, tells of contests for scripts, advice on scriptwriting, a standard template for scripts.

<http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/software.html> a list of software to help you format your script.

<http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/seminar.html> a remarkable amount of advice and quotations from playwrights.

Activities Before and After Viewing the Play – page 1 of 2

Before Seeing the Play:

1. Distribute the biography pages for the Director Marti Maraden (page 8) and other selected company members (pages 6-7). These Canadian artists have worked with a large number of theatre companies across Canada. Have the students create a research project on five of the following companies: Belfry Theatre, Canadian Stage, Centaur Theatre, Citadel Theatre, Great Canadian Theatre Company, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Neptune Theatre, Shaw Festival, Stratford Festival, Tarragon Theatre, the National Theatre School, or other theatre companies of their choice. The report should give the city in which each theatre is located, the names and number of performance spaces it has, its mandate or general choice of plays, the current “season” of plays and which ones are written by Canadians. Information on the theatre companies can then be pooled around the class to give a picture of Theatre in Canada. Information can be found in the Encyclopedia of Canadian Theatre (<http://www.canadiantheatre.com/>) or at the following website: http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/links/links_canadian.cfm. You could also go to the websites of the individual theatres.

2. Jason Sherman is a fascinating and prolific young Canadian playwright. Have the students read his biography and summaries of some of his plays (page 10). Have the students prepare a research project on Canadian playwrights. <http://www.playwrightsguild.com/pgc/> and <http://www.canadiantheatre.com/> are starting points but websites of individual Canadian theatres are also very useful. Have them collect names of ten Canadian playwrights and the title(s) of one or more plays each one has written. One or two sentence summaries of the plots should be included. As a bonus, find out which of these plays have been produced in Ottawa at such venues as the National Arts Centre, Great Canadian Theatre Co., or Ottawa Little Theatre.

3. In the play, Len and Jack both mention the local theatre which is putting on plays during the summer in the “cottage country” of Ontario. The group they are referring to could be a local community theatre group, but is more likely a Summer Theatre created by theatre professionals. Those living in Ottawa may be familiar with Odyssey Theatre performing in Strathcona Park or Company of Fools performing in a variety of city parks. Summer theatres may be as huge an enterprise as the multimillion dollar The Stratford Festival or The Shaw Festival or as simple as Company of Fools which travels in a van. They may operate out of doors, in old converted movie houses or opera houses, or in elaborate theatres built specifically for the company. Have the students create a research project on Summer Theatres by visiting such websites as: <http://www.summertheatre.org/> or <http://www.stage-door.org/sw-ont.htm>. Find the three or four nearest summer theatres, list the shows they are presenting this season and who their artistic directors are. Summer theatres often welcome young volunteers or backstage staff. For those interested, contact information for next season could be noted.

Activities Before and After Viewing the Play – page 2 of 2

After Seeing the Play:

1. While the play is still fresh in their minds, have your students write a review of the production of *After the Orchard*. Have them read reviews of other plays in newspapers or periodicals to give them an idea of the standard approach to theatrical criticism. A suggested outline for writing a review can also be found online on page 12 of http://www.artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/chekhov_guide.pdf. Students may have received programs at the matinée, or may refer to page 5 of this Study Guide (Who Helped Put the Production Together?) for the correct information about the production in their reviews. The areas the review should cover, in general and more specifically when merited are: all design elements (lighting, sound, set and costumes), performances of the actors, the direction, the basic narrative, dialogue and the central theme(s) of the script.
2. An advanced group of students will enjoy identifying echoes of Chekhov's ideas in *After the Orchard*. Have them read page 12 of this Study Guide and then read one or more of Chekhov's works either online (websites are identified there) or from the library. Viewing a movie version of a Chekhov play might also be suitable. They will find the most references in *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull*. Discussion in class should focus on how Sherman has modernized the story to make it more accessible to our audiences, what alterations he has made to the narrative, how he has combined or expanded characters or interchanged material from other plays.
3. The playwriting process involved in creating *After the Orchard* is intriguing. Have the students read page 12 of this Study Guide on Sherman's sources of inspiration. Using a play, short story or novel currently being studied in English class, have the students write a modern adaptation of one or more scenes. What happens when the theme of the piece is changed? The location and/or time period? The social status of the characters. Scenes should be read aloud in class in groups so that the playwrights may refine the dialogue or the impact of events.

Videos and Websites of Interest

Websites of Interest



http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/actors_studio.html

A website devoted to The Actors' Studio in New York explaining the philosophy of "The Method" inspired by Stanislavsky as taught there.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/ac/chorch.htm>

The complete text of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* as translated by Julius West. An excellent reference by which to study Jason Sherman's method of adapting his script and a handy source for scene material.

<http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/quotesarchive.html> 100 quotations from playwrights.

<http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/software.html> list of software to help you format your script.

<http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/seminar.html> a remarkable amount of advice and quotations from playwrights.

Movies of Interest



The Cherry Orchard (2003); director Michael Cacoyannis, starring Charlotte Rampling and Alan Bates. The film is a very straightforward staging of the drama, which tells the story of the downfall of an aristocratic feudal family that can't adapt to the post-emancipation Russia. (2 hrs. 17min.). Available at Glebe Video International, 237-6252.

The Sea Gull (1968); director Sidney Lumet; starring James Mason, Vanessa Redgrave, Simone Signoret. A rather slow-moving (even for Chekhov) rendition of Chekhov's classic of emotional upheaval on a country estate concerning a young poet/playwright in love with an actress who is in love with a novelist who is in love with the poet's mother who is in love with herself. (2 hrs. 21min.). Available at Glebe Video International, 237-6252.

Vanya on 42nd Street (1994); director Louis Malle, starring Julianne Moore as Yelena and Wallace Shawn as Vanya. An excellent version of Chekhov's comedy of lonely despair and yearning for love on a provincial farm. The film is shot in a dilapidated New York theatre as a rehearsal which comes to life when the actors become completely immersed in their roles. (1 hr. 59min.). Available in video at the Ottawa Public Library. Also available at Glebe Video International, 237-6252.

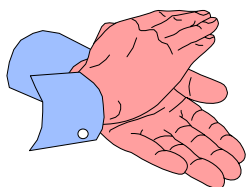
Last Summer in the Hamptons (1995); director Henry Jaglom, starring Viveca Lindroos and Victoria Foyt. Three generations of a large and very dysfunctional family full of writers, actors and directors come together for one last weekend at their East Hampton estate before it is sold. The movie manages to combine the elements of Chekhov's *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* as well as taking a crack at the Method style of acting. (108 min.) Available at Glebe Video International, 237-6252.



Theatre Etiquette

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre by explaining good **Theatre Etiquette** which will enhance the enjoyment of the play by all audience members:

1. *After the Orchard* will be performed in the Theatre of the NAC. Matinée at the NAC are for students and the general public. It is important for everyone to be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance so others do not lose their immersion in the "world of the play". Unlike movies, the actors in live theatre can hear disturbances in the audience and will give their best performances when they feel the positive involvement of the audience members. The appropriate way of showing approval for the actors' performances is through laughter and applause. For the enjoyment of all, people who disturb others during the show may be asked to leave the Theatre.
2. It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted and others are not disturbed. Cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps must be turned off. Cameras and all other recording devices are not permitted in the Theatre.
3. Unlike at a movie theatre, seats in the NAC Theatre are assigned to patrons according to row and number. It is important to find the seat indicated on the ticket rather than moving around and disturbing others. It might be wise for teachers to pass out the tickets before arriving at the NAC so students can make sure in advance that they are sitting beside the friend of their choice. Remember that in the NAC Theatre, all odd numbered seats are on one side and all even are on the other, so, for example, seats 12 and 14 are actually beside each other.
4. The play is performed in four scenes with one 15-minute intermission. Anyone leaving during while the play is in progress may unfortunately not be allowed back into the Theatre.





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