

UPSTAGE

THE BELFRY THEATRE – AN INSIDER'S GUIDE

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APRIL / MAY 2015

BOOKS / FUNNY RUSSIANS

THEATRE / WHY THIS PLAY?

ENGAGE / BOOKSMACK



*TONY AWARD-WINNING
COMEDY AT THE BELFRY
IN APRIL AND MAY*

Belfry
Theatre

VOLUME 1 / ISSUE 4

VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE

Winner of the 2013 Tony Award
for Best Play, *Vanya and Sonia*

and Masha and Spike is Durang's cheeky homage to all things Chekhov. The bucolic bliss of siblings Vanya and Sonia is thrown into disarray when sister-turned-movie actress Masha returns home with her new young lover in tow, sparking a fiery bout of rivalry.

hello

Welcome to the Belfry and our brand new production of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, Christopher Durang's award-winning comedy.

According to Durang, "My play is not a Chekhov parody... I take Chekhov scenes and characters and put them into a blender.

A blender indeed. He has borrowed characters and plotlines and remixed them in this gently wacky family comedy.

Our family for this show includes a few Belfry favourites: R.H. Thomson (TV's *Road to Avonlea*, *Republic of Doyle*), Deborah Williams (*Mom's the Word*, *The Flame*), and Brenda Robins (Soulpepper, Citadel Theatre).

More recent Belfry alumni Lee Majdoub (*Helen's Necklace*) and Yoshié Bancroft (*Home is a Beautiful Word*) join them, along with Carmela Sison making her Belfry debut.

This is the perfect way to end a very exciting season and we'd love for you to join us.

Tickets are on sale now at 250-385-6815 or at www.belfry.bc.ca

Thanks.

synopsis

Middle-aged siblings Vanya and Sonia have never left the confines of their childhood home in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. After spending their adulthood looking after their now-dead parents, neither has a job, and money is provided by their movie star sister Masha, who owns the house and pays the bills. Bringing with her an endless supply of insecurity and her 20-something boy toy, Spike, Masha wants to sell the family home to help fund her lavish lifestyle and keep her in the public eye.



B4Play

**SATURDAY, APRIL 11
at 11 am**

**Belfry Theatre
Studio A
1291 Gladstone Avenue**

**Join CBC Radio's Gregor
Craigie for a live talk
show with artists from
*Vanya and Sonia and Masha
and Spike* and some very
special community guests.
Free event.**

WHO WE ARE –

Upstage is the Belfry Theatre's new magazine. Our goal is to give you a leisurely, deeper look into our productions. With your tablet or computer you can view our expanded digital version of *Upstage* on our website or at issuu.com/belfry-theatre.



our thanks to our production sponsors for VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE –

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Clockwise from the top left: Anton Chekhov (portrait by Osip Braz), Christopher Durang (photo by Susan Johann), costume rendering for Masha by Cory Sincennes

Uncle Vanya and Sister Mashup

by Jennifer Wise

In *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, Christopher Durang's gleeful homage to the life and work of playwright and physician Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), Vanya, Sonia, and Masha are middle-aged siblings named after their parents' favourite Chekhov characters. Gently updating the dramatis personae of *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *The Seagull* (1895), *Three Sisters* (1900), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1903), they're an unmarried gay brother and his two unhappy sisters, one a movie star with a too-young boyfriend named Spike, the other a dutiful, bitter homebody. Like Chekhov's creations, who languish and fester on isolated rural estates, longing for a better life – "let's go to Moscow!

Please, let's go! There's nothing better than Moscow! Let's go, Olga, let's go!" (*Three Sisters*) – Durang's siblings are gathered for a family whine-fest and reproach-a-thon at their country house in Bucks County, Pennsylvania (where Durang himself lives, possibly with some embittered relatives of his own: this Tony-award-winning play has made him a fortune).

Next door there's a luminous ingénue, Nina, who identifies with a large dead bird and performs in a weird little ecological play written by one of the famous actor's relatives (*Seagull*). Outside the window there may or may not be enough trees for an orchard; inside there's a joke about a sentimental speech, immortalized by Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre, delivered to a bookcase (*Cherry Orchard*).

The Russian genius behind these comical allusions was the grandson of a serf. With his writings and medical practice, he supported his parents, siblings, and thousands of needy

story highlights

R.H.Thomson last starred at the Belfry in *Ashes* by David Ruskin in 1983. He directed Yasmina Reza's comedy, *Art*, here in 2002.

Brenda Robins starred in *Emerald City* by David Williamson in 1990.

In 1988 the Belfry produced Christopher Durang's *Beyond Therapy*, starring Glynis Leyshon.



why I chose this play

This play made me laugh out loud when I saw it on Broadway, in the summer of 2013. I laughed out loud and had a wonderful time. And then that wonderful time turned magical. Much to my surprise, and without realizing quite how it happened, I found myself incredibly moved.

Christopher Durang, one of the great funny-men of the American theatre, has created a play that manages to mock the clichés associated with the plays of Anton Chekhov, and at the same time use them to create a work of great poignancy.

One doesn't need to know Chekhov's plays to enjoy *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*. It is enough to know that Durang, like Chekhov, creates a world that is everyday and mundane, but also filled with passion and longing. Like Chekhov, he populates the stage with people who are unhappy and filled with longing, and whose extremes of unhappiness and longing almost tips us into the absurd. The two playwrights share an ability to mix despair

and comedy, creating, in both cases, a delightfully human cocktail.

Three of the title characters are in their mid- to late-fifties, and so they are inevitably assessing their lives, enumerating their regrets, yearning for change, and assuming that change will never come. Durang makes hilarious and oh-so-touching use of these emotions. As in Chekhov, these characters are obsessed with their own lives and the obstacles to their happiness. They look for love in the wrong places, nurse ancient wounds, envy the young, long for escape, and look for some sign that their life has not been pointless.

I love this play because it looks at the human condition with great affection – and makes us laugh. We laugh because we recognize ourselves onstage. We also laugh because it all seems so totally absurd and ridiculous. Durang doesn't only steal Chekhov's character names, he also steals his modus operandi: like Chekhov, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is funny and painful and witty and wise.

Michael Shamata
Artistic Director

(UNCLE VANYA AND SISTER MASHUP *continued*)

peasants, children, Jews, and prisoners of the Tsarist gulags. He endowed his fictional servants with as much human dignity as he accorded their masters. (Durang tries to do likewise, giving the cleaning lady an integral role.) When Chekhov was a teenager, his father went bankrupt and the family lost their house. This experience of homelessness marked him deeply, and the fear of it pervades his works – as it does Durang's play, which hinges on Vanya and Sonia's realization that their successful sister plans to sell the house out from under them. The simple joys of country life as Durang depicts them here were also Chekhov's: trees, a heron, a fish-stocked pond, siblings.

But Durang's sweet pastiche is also a serious look ahead – at the future of our shared stories, and the fate of our natural world. The cleaning lady proves uncannily reminiscent of Cassandra, the enslaved Trojan princess from a famous Athenian tragedy, condemned to predict approaching catastrophe, and forever be ignored. (As an ancient tragic rather than a modern realist figure, she gets to wail out her prophesies of doom in verse.) When a costume party forces everyone to choose a "character," we realize that Durang's real interest lies in the dramatic roots of identity itself: Sonia understands her resentment and self-pity largely through Chekhov, and Masha's desire for an entourage of caretakers leads her to dress up as Snow White. If our personalities are shaped by the shows we see and the authors we love, what's in store for the digital philistines, the self-absorbed Spikes of the world? Will they know or care about any stories at all – aside from their own text-messages? Durang isn't too worried. If someone as miserable as Sonia can be saved by a Neil Simon comedy and a Maggie Smith impersonation, then surely there's hope for the rest of us.

Except, well, as Cassandra might say: beware climate change.

Jennifer Wise is a playwright, translator, and associate professor of theatre history at the University of Victoria.

cast & creatives



Yoshié Bancroft
Nina



Lee Majdoub
Spike



Brenda Robins
Masha



Carmela Sison
Cassandra



R.H. Thomson
Vanya



Deborah Williams
Sonia



BOOKS

belfry librarian

We've unleashed the GVPL Librarians on our season scripts. For *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* our Librarian has compiled a list of books to help you get even more out of our production.

Chekhov Four Plays
by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (2005)

And Slowly Beauty
by Michel Nadeau (2013)

A Landowner's Morning : Family Happiness and the Devil : Three Novellas
by Leo Tolstoy (1984)

California Suite, A New Comedy
by Neil Simon (1977)

The Theater of Nikolay Gogol Plays and Selected Writings

by Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol' (1980)

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs
(DVD 2009)

Three Sisters
(DVD 2008)

Acting in Film, An Actor's Take on Movie Making
by Michael Caine (1990)

The Trojan Women
by Euripides (1967)

The Prank, The Best of Young Chekhov
by Anton Chekhov (2015)

Chekhov on Theatre
by Anton Chekhov (2013)

Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike
by Christopher Durang (2013)

List Compiled by Sarah Isbister, GVPL and Erin Macklem, Belfry Theatre.

get engaged

B4PLAY PODCASTS

If you can't make B4Play in person you can hear the full interviews on our website (the respective show page) and our SoundCloud page – soundcloud.com/belfrytheatre.

Select segments from B4Play will air (usually during our opening week) on CBC Radio's *On The Island*.

FREE CHILDCARE PERFORMANCE SUNDAY, APR 26

During select Sunday matinee performances, we offer free, professional childcare (ages 3–10) at the Springridge Early Childhood Centre at 1222 Gladstone Avenue, just a block from the Belfry (free parking is available right across the street in the Victoria High School Parking lot).

We only have a limited number of spots available. To book your tickets and childcare, please call our Box Office at 250-385-6815.

AFTERPLAY WEEKS APR 21–25 / MAY 5–9

Following selected performances of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, we'll host Afterplay – a facilitated discussion where patrons can share their thoughts with fellow audience members. It's a chance to "debrief" after the show and hear how other audience members experienced the play.

TALKBACK THURSDAY THURSDAY, APR 23

Following the 8pm performance of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, join the actors from the show and your fellow audience members for a 20-minute Q & A session.

BOOKSMACK!

MONDAY, APR 27 at 7:30 pm

The librarians are back! Fast, furious and fun, Greater Victoria Public librarians return to the Belfry for Booksmack. They will let their hair down, take off their glasses and speed review their favourite books. Deborah Williams from *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* will be joining the librarians for this special event.

Booksmack is sponsored by Munro's Books.



GET SOCIAL

Follow us on Facebook or Twitter to learn more during the run of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*.



Christopher Durang
playwright



Michael Shamata
director



Cory Sincennes
set & costume designer



Bryan Kenney
lighting designer



Paul Tedeschini
sound designer



Jennifer Swan
stage manager



Jessica McLeod
assistant stage manager

parts & labour

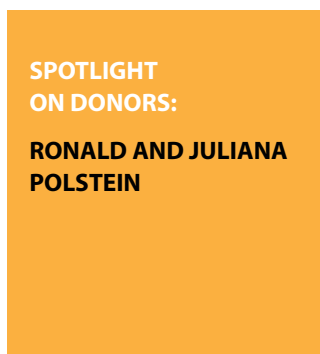
The Belfry will never look the same!

Jane Francis has been the Belfry's Graphic Designer since 1992. She has created a look for this theatre that is both classy and fun. Her exceptional taste has given each piece of printed material associated with the Belfry a clean and exciting look. She is simply the best. And we will miss her terribly!

After years of pursuing her visual art work in her spare moments, Jane has decided to focus on it full time. Her paintings are amazing. I love them. And I am extremely excited for her. I am also heartbroken to be losing a valued partner. She has become a close colleague and a dear friend. On behalf of everyone at the Belfry, I wish her the very best in her art and in her life.

Jane and her frequent collaborator Jo-Ann Richards are having a joint art exhibit at the Baumann Centre for Pacific Opera Victoria, May 14 to 27. Do yourself a favour and check it out.

Thank you, Jane! Much love, Michael.



SPOTLIGHT ON DONORS:

RONALD AND JULIANA POLSTEIN



Fine wine, furs and gifts of cash. These are a few creative ways that Ronald and Juliana Polstein have contributed to the Belfry Theatre this season.

The Polsteins say they were "overjoyed" that their bottle of 1989 Chateau Mouton Rothschild sold over value at Crush 2014, the Belfry's annual fine wine live auction, raising much-needed funds to create more theatre. While they sacrificed their valuable bottle for a good cause – thinking someone else would enjoy it even more than they – the tax receipt had its practical advantages too.

And remember the fur hat in our recent production of *The Best Brothers*, and matching fur cape peeking out from

Bunny Best's oversized closet? These vintage items belonged to Ronald's late mother. He is delighted his mother's spirit had another life on the stage, shortly after he contributed them to our costume collection.

The Polsteins, who moved to Victoria from Connecticut in 1972, tell us they were visitors to our building before the Belfry Theatre was in existence, as patients at a dental clinic in the offices adjacent to what is now our main lobby. By the eighties, when their children were older, they found themselves returning increasingly for the theatre rather than the dentistry. Some of their favourite Belfry productions

over the years include *Mesa* in 2006/07, *The Turn of the Screw* in 2007/08, *Ride the Cyclone* in 2011/12 and this season's *The Rez Sisters*.

Once their children grew up, and they had more disposable income, the Polsteins decided to play a role in keeping the arts alive by becoming donors as well as audience members. They enjoy the magical quality of theatre, which allows the audience to suspend its disbelief, and also that theatre "makes you think." The Polsteins appreciate the Belfry Theatre's mandate to produce predominantly Canadian works and would like to see an increased emphasis on support for Canadian playwrights. Their

John Ulyatt in
THE BEST BROTHERS
by Daniel MacIvor




grandson, now in his last year as a theatre major in Ohio, continues to inspire their interest in live theatre.

Thank you Ronald and Juliana for the unexpected and meaningful gifts – and for going a step further and increasing your annual cash donation to the Belfry this year.

For more information on the many creative ways to give to the Belfry and help us reach our annual fund goal this season, contact:
Susan Stevenson
Development Manager
development@belfry.bc.ca
www.belfry.bc.ca/give

Susan Stevenson, Development Manager



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
						 VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE
2015						11
APR 5	6	7	8			11am B4Play
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
		8pm Vanya P	8pm Vanya P	8pm Vanya O	8pm Vanya	4pm Vanya 8pm Vanya
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
2pm Vanya		8pm Vanya A	8pm Vanya A	8pm Vanya T	8pm Vanya A	4pm Vanya 8pm Vanya A
26	27	28	29	30	MAY 1	2
2pm Vanya CM		8pm Vanya	1pm Vanya 8pm Vanya	8pm Vanya	8pm Vanya	4pm Vanya 8pm Vanya
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2pm Vanya		8pm Vanya A	8pm Vanya A	1pm Vanya SM 8pm Vanya A	8pm Vanya A	4pm Vanya 8pm Vanya A
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
2pm Vanya		8pm Vanya	8pm Vanya	8pm Vanya	8pm Vanya	4pm Vanya 8pm Vanya
17						2pm Vanya C

P Preview O Opening C Closing A Afterplay T Talkback SM Special Student Matinee CM Childcare Matinee

how to buy tickets

BY TELEPHONE 250-385-6815

Please have your credit card ready, as well as the date and time of the performance you wish to attend.

ONLINE

Visit www.belfry.bc.ca/tickets, and buy your tickets online, anytime.

IN PERSON

Drop by our Box Office.

We accept Visa, Mastercard, American Express, debit card, cheques, and, of course, cash.

coming up next – tickets on sale May 19

AUGUST 4 – 23, 2015

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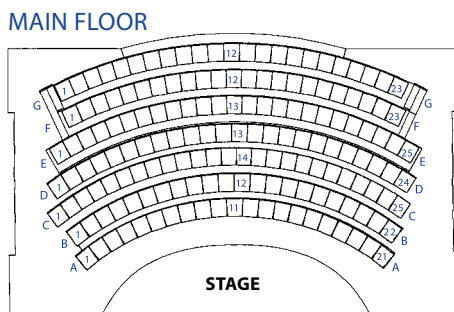
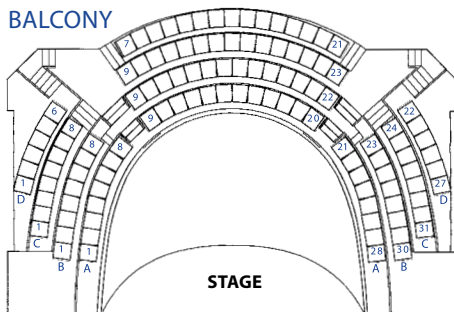
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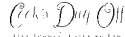
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