

# PROSCENIUM

## The Season

November 3, 4, 5, 6  
**Blood Wedding**  
by Federico Garcia Lorca  
Travellers

January 26, 27, 28, 29  
**The Caretaker**  
by Harold Pinter  
Travellers

March 29, 30, 31, April 1  
**Three Sisters**  
Anton Chekhov  
Travellers

May 24, 25, 26, 27  
**Pygmalion**  
by George Bernard Shaw  
Compass

## Company contacts

**Secretary:** Crystal Anthony,  
758 Kenton Lane,  
Harrow Weald.

Tel 0208 954 2761

**Proscenium Box Office** 0208 422 0400  
Compass Theatre for Pygmalion  
01895 673200

# 76th SEASON

## 1999 - 2000

**PROSCENIUM**

**Three Sisters**

**By Anton Chekhov**

**in a translation by Stephen Mulrine**

**T h r e e                      S i s t e r s**

March 29<sup>th</sup> to April 1st, 2000  
Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre

### Three Sisters

By Anton Chekhov in a translation by Stephen Mulrine

|   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Andrei Prozorov</b>                              | Robert Ewen                         |
| <b>Natalya Ivanovna</b> his fiancée, later his wife | Debbie Keating                      |
| <b>Olga</b> }                                       | Angie Sutherland                    |
| <b>Masha</b> } his sisters                          | Isabelle Cartwright                 |
| <b>Irina</b> }                                      | Dominique Gerrard                   |
| <b>Fyodor Kulygin</b> a teacher and Masha's husband | Alan Glover                         |
| <b>Aleksandr Vershinin</b> Lieutenant Colonel       | David Pearson                       |
| <b>Nikolai Tuzenbakh</b> Baron, Lieutenant          | Vincent Eavis                       |
| <b>Vasily Soliony</b> Staff Captain                 | Charles Anthony                     |
| <b>Ivan Chebutykin</b> Medical Officer              | Colin Hickman                       |
| <b>Aleksei Fedotik</b> 2nd Lieutenant               | Russell Clarke                      |
| <b>Vladimir Rode</b> 2nd Lieutenant                 | Owen Anthony                        |
| <b>Ferapont</b> local watchman, an old man          | Morris Suckling                     |
| <b>Anfisa</b> family nurse, now eighty              | Janet Suckling                      |
| <b>Other parts</b>                                  | Rachel Barnett<br>Pauline Patterson |
| <b>Directed by</b>                                  | Crystal Anthony                     |
| <b>Stage Manager</b>                                | Rachel Barnett                      |
| <b>Assistant Stage Manager</b>                      | Clare Wooster                       |
| <b>Properties</b>                                   | Jane Inglese<br>Sally Hamblin       |
| <b>Costumes</b>                                     | Jeanne Hawkes<br>Evelyn Moutrie     |
| <b>Set Design</b>                                   | Alan Glover                         |
| <b>Music</b>  | Vincent Eavis                       |
| <b>Lighting Design</b>                              | Neil Baker                          |
| <b>Lighting Operation</b>                           | Paul Davis                          |
| <b>Sound Tape</b>                                   | Mike Brownsell                      |
| <b>Sound Operation</b>                              | Paul Ewen                           |

The action takes place in a provincial Russian town at the turn of the last century

**Act 1** Spring – Irina's Saint's Day

**Act 2** Shrovetide – Twenty months later

**Interval (fifteen minutes)**

**Act 3** A Summer Night – Two years on from Act 2

**Act 4** The Prozorovs' Garden – An autumn afternoon, eight months after Act 3

### Anton Chekhov, 1860-1904

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1860 | Anton Pavlovic Chekhov is born, the son of a grocer, in Taganrog.   |
| 1875 | Chekhov's father flees Taganrog due to bankruptcy; Chekhov's is kicked out of their house.  |
| 1879 | Chekhov rejoins his family in Moscow, enrolls in University to medicine.  |
| 1882 | Chekhov is a regular contributor to the St. Petersburg humorous journal, Oskoki, with short stories and sketches.   |
| 1884 | Chekhov begins practicing medicine.   |
| 1887 | Chekhov is a literary success in St. Petersburg with his first play, <i>Ivanov</i> .  |
| 1888 | Chekhov begins publishing his stories in the "thick journals."  |
| 1890 | Chekhov begins to see himself as a serious writer.  |
|      | Chekhov travels across Siberia to visit and report on the penal colony on the island of Sakhalin where he interviews the entire population of prisoners and exiles. |
| 1895 | Moscow Art Theatre opens. Chekhov writes <i>The Seagull</i> .   |
| 1896 | <i>The Seagull</i> opens. It survives only five performances after a disastrous first night.  |
| 1897 | Chekhov realizes he is suffering from advanced consumption.   |
| 1898 | <i>The Seagull</i> is produced successfully by the Moscow Art Theatre.  |
| 1899 | <i>Uncle Vanya</i> is produced successfully by the Moscow Art Theatre.  |
| 1901 | <i>Three Sisters</i> is produced to poor reviews. - Chekhov marries actress Olga Knipper.   |
| 1904 | <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> , Chekhov's last play, is produced.   |
| 1904 | After two heart attacks, Chekhov dies in a hotel bedroom in the German spa of Badenweiler at the age of 44.   |

## Three Sisters – in Performance

When you come out of a performance of Three Sisters your soul may have been wrung to its very depths. But you don't feel like killing yourself, partly because you may have seen something of your own agony and frustration represented on stage and partly because the characters themselves believe there is some discoverable purpose to life...

### *Michael Billington*

In 1896 Anton had sent to Taganrog library a biography of the Bronte sisters: three talented, unhappy girls, stranded in Yorkshire; a despotic father; a mother they do not recall; a brother, once their idol, now a drunken ne'er-do-well. Chekhov's Prozorova sisters have much in common with the Brontes... In this cruellest of Chekhov plays the sisters do not deserve their fate: comedy is incidental.

*Donald Rayfield, Anton Chekhov, A Life*



Chekhov does not name the provincial town where the three Prozorov sisters and their brother live, but we discover its spiritual identity soon enough; its name is Exile...

...The final irony of the play though is its demonstration that we cannot live without the hopes that cut us off from life. We are both poisoned and nurtured by the act of hope itself. And when all hopes for ourselves have been destroyed...then we summon whatever dogged courage we can muster to confront the rest of our lives – and we start to tell the old consoling story once again; only this time not about ourselves, but about another people, living under quite different laws, on the far side of the storms.

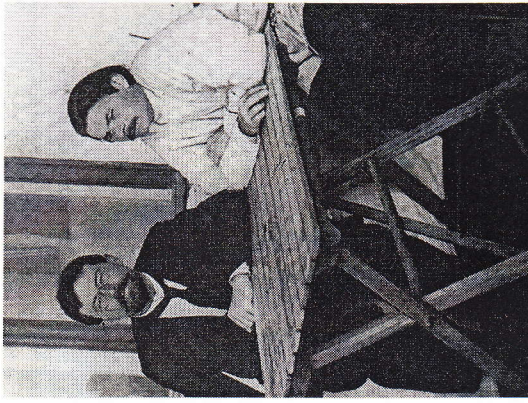
*Michael Frayn (playwright and translator of Chekhov)*

## Three Sisters – in Performance

Chekhov wrote *Three Sisters* whilst he was marooned in the Crimea, hundreds of miles to the south of Moscow, in a provincial town off the main railway line. The town where his play is set is unnamed. From a letter of Chekhov's to Maxim Gorky, however, we know something of what he had in mind. The town was like Perm he said. Perm is in the northern Urals, over seven hundred miles from Moscow. In those the nearest major town by train was Ekaterinburg, and the train journey would have taken 23 hours.

*Simon Goodwin, Oxford Stage Company Associate Director*

### *Chekhov with Maxim Gorki*



I still lack a political, religious and philosophical world view — I change it every month — and so I'll have to limit myself to descriptions of how my heroes love, marry, give birth, die, and how they speak.

*Anton Chekhov, Letter to Dmitry Grigorovich, October 9, 1888*

A play should be written in which people arrive, go away, have dinner, talk about the weather and play cards. Life must be exactly as it is, and people as they are – not on stilts... Let everything on stage be just as complicated, and at the same time just as simple as it is in life...

*Anton Chekhov*

What happens? Some people would say of Chekhov that nothing happens... the contrary view is that everything happens that could possibly happen: people fall in love, are happy, are miserable, get older, get drunk, marry, don't marry, die etc etc. What else is there?

*Mike Poulton (translator of Chekhov)*

## Three Sisters – in Rehearsal

Just before rehearsals began on the very first production of the play at the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1901, the director Stanislavski wrote to Chekhov. In his letter he explained how, at that stage, he saw the play:

- Act 1 Joyous, lively
- Act 2 Chekhovian mood
- Act 3 terribly tense, works on speed and nerves. Towards the end energy has run out and tempo slackens
- Act 4 not sure yet

### Simon Goodwin



Describe at least one rehearsal of *Three Sisters* to me. Isn't there anything that needs adding or subtracting? Are you acting well my darling? But watch out now! Don't pull a sad face in the first act. Serious, yes, but not sad. People who have long carried a grief within themselves and have become accustomed to it only whistle and frequently withdraw into themselves. So you can often be thoughtfully withdrawn on stage during conversations. Do you see?

*Chekhov, letter to Olga Knipper, who played Masha, 2 Jan 1901*

Of course everything must be quiet on stage in the third act so that a sense of people's exhaustion can be felt and the fact that they want to sleep. What's the point of all the noise? It's indicated in the text where the alarm bells are rung off-stage.

*Chekhov to Olga Knipper, 17 Jan 1901*

## A Letter to Chekhov

Darling.

I have just come back from seeing your brother, Ivan, I upset him by telling him about your last days but I felt it was good for him, even if it was distressing. And I could talk about everything, about you for ever, about Badenweiler, about something great, grand that occurred in that rich, emerald-green town in the Black Forest.

Do you remember how we loved our carriage rides, our 'Rundreise', as we called them? You were so affectionate, I understood you so well at times like that. Do you remember how you would discreetly take my hand and squeeze it, and when I asked if you were all right, you would say nothing, just nod and give me a smile for an answer. With what reverence I sometimes kissed your hand! You would hold my hand for a long time and so we drove through a fragrant pine wood.



Your favourite spot was a lush, green glade, filled with sunlight. A stream babbled splendidly along a ditch and you kept telling the driver to drive more quietly, taking delight in a large expanse of fruit trees that stood in the open and weren't fenced in, and no one took or stole a single cherry or pear.

You recalled our own, poor Russia... Do you remember the charming mill, so low it was completely hidden in the thick greenery and only the water sparkled on the wheel? How you liked the comfortable, clean villages and little gardens with the regulation rows of white lilies, rose bushes and kitchen gardens! And with what pain you said: Dearest, when will our peasant farmers live in little houses like these!

Dearest, dearest one, where are you now...?

*Olga Knipper, 20 August 1904*

## Proscenium

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924. The company's first production was the now little-known *The Tide*, by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then the company has performed nearly two hundred and fifty plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945. In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

If you would like to find out more about Proscenium, please contact:

The Secretary, Proscenium, 020.8.954.2761

---

## Our Next Production

### Pygmalion

By George Bernard Shaw

Arguably GBS is the greatest playwright to have lived and worked in these islands during the 20th century. *Pygmalion*, probably the best loved of his huge output, combines humour and a comment on the strict class divide of the early part of the last century. The well-known characters, perhaps better known from the musical version, are still vibrant and alive in today's more relaxed and less rigidly divided society. Do we, at the dawn of the new millennium, care if "the rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain"? **Not b..y likely! A pity?**

**At the Compass Theatre, Ickenham, May 24th-27th 2000**

For further details contact

**Proscenium Box Office 020.8422.0400**

---

**In accordance with the requirements of the Council:**

**"Persons shall not be permitted to sit or stand in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any of the other gangways."**