

# Production Notes

## From the Director

### Kristin Kundert

My first encounter with Chekhov was in a dramatic literature class in college. Like many undergraduates, I found *The Cherry Orchard* long and boring. My professor said it was a comedy. I didn't laugh once. Christopher Durang also had a similar experience when he first read Chekhov, but he was only sixteen and reading plays for fun and not for a grade. He was a precocious young man.

Several years later, in graduate school, I had my second encounter with Chekhov (*The Three Sisters*) and my first encounter with Durang (*Baby with the Bathwater*). I found Durang to be one of the funniest playwrights I had ever read, and this time around I was enthralled with Chekhov. Durang too found his later encounters with Chekhov's plays very funny and moving. At eighteen, he fell in love with *The Seagull*. He was always ahead of me.

All of Chekhov's texts have themes about the tediousness of life – great material for a comedy writer. His characters' search

for meaning in a meaningless world. They want change, but fear it and can't accept it when it comes. His characters can't communicate and, in the end, are left feeling disconnected from each other with little hope for their futures.

Chekhov could find humor in these depressing ideas, but Durang could make them hilarious. He wanted to see what would happen if he placed some of Chekhov's characters in contemporary times. Therefore, Vanya, Sonia, and Masha encounter their fifties in a world that appears to be collapsing, where families are breaking apart as are the ice flows in the Arctic. Every day they experience the same routines, and the only possibility they see in the future is economic, societal, and environmental destruction. Sounds funny, right? Durang uses humor to unearth hope from the love Vanya, Sonia, and Masha have for each other. He pokes fun at their inability to change, at their stubbornness, and at their isolation. Perhaps we, the audience, laugh so that we don't cry as we recognize the same flaws in ourselves. The characters find comfort and strength in their love, with Durang suggesting that there is still hope for humanity if we draw upon love to face our uncertain future. So, enjoy the play, laugh, love, live.

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## From the Scenic Designer

### Eric Chamness

A house can be a very personal object to a lot of people. Memories are made, good and bad experiences are had, and copious amounts of time are spent within these walls. A house can influence people and alter life decisions. The comfort and safety of a home can be a warming yet binding feeling. In this comedy, we see the characters struggling to get out of their comfort zone, and the home adds to their struggle. Sometimes the struggle can be

funny, and Durang bluntly reminds us that it's important to be able to laugh at yourself in the midst of chaos. This particular set is the interior of a Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Victorian farmhouse. In designing the set, one of my goals is to treat the space like a character of the show. This works on two levels: first, embracing the wonderful Cellar Theatre by using its space rather than blocking it off, and second, viewing the set as an actual character in the show rather than walls in which people perform. The aged paint treatments and photos on the walls reflect the life this house has experienced.