



**Production team**

Director – James Suckling

**Cast**

Maid servant – Sharon Allison  
 Ian Samuels – Connor Bailey  
 Pauline – Berny Baretto  
 Kit – Christopher Bird  
 Nina – Nona Davies  
 Basil Trevelyan – Mark Ewbank  
 Peter Saunders – John Fenner  
 Simon Meadows – Siôn Grace  
 Martha – Vicky Holding  
 Edward Davison – Peter Nouwens  
 Irene Anderson – Dawn Suckling

Hi John,  
 I just had to write to tell you how terrific your performance was this evening. The embodiment of Chekhov. Beautifully judged.  
 Sue Moore  
 Artistic Director

**Behind the scenes**

Stage manager – Adrian Matthews  
 Lighting design – Malcolm Hunt  
 Sound design – Phil Reynolds  
 Set design – Richard Moore

**Review (Warwickshire World): Timeless Chekhov classic gets sensitive and intelligent adaptation on Leamington stage**

The Seagull, Anton Chekhov's comedy of unrequited love, is adapted and set in late Victorian England. The transposition does not change the essence of the play, which for a comedy, as Chekhov described it, is full of sadness and frustration. Indeed, there are few laughs. The comedy lies in the human condition, which is full of hope and laced with disappointment and tragedy. It is a moving, thoughtful play that will linger in the memory.

James Suckling, the director and adaptor of this sensitive, intelligent production, has dispensed with all Russian references and renamed the characters. Now we are in Cornwall on Peter Saunders' (John Fenner) estate, where Irene Anderson (Dawn Suckling), an old friend and famous actress, likes to visit and where her son Kit (Christopher Bird), an aspiring writer, lives. Kit is in love with Nina (Nona Davies) who is herself in love with Irene's lover Basil Trevelyan (Mark Ewbank), whom Kit loathes, not only for the sake of rivalry, but because Trevelyan is a successful writer of popular fictions. Trouble is, Kit's own writings are deeply unfashionable, and he despises himself for his failures. Then, there's Martha (Vicky Holding), daughter of the estate manager (Connor Bailey), who is in love with Kit and who, in desperation, unhappily marries local schoolteacher Simon Meadows (Siôn Grace).

The sadness of the play is in the indifference of the older characters, most of whom are too wrapped up in themselves to see the damage they are doing. Dawn Suckling is gorgeous as Irene, beautiful to look at but with an empty heart. She is, arguably, the only 'star' in an ensemble piece in which the whole must be, and is, greater than the sum of its parts. Beneath the stillness of the country atmosphere great passions are stirred in the longings of a younger generation for love and recognition. We know, of course, that that generation would soon be slaughtered in their millions, in part by the indifference of their elders.

**Review (Leamington Observer): Chekhov classic feels pleasingly at home in Loft's new setting**

The era and the location may have changed but for those trapped in Chekhov's suffocatingly claustrophobic world the problems remain steadfastly the same.

A country retreat away from the rigours and attractions of Victorian London plays host to Chekhov's trademark band of wistful and perennially disappointed dreamers caught without the means or determination to see those dreams come to fruition.

Endless talk of the importance of art and the need to keep searching for life's ultimate meaning is interspersed with equally endless talk of the hopelessness of love in director James Suckling's own re-scripting of the work.

It's an adaptation which eschews the opportunity to enliven the action while somehow managing to keep things moving so the production, despite its constant portrayal of stifling boredom and mind-numbing introspection, never actually drags.

Richard Moore's design is a fine blend of outdoor space and interior crampedness. The lowering presence of the abandoned garden stage throughout the final scenes is hugely effective. Just as important though is the non-stop soundscape running from evening birdlife to impending tempest which both anchors the action and steers us clear of those empty, sapping silences which can so easily spoil Chekhov productions.

There are some fine performances from the Loft cast. Christopher Bird and Nona Davies as the young idealists yearning for the perfect life they feel writing and acting will bring them are well-matched and the final scene recognising the regrets and mistakes they inevitably have is beautifully pitched. Dawn Suckling portrays the matriarch Irene as a woman more at home playing the lead on stage than she is in her private life. John Fenner is excellent as her brother, constantly grounded and in a position to add the odd trenchant comment on the assembled, self-regarding party.

A fine performance comes too from Vicky Holding as the doomed, lovelorn Martha whose love and hopes all disappear as quickly as the brandy in her very active glass. Martha also provides two genuine highlights in front curtain songs added in to smooth breaks between acts – a very welcome addition indeed.

Chekhov always calls for good ensemble playing and the cast work well together and will only improve as the play's run continues.

This is a challenging play – these monumental examinations of human isolation and disappointment always are – but in this spirited and well-observed production the Loft goes a long way to making a case for why we continue to explore and enjoy them.

Matthew Salisbury





