

REVIEWS • Theatre

The Seagull 2288

Reviewed by Karl Levett

Presented by the Cherry Orchard Center, produced by Marina Levitskaya and Victor Rashkovich, at the ArcLight Theatre, 152 W. 71 St., NYC, Nov. 5-21.

This spirited adaptation by **Alexandre Marine** of Anton Chekhov's masterpiece all takes place on Treplev's makeshift stage. This stage, cleverly designed by **Corey Larson**, is all askew and replete with odd angles. Thus, in this setting, Marine, who also directs, asks the audience to examine Chekhov's "The Seagull" from new angles while he emphatically supplies the significant stresses. The conceit allows for that none-too-original play-within-a-play concept, providing the freedom to take liberties and fashion the play anew. While these liberties are often intelligent, the results at times can seem like Chekhov in shorthand or Anton on speed. Still, the Cherry Orchard Center, a welcome group of Russian theatre professionals in New York, knows its literature, here presenting a classic with game-loving twists.

What are these games? The title seems to come from the card-playing scene in the final act—here it's lotto,

and 22 and 88 are the first and last numbers. More importantly, Marine asks his cast to play some scenes with sudden melodramatic flourish, complete with Hollywood-style musical accompaniment. These sometimes tip over into pratfall slapstick, with the director seeming hell-bent on proving that this play is what Chekhov always claimed, a comedy. Some other excesses, such as simulated masturbation and Treplev playing a didjeridoo, just seem curiously old-fashioned. On the other hand, **Nadia Fadeeva's** costumes wittily bridge the old and the new.

Yet despite these affectations, Marine is still able to show the power of the play. This very physical adaptation is best when Chekhov is given his head. For example, Nina's shivering return is wonderfully moving. Also, Marine is blessed with a cast in



Pavel Antonov

A scene from "The Seagull 2288," with Jill Larson (l.)

which most members could easily play the original version. **Jill Larson's** Arkadina emphasizes the actress, **Jonathan Kells Phillips** is a truly ardent Treplev, and **Katy Downing's** Nina captures both innocence and pathos. While **James Hallett** is a rather lackluster Trigorin, **Sayra Player's** miniskirted Masha best combines the new and traditional of this energetic production.

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