



A FRUITY FAMILY Studio Theatre is remaking Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. LIZ DURDEN

A cherry-picked production

The Cherry Orchard

Directed by Richard Greenblatt
Starring Meredith Bailey, Kate Bateman, Tracy Leigh Campbell, Darren Dolynski, Katherine Gorham and Alana Hawley
Runs 29 March to 7 April
Studio Theatre

PAUL BLINOV
Arts & Entertainment Staff

The Cherry Orchard is a play about saying goodbye to the past and trying to embrace an unknown future. Fitting, then, that it's also one of the final performances of this year's graduating BFA class, who will soon be doing just that.

Famously written as a farce but subsequently directed as a tragedy, *The Cherry Orchard* depicts a Russian family's return to their old estate in an attempt to prevent it from being sold. However, they end up wasting their precious time on trivial matters and take little action to save their plot of land. It took Darren Dolynski, who plays free slave Yermolai Lopakhin, a few reads before he found a deeper connection with the unusual script.

"Originally when I read the play, I thought, 'What the hell is this?'"

Dolynski admits. "I didn't find it funny. I didn't even find it interesting, really. But upon further reading and delving into [the script] more, the play became immensely interesting, and hilarious. You have a bunch of characters who seem like they aren't doing anything, but inside, it's like all these kettles on stage, ready to boil over."

The Cherry Orchard was penned by Anton Chekhov in turn-of-the-century Russia, a socially unstable time when the country was a messy blend of crumbling aristocracies, an emerging middle class and many growing revolutionary ideologies. This uncertainty is reflected in the script, and according to Ben McIvor, who fills out the role of servant Yasha, because of this shaky political landscape, the characters are caught between the past they understand and the future they don't want to embrace.

"[In the play], the world is changing and there are people who change with it, and also those who hold on to the past and who do nothing to protect their futures," McIvor notes. "The play really looks at a lot of that aspect. The family comes home to say goodbye to their old life, to the fall of their society, but they refuse to fully

accept it and move on to the future."

This may seem like serious subject matter for a play that was originally written to be humorous, but McIvor clarifies that this was never meant to be a traditional comedy. *The Cherry Orchard* relies on the gravity of situations, not gags, to provoke laughter.

"The play's not 'one, two, three, punch line.' It's a situational comedy, and the relationships are what's really funny," McIvor states. "The characters, and what they're trying to do to move forward yet still hold onto the past is so ridiculous and so mundane that you either laugh in pure utter disbelief of what they're doing, or you laugh because it's better than crying."

The combination of laughter and tears *The Cherry Orchard* is meant to draw from audiences is likely tugging on each actor as well; they're all on the verge of graduating, leaving the safety of university behind and trying to embrace their own unknown futures. But as Dolynski observes, life always has a bittersweet tinge to it, and like in the play, it cannot be ignored.

"Laughter and tears are so close to each other," Dolynski explains. "Life is like that: it's really funny at times, but also really sad."

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