

# THE CHERRY ORCHARD

2001

## ENTERTAINMENT



### RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

## Intimations of revolution

**I**N THE right hands Chekhov's fictional people become real to me, and David Lewsey's production of *The Cherry Orchard* for Teddington Theatre Club at Hampton Hill Playhouse last week had a cast of entirely believable characters.

No-one takes centre stage for long in this play. Ideally the mood and atmosphere is created by ensemble playing and this was achieved seemingly effortlessly by unselfish acting by the whole cast.

Susan Reoch's Ranevskaya had great serenity and radiance as she returned to her ancestral roots - the decaying grandeur of her country estate, and later when her beloved cherry orchard is doomed, her paroxysms of grief were immensely moving.

Chekhov's story, a mix

of realism and symbolism, of the ruination of a pre-revolutionary Russian family by their own heedlessness, is described by him as part tragedy, part comedy and sometimes even farce, had the last two of these embodied, in this instance, by the wonderfully funny Stephen Bentley as Gaev, nearly always disengaged from immediate concerns, and aiming an imaginary cue at billiard balls.

Adding comic touches too was John Roth as the clerk, Yepihodov, absorbed and lamenting his squeaky shoes; Claude Wheeler's eccentric Carlotta and an amusing account of self-regarding Dunyasha from Lynn Lewsey, declaring her sensitivity as she gazed into her pocket mirror.

There was an assured performance from David R Blackburn as arrogant manservant, Yasha and Giles

Henderson brought a lightness to mature student Pytor's pedantry.

Although there were some anguished glances from Sophie Compton's constantly angry Varya to Nick Young's Lopahkin, who came across as engagingly extrovert, there wasn't much sense of unspoken love.

Karyn Victoria Scott's Anya, Ranevskaya's daughter, was quick to sympathise but still bubbled with irrepressible youthful optimism in her love for Pytor.

Chekhov's interweaving of tragedy and comedy is seamless and as the curtain came down on David Crawlwy's shambling old manservant, Firs, accidentally locked in the abandoned house, it's a potent image of the break-up of the old order.

Jenny Scott