

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRICAL ARTS FOR STAGE AND SCREEN

sharing **STAGE**

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Seagull

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DIRECTED BY

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THE SEAGULL IS PRESENTED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., NEW YORK.

DRAMATURG'S NOTE

What makes us come to watch theater? What draws us to watch other people's lives play out in front of us, their joys, their hopes, their fears, their loves, their triumphs, their losses ... their regrets?

I can't help it: every time I watch this play, I feel something.

At the first cast meeting, director Jeremy Sortore spoke to us about his graduate study at the Moscow Art Theatre. We watched clips from recent Russian work. It's big, experimental, bold. People move and speak with larger-than-life expression. It's because they are expressing human emotions that are always larger than life, sometimes larger than we humans have the power to express in words. It's like a dance. If you haven't seen it, you should.

Theater in Russia is crucial, Sortore explained. It's where all walks of people gather to reinforce what is important to them. To protest. To connect. To debate. To celebrate.

"I understand now,
Constantine... the
most important thing
isn't fame, or glory, or
anything that I dreamed
about, but the ability to
survive. To carry your
cross, and keep moving."

– Nina, *Seagull*

Over a century ago, in 1898, this is where Anton Chekhov's *Seagull* had its real debut, at the Moscow Art Theatre. Back then it was a new, experimental theater company. Stanislavski, the director, was improvising. After experiencing rejection at the St. Petersburg premiere in 1896, Chekhov wrote, "I thought ... [my] instinct ... must have gone wrong for good."*

These artists knew failure, and they knew the human stories that they were writing about.

The Moscow production was a success. The theatre company went on to produce for another century ... and Chekhov kept writing. I can't help but feel it, though, as I watch this play: The firsts. The loneliness. The struggle. The rejection. The unjustified hope. The triumph. What it's like to be on the brink of something that hasn't succeeded yet. The human story. It's all there on stage, just like it is there all around us.

Maybe the human story is the point. The point of theatre. The point of art. Maybe feeling a little more empathy for one another, listening harder. I hope, as you watch *Seagull*, that you feel something.

– Jess Bird, Dramaturg

*Anton Chekhov, as quoted. in "The Seagull." Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seagull
Background image: William Lionel Wyllie (1851–1931) Wikimedia Commons

Watch a clip from Satirikon Theatre's recent production of *Seagull*, directed by Yuri Butusov.



WHY A SEAGULL?

Chekhov named his story after a bird and set it on a beautiful lake. Why? Could it be the bird's freedom that inspires envy? Its resilience allowing it to thrive in air, land, and sea? Its helplessness against the laws of the universe? Its inability to save itself from death?

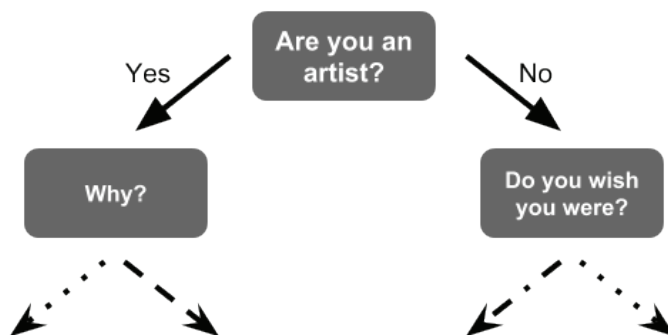
Watch in the show for the times when an alternate Nina character comes on stage to dance. Is she the seagull? Or is she, like the seagull, a reminder of all these things: a deep human desire for something we can't have, our inability to escape this deep yearning, and our determination to handle it with resilience?



Image credit: S. Didam, 2007. (Public Domain)

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ART?

The characters in *Seagull* spend a lot of time talking about art: what it is, how it works, what they think about it. Want to find out how you compare? Take this quiz to find out!



Scan this QR code to take the quiz.

Or visit this link:
<https://tinyurl.com/seagullquiz>



IT'S A COMEDY?

Chekhov insisted *Seagull* was a comedy.

Why?

Are there moments in *Seagull* that are tragic?

Are there moments that are funny?

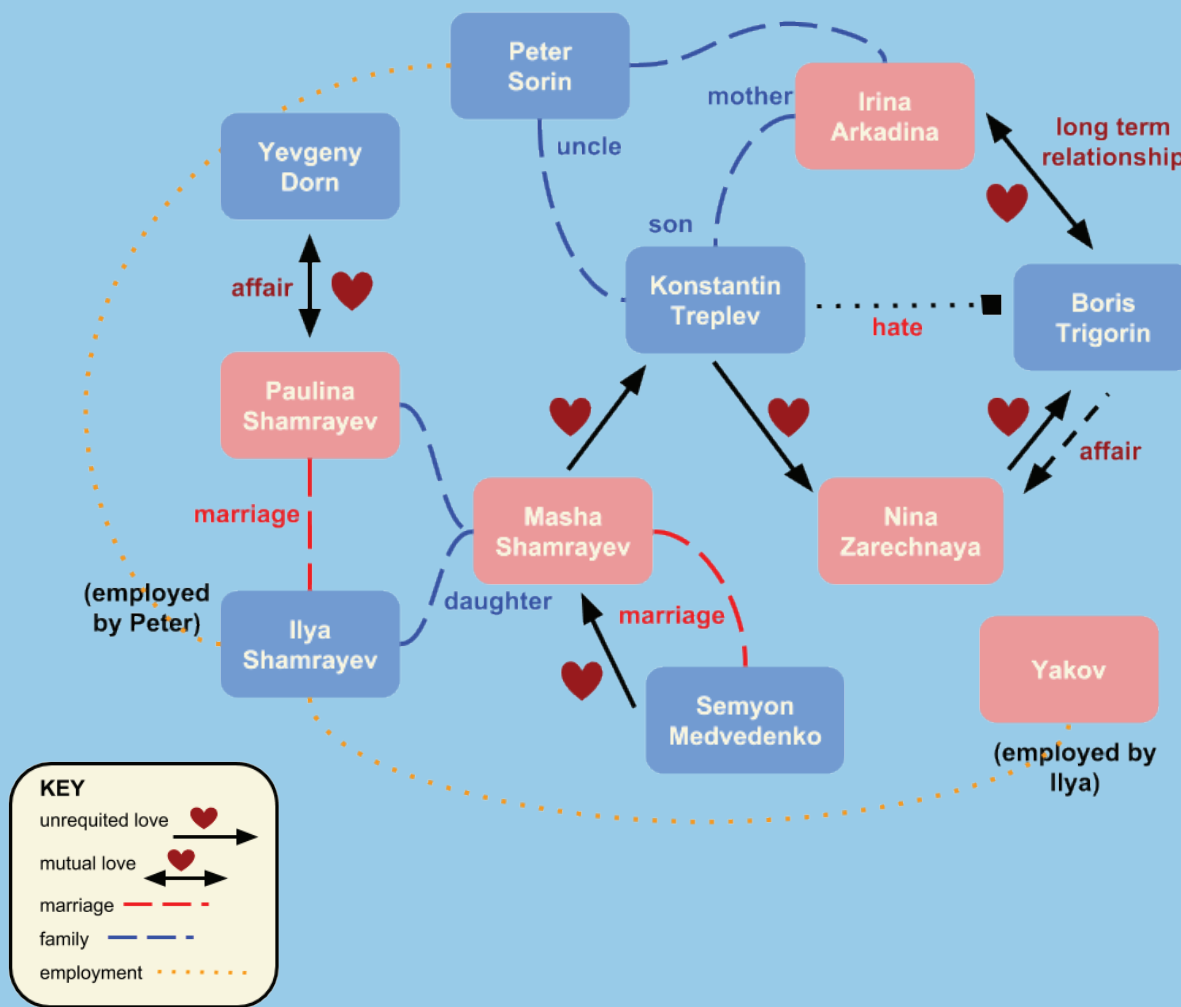
Funnily tragic?

Tragically funny?

Is life like that?

RELATIONSHIPS

Watching a Chekhov play like *Seagull* usually requires discerning a web of different relationships between characters. This diagram might help to get you started.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

So much of *Seagull* is about moments where people fail to be there for one another. I can't help but wonder:

- How often do we fail to act when deeply needed by someone else?
- How can we be better listeners for one another?
- What can we do when we hear things like those in the play from those we love?

CREDITS:

Sharing Stage is published by the TYE Center for Theatre, Youth, and Education at UVU. This issue was guest edited by dramaturg Jess Bird under the direction of Dr. John Newman, Director of the TYE Center, and Professor Janine Knighton. Graphic Design by Jason Warren.