



kanata theatre

PRESENTS

VANYA

AND

SONIA

AND

Masha

AND

SPIKE

BY

CHRISTOPHER DURANG

DIRECTED BY JIM HOLMES

MAY 15 - 19 & 22 - 26 2018 | 8PM

*Vanya and Sonia  
and Masha and Spike*

by Christopher Durang

Directed by Jim Holmes

**CAST**

VANYA

Bryan Morris

SONIA

Chrissy

CASSANDRA

Shirley Manh

MASHA

Kim Strauss

SPIKE

Jordan Anger

NINA

Jillian Facchin



# Kanata Theatre wins critics awards

BY ANIL JHALLI

As it continues to celebrate its 50th year, the Kanata Theatre has won three prestigious Capital Critics Circle awards.

Two of them were for its production of 'Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike'. The comedy, written by Christopher Durang, tells the story of two siblings, Vanya and Sonia, who live together and constantly complain about each other's lives. Enter their more star sister, Masha, who supports them, and her new boyfriend, Spike, who threaten to sell the house that Vanya and Sonia live in.

James Holmes, who has been a member of the Kanata Theatre since 1973, received the Best Director (Community) award for the production.

"It's great recognition for us and shows people we are putting on really great shows," said James Renaud, who serves as the Director of Marketing and Publicity for the Kanata Theatre. "We have a really dedicated group of members. There's not just one person, it comes down to everyone and it's a huge team effort."

Holmes said his award was validation for everyone involved in the production, from the actors and the crew behind the scenes, for six months of effort and dedication in bringing this Tony Award winning play for local theatregoers.

"We have a very strong stable of people who were working at this," said Holmes, a resident of Kanata since 1970. "It's very encouraging for everyone involved."

Holmes has acted and directed in more than 50 productions for the Kanata Theatre and helps out with set construction and design.

He has also served on the board of directors and has served three terms as the theatre's president.



Submitted photo

Heidi Roberts, left, James Holmes and Chrissy Hollands of the Kanata Theatre were winners at the 2018 Capital Critics Circle Awards earlier this month.

"It is a major source of recreation, especially for people in Kanata," said Holmes of the local theatre's impact over the last five decades. "It's been a massive factor into the growth of the west end and has become so important to many, many people."

Holmes was already a fan of the play and was eager to present it to a local audience. Some of the themes and characters are derived from the works of the famous Russian playwright Anton Chekov, who Holmes said is a source of inspiration and admiration.

"It's been a very popular play, especially in the U.S.," said Holmes, who first caught the acting bug in high

school. "It's a very satirical comedy. An adult comedy with universal appeal."

Also receiving an award was Chrissy Hollands in the Best Actress (community) category for her portrayal of Sonia in the play while Heidi Roberts won the Tartan Award for Best Design for a community production for 'Arsenic and Old Lace'.

The 13th Capital Critics Circle Awards took place on Dec. 3rd at the National Arts Centre.

It is affiliated with the Canadian Association of Theatre Critics (CTCA) and the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC).

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*Capital Critics Circle Award  
Best Director, Community Theatre  
Best Actress, Community Theatre - Chrissy Hollands*

# **KANATA THEATRE SCORES HIGH WITH VANIA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE**

**REVIEWED BY JAMIE PORTMAN ON MAY 16TH, 2018**

Theatre in Ottawa and the region

Community theatre 2018, Kanata

One of the pleasures of Kanata Theatre's latest offering is its success in delivering a succession of plausible, fully-realized characters.

Furthermore director Jim Holmes and his cast are attentive to the nuances, both comic and wistful, of Christopher Durang's amusing yet curiously heartfelt comedy, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*.

To be sure, these characters inhabit their own, slightly skewed universe while also providing a conduit for Durang's own wry reflections on the real world. What's more, the plays of Anton Chekhov crop up as reference

points in this 2012 script — even though you need to know nothing about his works to enjoy what's happening on the stage of Kanata's Ron Maslin Playhouse.

All of which points to the need for balance and cohesion in the rippling, modulating landscape of this play. In directing it, Holmes gives full rein to its explosions of outright zaniness, but the production also remains anchored to the truth that these are real human beings who are often — in true Chekhovian form — trapped in sad, unfulfilled lives.

It's a measure of this production's quality that it manages to engage us early on with a potentially static opening scene in which we meet two people seated in their country home awaiting a glimpse through their picture window of some blue herons. They're middle-aged siblings — Vanya, who is quietly gay, and Sonia, who continues to be preoccupied with the fact that she was an adopted child. Both are discontented with life, although neither seems that capable of embracing its possibilities, and somewhat burdened by the fact that their culture-vulture parents named them after characters in Chekhov plays.

Two people sitting together having a morning conversation — a prescription for boredom? Possibly, but not here. Thanks to the quiet, rueful dignity of Bryan Morris's performance as Vanya and the restless, slightly neurotic awareness of lost opportunities inherent in Chrissy Hollands's portrayal of Sonia, these two lonely people do engage our attention

What's also evident is that they're getting on each other's nerves. Hence, within this emotionally suppressed atmosphere, a squabble over morning coffee has the impact of an exploding grenade. Can this be happening in what seems to be a reassuring, perfectly groomed environment? It can. Indeed, designer

Dean Flockton's idyllically imagined farmhouse setting provides a gently ironic counterpoint to the turbulence in the lives of its inhabitants.

More turbulence ensues with the arrival of Masha, their worldly actress sister. Five times married, she's now in the company of her new boy toy, a dim, muscle-flexing narcissist named Spike. Masha, as self-absorbed as she is skittish, is here because she's been invited to a nearby costume party and plans to go there as Snow White — her scenario also includes dressing up her siblings as two of the dwarfs. Masha, capable of causing turmoil by her very presence, also has an announcement to make. As owner of the farmhouse home in which her siblings have lived for decades, she's now proposing to sell it.

There are echoes of *The Cherry Orchard* here — indeed, Sonia immediately starts flapping about the fate of the very few cherry trees on this Pennsylvania property, a smattering that she would like to believe constitutes a real orchard. But we're also getting garnishes of *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* as processed through playwright Durang's own anarchic sensibility.

"The play takes Chekhov characters and puts them through a blender," Durang said a few years ago, and this is particularly true of the character of Masha. This is the most challenging role in the script, drawing on the personalities of both that self-admiring humbug, Serebryakov, in *Uncle Vanya* and Irina Arkadina in *The Seagull*. In portraying Masha at Kanata, Kim Strauss is entrusted with evoking elements of two of the most irritating characters in the Chekhovian canon. She can scarcely be blamed for delivering an over-the-top performance when she's playing an over-the-top personality. The comic skills of this actress serve her well in portraying someone who is programmed to turn every action and every utterance into a drama. But it's a characterization tinged with a fearful awareness of

time's passage and with it her fading career: there's poignancy in her comic indecision about admitting to her true age.

Three additional performances make solid contributions to the mix. As Spike, Jordan Anger is successful in conveying the dopey, macho charm of Masha's preening muscle-boy lover. Jillian Facchin makes the most of a worshipful innocent named Nina who falls under the roving eye of Spike. And Shirley Manh is an ongoing delight as Cassandra, a volatile cleaning lady who lives up to her name with her dire predictions of misfortune and calamity.

There are a number of solid set-piece moments. One comes when Manh's Cassandra, driven to revenge by the disruptive presence of Masha, goes to work with a voodoo doll. Another comes when Bryan Morris, as Vanya, becomes the playwright's megaphone and navigates his way through a treacherously long monologue bemoaning the death of culture: the fact that this is an outburst of moral passion from a distinctly ordinary man makes it all the more powerful. The speech still seems excessively long, but kudos to Morris for making it to the opposite shore without mishap.

Finally, there is that riveting moment when Sonya, a lonely woman who has given up all hope of a meaningful relationship, receives a telephone call asking her for a date. Chrissy Hollands — uncertain, indecisive, on the verge of once again destroying one of life's possibilities — is outstanding in this scene.

*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* continues at Kanata Theatre to May 26.