

Lyric

THE SEVEN F

BY
**Anton
Chekhov**
IN A NEW VERSION BY
**Simon
Stephens**

Education Pack

The Seagull

This play is an adaptation by **Simon Stephens** of *The Seagull* by **Anton Chekhov** and was directed by the artistic director of the **Lyric Hammersmith, Sean Holmes**. It premiered at the Lyric on 03 October 2017.

This **Education Pack** aims to support teachers in exploring *The Seagull* both before and after the performance, giving practical and written responses to the show. It is set out with three main components **DIRECTORS, PERFORMERS** and **DESIGNERS**; the aim is to give specific information for students studying **GCSE Drama** or **A Level Drama and Theatre Studies** in response to '**Live Theatre Review**'* but also as a tool to enhance learning of different elements of Theatre and exploration of contemporary adaptations of classical text.

Written by **Marilyn Rice, Producer of Education**
Teacher Consultant **Mary Ling**

*This is in line with Edexcel, AQA and OCR examination boards

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Cast



Adelayo Adedayo
Nina



Michele Austin
Pauline



Lloyd Cooney
Jacob



Nicholas Gleaves
Boris



Paul Higgins
Hugo



Lloyd Hutchinson
Leo



Lesley Sharp
Irina



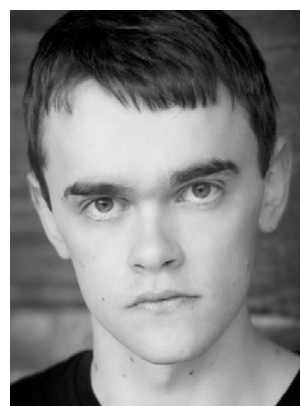
Cherrelle Skeete
Marcia



Raphael Sowole
Simeon



Nicholas Tennant
Peter



Brian Vernel
Konstantin

Creatives

Written by **Anton Chekhov**
In a new version by **Simon Stephens**
Directed by **Sean Holmes**
Design by **Hyemi Shin**
Lighting by **Anna Watson**
Sound by **Pete Malkin**
Casting by **Stuart Burt CDG**

Literal Translation by **Helen Rappaport**
Associate Director **Jude Christian**
Assistant Director **Anna Crace**
Movement Consultant **Imogen Knight**

Starting Points

Before bringing your students to the theatre you may want to give them some information on the plot, characters and themes of the play as well as some social and historical context on **Chekhov**.

Why Chekhov?

This is not the first and will not be the last adaptation of Chekhov, so why do we in the 20th century still want to explore and perform the work of this playwright? Chekhov was born in 1860 in Russia and his first published play, *Ivanov*, was performed in 1887. His most successful and well known plays are *Ivanov*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Uncle Vanya* and *The Seagull*. Chekhov's writing marked a new era of playwriting and teamed with his working relationship with Konstantin Stanislavski we saw the introduction of 'naturalism'. His plays introduced the element of subtext and focused on the inter-relationships of characters; they explored the everyday instead of the fantasy using themes that were universally relatable.

It is indeed these themes of unrequited love, hunger for success and fame and the fragility of relationships through time that still lures us to this text. We, as the audience, can relate and find parts of ourselves within these characters and the storyline of the play.

Who's who?

Please note that this adaptation refers to characters by their first name and in some cases these have been contemporised. In brackets you will find the original names given by Chekhov:

Irina (Arkadina): A successful and well known actress, mother to Konstantin

Konstantin (Trepnev): A budding playwright who is in love with Nina and jealous of Boris' success

Nina: A budding actress who is in love with the idea of fame

Peter (Sorin): Brother of Irina who is not in good health

Leo (Ilya Shamrayev): The estate manager who is married to Pauline

Pauline (Andryevna): Leo's wife but who is in love with the doctor

Marcia (Masha): Leo and Pauline's daughter, she is in love with Konstantin but marries Simeon

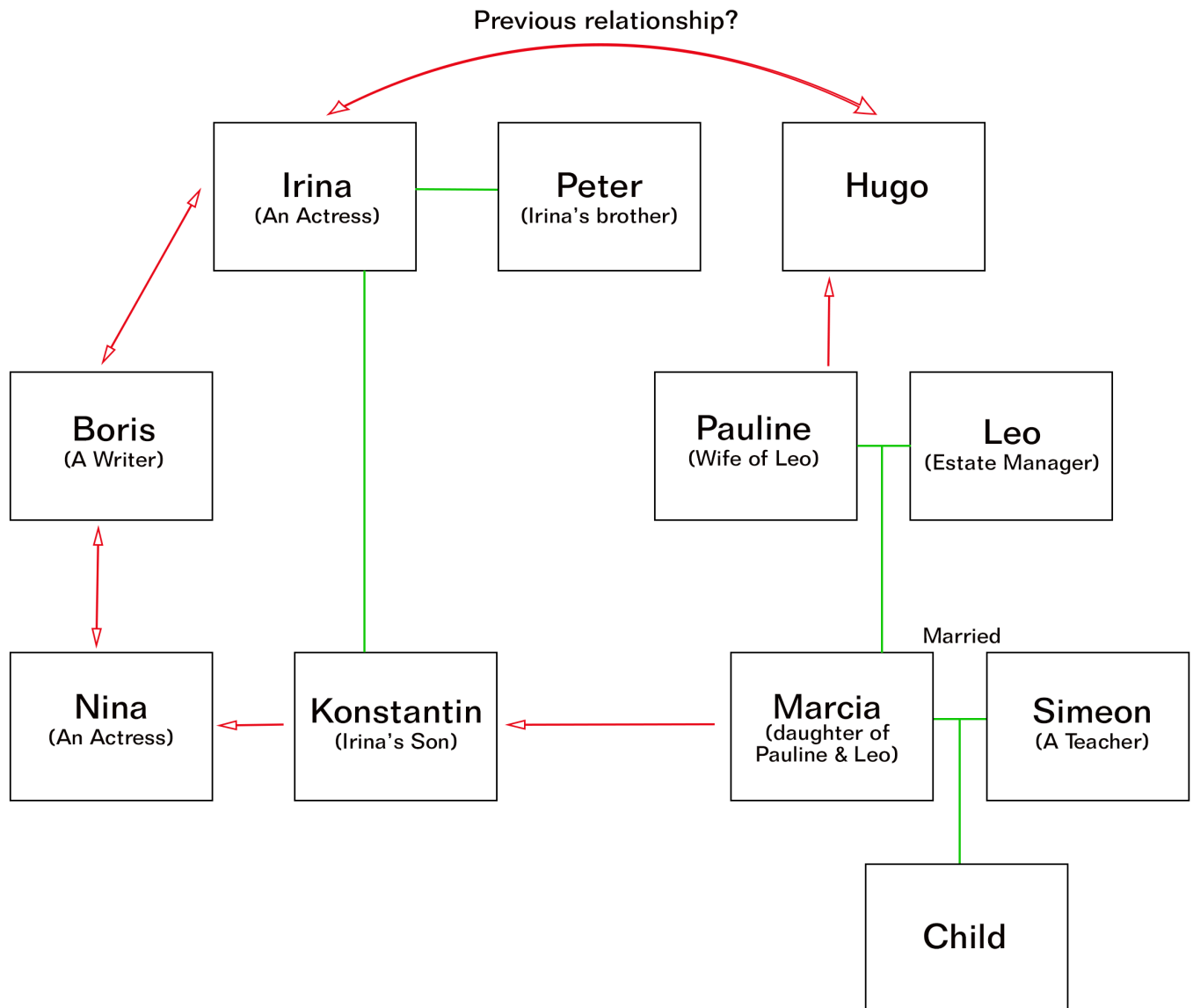
Boris (Trigorin): A famous playwright who is in a relationship with Irina before he becomes infatuated with Nina

Hugo (Yevgeny Dorn): The doctor

Simeon (Semyon Medvedenko): A teacher who is dissatisfied with his place in life and in love with Marcia

Jacob (Yakov): A labourer who works on the estate

Relationships of the Characters in The Seagull



→ In love with

— Related/Family

The Seagull: A brief synopsis

Each act is denoted by a season and is a continuum except Act Four which takes place two years on.

Act One: Spring

As the play begins we are introduced to a nervous yet excited **Konstantin** who is preparing to unveil his first play. He has written it for **Nina** with whom he reveals he is in love. Nina, who is to be the performer of the show, arrives and is nervous about performing in front of **Irina**, Konstantin's mother and a celebrated actress. She is also incredibly anxious about performing in front of **Boris**, a famous playwright who is in a relationship with Irina. We are introduced to **Simeon**, a teacher who is in love with **Marcia** the estate manager's daughter. However Marcia is in love with **Konstantin**. **Pauline** (**Leo** the estate manager's wife) also shares that she is in love with **Hugo** the doctor. Chekhov's sense of mixed up relationships and conflicting desires uses the common elements of farce; the play was written as a comedy.

Irina arrives and the group assemble to watch the show. Irina interrupts and talks through the play and an infuriated Konstantin stops the performance and storms off. Irina and Konstantin argue about the play and the fact Irina has brought Boris to the house. Konstantin does not approve of Boris' writing or style.

At the end of the Act we see Boris and Nina meet for the first time. It is also our first reference to the seagull as Nina explains she is '*drawn to the lake like a seagull*' symbolising being trapped in her environment but also the possibility of being free as a bird.

Chekhov uses this first Act to set up the stories and relationships of all the characters. There are multiple conversations on the Theatre and its form as well as the desire to be famous.



Act Two: Summer

Boris explains the reality of success and fame to Nina but we see her still in awe of his presence. Throughout this Act we see her pull away from Konstantin and focus her attentions on Irina and Boris. Irina welcomes Nina but there is an underlying implication that she is jealous of her youth and beauty. We see Irina take centre stage in this Act and despite her boredom with the countryside she decides to stay on. In this Act Konstantin has shot a seagull and presents the dead bird to Nina. He explains that he will one day shoot himself so we are witness to his demise and depression and privy to an insight of what is about to come.

Act Three: Autumn

Konstantin has attempted to shoot himself but failed and is left with a head injury. He is bandaged up and we witness his discontent both personally and professionally. Irina attempts to comfort him but this develops into a heated argument; Irina is cutting and harsh as she pulls apart Konstantin's work and talent. Throughout this Act we see the relationship of Boris and Nina grow, until Boris becomes infatuated by her and reveals this to Irina asking her to release him as he must go to her. We see Irina beg and sexually coerce Boris back into her arms and they make plans to leave. Nina's infatuation with Boris and becoming an actress comes to fruition as she tells Boris that she is leaving and running away to the city to follow her dreams. He arranges to secretly meet her in the city. Pauline declares her feelings for Hugo (the doctor) but these are not reciprocated. Marcia talks to Boris about her feelings but is resigned that she will marry Simeon. This Act displays a tangled web of lust, love and unrequited love.

Act Four: Winter (two years on)

Konstantin acts as our narrator as he retells the story of how Nina and Boris had a relationship and a child together. Boris left Nina and went back to Irina. Nina lost her child and the only thing she was left with was her career which was not entirely as successful or as fulfilling as she expected it to be. Irina returns to the house as **Peter**, her brother, is very ill. On returning she finds a very distant and discontent Konstantin who has become a successful writer but is still deeply unhappy in his personal life. Marcia has married Simeon and had a child with him but still longs for Konstantin and vows to move away to forget him. Nina returns to the house to see Konstantin but is scared of bumping into Boris and Irina. She is fragile and her speech becomes confused as she explains that she is the seagull but then asserts that no she is an actress. Nina shows she has not given up hope and still wants to try. Hugo has been away for this time overseas and it is clear that he is not entrenched in the social decline that has been experienced by the house. At the end of the play Hugo takes Boris aside and tells him to get Irina out of the house as Konstantin has killed himself.

As an audience, we are left to wonder what will happen next with the majority of the characters discontent and still searching for happiness- yet we remember that this is a comedy...



Themes and Symbols

Unrequited love

Many of the characters experience '**unrequited love**' throughout the play. Irina is famously left by Boris at the end of Act Three as he arranges to secretly meet with Nina. This is despite her alluring attempts to win him back. Konstantin and Nina are together in the first Act but by the end of Act Two we see she has grown bored with him and by Act Three makes plans to meet Boris. Konstantin demonstrates the lengths that a person goes to when they are in love: he recounts how he has followed Nina's career and turned up at hotels that she is staying at. In Act Two Konstantin attempts suicide and shoots himself but is unsuccessful; in Act Four he shoots himself again and it is revealed that he is dead. We witness his unhappiness and lack of fulfilment because he has been rejected by Nina.

Marcia's situation is probably the most clear as we see her deeply in love with Konstantin but this is never reciprocated. She decides to marry and have a child with Simeon to try and move on but ends up wanting to be near Konstantin and not her husband or child. Simeon remains constant in his love throughout the play as he dotes on Marcia, but he marries her knowing that maybe she will never love him back.



Success and fame

Nina speaks longingly of wanting to be famous: '*I want fame; real proper fame*'

Konstantin explains in Act Four of the stark reality of Nina's illustrious fame and the demise of her career in the aftermath of having lost her child and being rejected by Boris. Konstantin himself strives for success with his writing and when this comes to fruition in Act Four it does not fulfil him, because he desperately needs and desires his mother's approval. Interestingly with both of these characters their fame and success is barred because of their focus on 'love'. This want and need for ongoing success is paraded around by Irina who talks of performing and romanticises the notion of what being an actress is. Irina's success is linked to her aristocratic birth and to a specific, popular theatre style that is not approved by Konstantin. Boris shows an alternative side as he explains the negatives of fame and the challenges of being a writer.

Representation and meaning of the seagull

The seagull is first introduced in Act One when Nina says: *'I am drawn to the lake like a seagull'* This is the first time she refers to herself as a seagull. In Act Two Konstantin shoots a seagull and lays the dead bird at Nina's feet saying: *'It's a seagull. I shot it. This morning. I feel very ashamed so I am laying it at your feet'*. Konstantin then goes on to explain how he will probably shoot himself in the end. The seagull becomes a symbol and prefigures his actions in Act Four.

In Act Two Boris refers to the seagull as *'a beautiful bird'* as he is talking to or even about Nina, from this point onwards she makes reference to herself as the seagull. In Act Four as Nina returns with her lost innocence and a failing career she tells Konstantin: *'I'm a seagull. No. That's not it. I am an actress. That's what I am!'* Nina's situation in Act Four is akin to the dead bird that was presented to her by Konstantin, there is however still some ambition left that she rejects the description and explains that she is an actress. Nina commits here to keep trying, which is also an important theme, and contrasts with the choices of other characters in the play.



Mental health

It is clear that Konstantin is suffering from depression which then leads to suicidal thoughts. These deepen and lead to his first attempted suicide and in then in Act Four we see him end his life. This diagnosis of depression is confirmed by Hugo the doctor. In this new version of *The Seagull* it feels appropriate to highlight this as a theme and one you may want to explore with your students, given the current focus on mental health among young people.

It may not have been a theme that would have been focused on when it was written as this was not a subject that could be openly discussed. Irina describes his attempted suicide act as *'silly bang bang'*, it is not discussed as to why he felt the need to go to such extreme lengths. Mental illness was not a socially accepted; especially in the upper classes. Konstantin is a young man struggling with his relationship with his mother, his desire for success and unrequited love. This character and these struggles are very recognisable and still very much relatable in the 21st century.

Discussion points...

Success and fame

Nina talks incessantly in Act one about being famous and how desperate she is to achieve this. She becomes an actress but does she really become famous? Ask your students:

- What does being famous mean today?
- Is this theme still relevant to young people?
- What would be the modern day equivalent to Nina's story, would it have changed in any way?

Mental health

Konstantin ends his life in Act four, there are clear points in the play when we are told that he is struggling and depressed.

- Could there have been an alternative ending to this characters story and if so what could that have been?
- What characters could have supported him and what actions could they have taken?
- Would this situation have been different in 2017 compared to late 1800s and if so how?



Actioning the story

With your students in a circle and using the synopsis notes go through the storyline getting students to take on different characters, as they take on this character they enter the space and improvise the storyline given. As the teacher you act as the joker and narrate throughout. This can also be done with props and pieces of costume so that characters can be interchanged. For example Irina may have a brightly coloured scarf that is used every time she is in a scene.

Outcome: this should give your students a basic idea of the storyline

Love Web

Either write or print out cards with characters names on and ask your students to map out who is in love with who and whose love is unrequited. Once this has been established ask your students to get in two rows facing each other. With their partner they will have two minutes to improvise the following scenarios:

- Konstantin is rejected by Nina as she no longer loves him
- Simeon asks Marcia to come home to him and their baby, she refuses
- Irina persuades (however she can) Boris to stay with her and not go off with Nina
- Nina tells Boris she is going to leave to become an actress and they agree to secretly meet

Pairs can be spotlighted and scenes played out to the rest of the class. They will then try a different scenario with a different partner. Discuss the different relationships and how these scenarios impact each character.

Outcome: Students start to explore the relationships and try out different interpretations of the characters. They will gain an understanding of some of the key moments of the play.

Contemporary Chekhov

As this is a new version it is important for students to explore how the storylines and themes are relevant in the 21st century. In small groups give your students the following scenarios- they are based on the storylines in *The Seagull* but could be taken anywhere. All of these parts of the story happen off stage and in between acts and are explained in the text but never shown. Ask them to create short scenes based on these scenarios.

- Nina is hungry for fame, she moves away from the country to the city to pursue her acting dreams and love interest (Boris- who is much older than her). Reinact their first meeting.
- Simeon proposes to Marcia, she does not want to accept but feels trapped
- Boris goes back to Irina and ask her to take him back

Outcomes: students explore key moments and storyline through a contemporary means.

Being in the Public Eye

There is so much talk of fame and wanting to be successful throughout the play, this exercise explores the public reality and highs and lows of fame. In a form of hot seating ask students to take on characters and take part in a TV interview. Another student may play the interviewer or you as the teacher may do it in role

- Irina putting on a positive show despite being left by Boris
- Konstantin's rise to fame- does it make him happy?
- Boris as a "love rat" because of his behaviour to Nina and Irina.
- Nina's rise to fame but public shame with her affair and love child

Then ask those characters to act out a private moment that shows how they really feel - does this contradict their 'public' persona? Do they wear a social mask?

Nb. This could also be done exploring social media and in a written format where they could write it as a Twitter feed or news report. Stanislavski's concept of 'being private in public' can be explored in more depth here.

Outcome: explores the two sides of private and public for each character and the theme of fame and the reality of their aspirations.



Directorial Interpretation

Sean Holmes, Artistic Director of the Lyric talks about his vision and process for *The Seagull*:



Breaking the Fourth Wall

This term refers to an imaginary wall between the actors and the audience where we hold the illusion of theatre and believability that what an audience is seeing is real. The audience are then privy to the action in a 'fly on the wall' capacity. When an actor steps out and address the audience, this illusion is then broken and thus breaking the fourth wall. This direct address is an aside to narrate the story; it can also be used (as indeed it is in this play) or as an opportunity to express how they feel to a third party. During the show most actors break the fourth wall, it is certainly a style that is embedded in this version.



Performers

Watch the trailer for *The Seagull* featuring the cast:



Chair Chess

Sean Holmes described how during the R & D period of *The Seagull* they discovered that in the first Act where the chairs were positioned determined and informed us of the inter-relationships between the characters. It is the set-up of all the relationships that we follow throughout the play.

In pairs and with a chair ask them to consider the following characters and points in the play, they must decide who is which character and take it in turns to move their chair to imply the objective of the character e.g. Marcia may move a substantial distance on her move and turn her chair in a different direction to communicate how she does not want to be near Simeon and wants him to leave. In the first instance they must not use facial expressions but simply the chair move to imply meaning.

- Act Four Simeon asks Marcia to come home, she refuses
- Act One Irina tries to win back Konstantin's affection after the play
- Act Three Irina persuades Boris not to leave her

These can then be developed where eye contact, facial expressions and gestures are added. The students can move away from the chairs and now create non-verbal scenes to explore the characters' objectives at these key points.

Extended exercise

If you are working with Level 3 students you may want to explore the opening of the play and where you would place the actors to communicate the play's set up of the characters' relationships.

Where would they position:

Irina, Boris, Hugo (doctor), Peter, Konstantin, Marcia, Simeon, Pauline, Leo and Jacob?

They need to consider status, love interests, family relationships and what the action that is currently happening in the play.

Outcome: students explore status, objectives and relationships through spatial awareness.

Discussion points: performer's vocal and physical interpretation of character

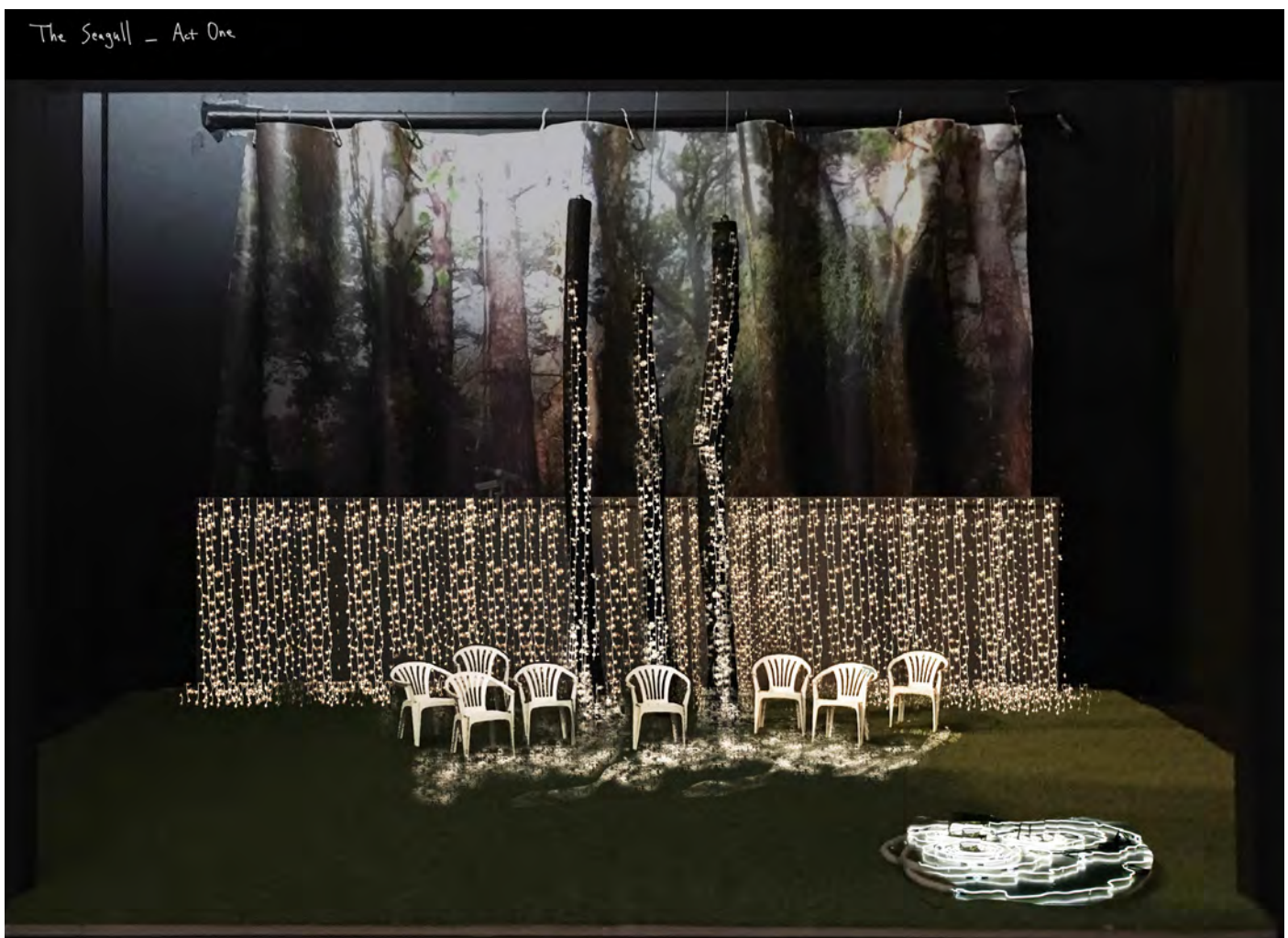
- Nina's last scene in Act Four sees her distressed, disorientated and physically nervous being back in the house. How did the actor achieve this through vocal and physical means?
- As an audience we see Konstantin's demise throughout the play as he loses his love and struggles to come to terms with this. How does the actor achieve this throughout his performance? Make reference to how he presents himself physically and his interaction with other characters throughout the play
- The play begins with Nina and Konstantin in a seemingly happy relationship, what obstacles do they face throughout the play that alters the course of their relationship?

Set design (Hyemi Shin)

Overview; the set is contemporary but is not documentary representative- it is both literal and metaphorical. Each Act is representative of a season so we see time passing.

Act One: Spring

There is a sense of entitlement, luxury and ease which is emanated through the vast lawn and backdrop doused in fairy lights. It becomes a magical, opulent environment that makes you as an audience member want to be there. The chairs are set for the 'audience' of Konstantin's play but the placement of these denotes the relations within the text. Chekhov's first Act unveils the intertwining relationship of all of the characters and positioning of the chairs enhances and physically describes this to the audience. We see a security camera positioned upstage that gives us a sense of the outside world and them being kept out from this space. This is reinforced by the synthetic curtain as a backdrop to 'keep the world out'.



Act Two: Summer

There is a small square of grass and sun loungers are on stage, the lights denote an oppressive summers day with the heat beating down on the characters. The wall at the back of the stage gives us the sense of the characters being shielded from the outside. We do however see the presence of a security camera which suggest there is a potential threat from outside world.



Act Three: Autumn

This is the interior of the house and we see a sense of open space and luxury; this once again enhances the theme of entitlement that they live in a house that offers such sprawling space. It is once again very modern in design but not time specific.



Act Four: Winter

This is the one Act where it is not a continuation of the same year but two years on, there is a sense of economic contraction and we can visibly see that there are less resources available. This is shown by the visible tins of food to expose the sense of a time of change and political unrest. The physical space has shrunk which symbolises the outside threat and potential demise of their entitled and privileged life. We can see the security lights and gates which also enhance this sense of threat from the outside world. This design presents a possible future.



Costume Design (Hyemi Shin)

The costume designs aim to also enhance the sense of opulence in the first Act, this is shown through Irina's costume. It also alludes to her flirtatious and sexual character.



We can see the shift in this by Act Four where the glamour has faded and practical aspects are now in place. There is still a sense of the importance of appearance despite the lack of funds and the practicalities of winter.



To match the set design the costumes (also) emulate the seasons as we can see from Pauline's Act Two 'summer' costume design.



The sense of being timeless but contemporary is achieved by not having all costumes from one time period although we see certain fashion pieces from different eras such as Nina's here.



Konstantin's costume shows his mental struggle as it becomes more dishevelled as the play goes on, in Act Three Peter explains how he has been '*dragging himself around for the last three years in the same old battered coat*'

The coat is very worn and shows the change in circumstance for his family and indeed what may be going on in the outside world that is now impacting on them.



Discussion points...

- Looking at Nina's costume what does it tell us about her status and her personality?
- Compare this to Konstantin's costume in Act Four, what is his status level and what does it say about how he feels at this point?
- The costumes are contemporary but timeless- what are the challenges of this for the director in order to communicate meaning?



Through initial planning with **Sean Holmes**, the concept for the sound design in *The Seagull* was based around the four Acts being clearly separated, both in time and feeling. This led to the Acts being set in each of the four seasons. This gave a starting point of using the auditory world that denotes each of those seasons, but they also brought something else with them, an aggression or relaxation. Each of the Acts are introduced with Vivaldi's 'Four seasons' which is reflective of each act representing each season. The classical music also gives a sense of their affluent and elitist position. It sets the tone of their environment as the act begins. The integration of Vivaldi's Four Seasons also lends itself to contrast the style of the modernised version of Chekhov.

Act One

We have an underscore of bird song throughout that places us both in spring time and in our outside location looking out to the lake. There is a beauty to the soundscape, a calming relaxing feeling of nightfall in springtime but yet there's an excitement for the play.

Act Two

This Act similarly uses the underscore of cicadas to indicate the heat of the summer time. It is so hot and unrelenting that even though there are similar elements to the first act soundscape they are much more intense, repetitive and imposing, we reflect the annoyance that the characters have with one another during this act.

Act Three

As another approach to the start of the project Sean wanted to experiment with the idea of using subtle and discreet tonal elements which heighten specific moments of the play. This then shifts us out of the naturalism of the soundscapes and of the seasons and more into the internal world of certain characters. This is demonstrated in Act Three with music highlighting the repetition and monotony of the characters' days. The music is reintroduced and interspersed with movement such as when they are drinking vodka shots, it denotes time passing and sets the mood of the house. At the top of Act Three we use Vivaldi's Autumn III, which also gives a great sense of preparation for the rest of the scene where the characters are getting ready for Irina's departure.

Act Four

The gun shot is a key moment within the play, the sound is very loud and cuts through the action to shock both the audience and the characters. We are given a clear indicator of what is to come despite the doctor's story of an exploded medicine bottle.



Lighting: Anna Watson

The lighting enhances and reinforces the changing in seasons throughout the play; in Act Two we see the bright, yellow lights snap on. This burst of light sets the scene of 'summer' and the oppressive heat. In Act Four we see blue gels being used to denote the cold of winter, this also reflects the mood of certain characters such as Konstantin.

The lighting enhances the theatrical style of breaking the fourth wall; the lights in Act Two are lowered from above and clearly visible from the side so the audience are aware that it is a theatrical effect.

In Act One we see a play within the play; Konstantin has positioned his theatre lights on stage for Nina's performance. As the play begins the fairy lights are switched on, this is then enhanced by the red mist (created by red gels) and Nina positioning herself on a pool of white lines of light. The 'sulphur' or smoke hits the lights and creates an eerie effect on Nina and her audience. These effects are all created for Konstantin's audience and we see the characters being drawn into his play.



Try this...

In small groups ask your students to come up with their own interpretation of *The Seagull*; they will need to decide on:

- An overall vision/concept for the play (if this is too broad they can work with a specific theme of either unrequited love or success and failure)
- Is it set in a time specific period or is it a symbolic or thematic interpretation?
- What type of staging will it use and how does this enhance their concept?
- What are the main components of the set and does it change in every act?
- Are the costumes from a set time period or non-specific? How do they enhance the understanding of the play?
- What lighting would be used and how does this enhance key moments in the play? (depending on the level they can refer to specific lights, effects and colours)
- What sound and music would they use to enhance their concept? Give examples that could be played and choose key moments of the play

Students could use illustrated diagrams, model boxes, sound clips and written references- this could be done as a quick response exercise or extended to a timelier one. Students in their group would present back their concepts and answer questions from their class.

Outcome: Explores their understanding of the play and developing key design elements in creating a show. They should be encouraged to use Theatrical vocabulary when describing referring to each point.





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Young Lyric is the home for all young people here at the Lyric. We are committed to working with exciting artists and young people to create innovative and exceptional performances and projects. Over the past decade the Lyric has established a national and international reputation for its work with children and young people.

We are profoundly committed to giving young people from all backgrounds access to the arts in order to develop their creative, social, personal and economic potential. In particular we recognise the power of bringing young people into the Lyric to create work in a professional theatre alongside professional artists.

Young Lyric encompasses all of our projects and activities, including classes, performance opportunities, apprenticeships, work experience, supporting emerging artists, schools activity and targeted work supporting vulnerable young people.

Visit the website for more information: <https://lyric.co.uk/young-lyric/>