**Introduction**

**The Seagull – Lyric, Hammersmith**

Welcome to this introduction to **The Seagull** by Anton Chekov in a new version by Simon Stephens at The Lyric, Hammersmith, directed by Sean Holmes.

This production lasts for 180 minutes with an interval of 20 minutes and contains unrequited love, creative jealousy, guns, vodka and art. The audio described performance is on Saturday 28th October at 7.30pm. The touch tour will be at 6pm, and we will repeat this introduction in the auditorium at 7.15pm. **The Seagull** will be described by Alison Clarke and Ruth James.

The programme tells us “*The Seagull switches between the ridiculous and the profound and forensically examines the transcendence and destructiveness of love. The burning need to create Art and how harshly that need can be crushed, permeates throughout the play*”*.*

**The Seagull** takes place on the country estate of Peter Sorin. It is in four acts. The first act takes place in Spring, the second in Summer and then Autumn. The final and fourth act takes place in Winter, after an interval of two years.

When we enter the theatre the stage is open to us. In the centre are three towering, bare tree trunks which disappear into the gloom high above the stage. Rows of tiny white lights, as yet unlit, run down the length of the tree trunks. Behind the trees a back cloth represents the grimy concrete wall which stands about 15 ft high and encloses the estate. The wall is also covered in a mass of small white lights. These lights spill over the untrimmed Astroturf grass which covers the floor sloping down towards us. Several metre-long neon tubes are placed to lie apparently at random on the grass and lean against the tree trunks. On the left an electric guitar is propped against a small black amplifier. On either side of the stage are three metal stands each supporting a stage light. At floor level between the tree trunks a bright white light shines out at us towards the lake.

During scene changes, a translucent screen is lowered to fill the stage and the lights in the auditorium brighten. The silhouettes of the stage crew play across the screen as they move behind it. We will describe this for you as it happens.

**The Seagull** is performed by a multi-racial company of eleven actors, all in contemporary clothes. The first to appear is a young man, **Jacob**, who is an employee of the estate. He is dressed for work in khaki dungarees and a red tee-shirt. He sets the lights in readiness for the start of the play. When he is satisfied he completes the circuit and the hundreds of fairy lights sparkle. It is an evening in spring.

Jacob is joined by **Marcia**, the daughter of the estate manager and **Simeon**, a teacher. Marcia is a feisty bright-eyed young woman. Her face is framed by long black dreadlocks. She’s dressed all in black: a black satin vest top with a floating chiffon skirt over bare legs and shiny black ankle boots. A long black scarf is wound around her neck and a slim black bag is slung across her body. This contains her cigarettes and lighter.

In contrast, Simeon is a substantial, sober figure. He’s a teacher and devoted to Marcia. Simeon wears a grey check short sleeved shirt and maroon tie and light grey trousers, with a light grey jumper knotted around his shoulders. His dark hair is tightly curled and he has a neatly trimmed black beard.

**Peter**, the owner of the estate, bounces in. He’s a bohemian character, barefoot, and his light cotton trousers are crumpled and held up with patterned braces. His grey hair and beard are unkempt and his white shirt is open at the neck. It’s not long before he is puffing on a cigar.

Peter is accompanied by his nephew **Konstantin**, an aspiring writer, who lives with him on the estate. Konstantin is barely out of his teens and is the object of Marcia’s affections. Like Marcia, he dresses mainly in black. He’s tall and slim, pale faced with angular features and exudes an air of intellectual intensity . He wears slim black jeans with turn ups and black laced boots. His soft grey shirt hangs loose and is worn with a grey tie and long, soft leather jacket.

Konstantin is in love with 18 year old neighbour **Nina** from across the lake. Nina is tiny and her demeanour is serious. Her face is dominated by her huge dark eyes and framed by a shining bob of jaw length black hair. Nina has aspirations to be an actress and when she arrives to perform in Konstantin’s play she wears a white tee-shirt, emblazoned with the word Joyeux, and a shapeless grey skirt. She quickly removes these to reveal the black body suit she wears underneath with white sneakers and short white socks. For her performance she dons a diaphanous long white dress.

The first guest to arrive for the performance is the local doctor, **Hugo**. He is a handsome 55 year old, well turned out in elegant casual cream trousers, a discreetly checked shirt and well polished brown shoes with a matching belt. His outfit is completed by a sporty flat cap.

**Pauline**, the estate manager’s wife, is infatuated with Hugo and follows him in. She’s in her late 40s, an attractive, voluptuous woman with a mass of dark curls. Pauline wears a tightly fitted sleeveless silk dress with a large floral pattern.

As the time for the performance nears, the remaining characters take their place on the grass, where white plastic seats await them. Pauline’s grumpy husband **Leo** has dressed for the occasion in a hairy brown tweed suit with a fawn shirt and brown tie. His trousers are tucked into his thick brown socks and he clutches an enormous bag of crisps. Leo has a mop of white hair and a heavy beard.

In common with everyone else, **Irina** is dressed for the warm spring evening, but not for the country. Her clothes are expensive and extravagant. She makes her first dramatic entrance wearing a deceptively simple black silk dress, cut to emphasise her slim figure. Over this she wears a transparent long black devorée jacket patterned in gold. This is cinched in at the waist with a wide black belt with a huge ornate gold buckle. She moves with a sinuous, studied grace on her vertiginous sparkling heels. Irina is Konstantin’s mother although she is loathe to admit she has an adult son and from a distance her straight, long blonde hair gives her a youthful appearance. She has high cheekbones and her eyes are heavily lined in black. Irina changes her costume at every opportunity, always ensuring she takes centre stage.

Finally, **Boris** is Irina’s lover. A famous author in his 50s, he is accompanying her on her visit to the estate. A tall, slender man, he too dresses youthfully, although his dark hair is greying at the temples. He wears light blue jeans, an untucked white shirt and a small grey trilby. Boris is never without his notebook and maintains an air of aloof detachment.

**Cast and Creative Team**

NINA is played by Adelaye Adedayo

PAULINE by Michele Austin

JACOB by Lloyd Cooney

BORIS by Nicholas Gleaves

HUGO is played by Paul Higgins

LEO by Lloyd Hutchinson

IRINA is played by Lesley Sharp

MARCIA by Cherrelle Skeete

SIMEON by Raphael Sowole

PETER by Nicholas Tennant

And KONSTANTIN is played by Brian Vernel

The Sound is by Pete Malkin

Lighting is by Anna Watson

The Design is by Hyemi Shin

And the Director is Sean Holmes