

Bridge Street Theatre, Catskill, NY
Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov, adapted by Conor McPherson.
Directed by John Sowle.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“It’s the way of everything.”

Vanya is 47, single, frustrated, living with his mother and his niece and a few devoted servants in a farmhouse on depleted land far from the woman he loves who has married Vanya’s aged brother-in-law. His niece, Sonya, is in love with Vanya’s best friend, a doctor who drinks too much and is in love with Vanya’s sister-in-law. At the end of the fourth act Vanya and Sonya are pretty much where they were at the start of Act One, little changed, still frustrated and still committed to one another personally and professionally. Chekhov clearly wants us to know that the incidents in our lives don’t necessarily move us onto a new level of life, but merely gently shove us back into our own reality. The current production at Bridge Street Theatre uses the talents of many wonderful people to deliver the playwright’s message of the futility of life’s passing experiences.



Eamon Martin as Telegin,, Mike Durkin as Serebryakov, Renee Hewitt as Mariya, Eileen Schuyler as Nana and upstage, Richard Neil as Astrov; Steven Patterson as Vanya
Photo: Jeff Hewitt.

Steven Patterson’s Vanya is extraordinarily frustrated with his life. He gives us a man we want to reach out to, console, and then move on quickly before his depression depresses us also. He plays the tragic hero with style and verve and he adds temperament to the frustrations Vanya experiences. It is an excellent performance matched by that of Abby Burns as Sonya. The niece’s belief in her homeliness is as tragic as Vanya’s frustration with life. They are a matched pair of tragedians, him desperate, her resigned, and Burns gives us the flip side of the tragic coin that



Steven Patterson, Abby Burris;
Photo: John Sowle

A particular standout in this excellent cast is Mike Durkin as Vanya's brother-in-law, Professor Serebryakov. Though his time on stage is brief he is exhaustingly memorable.

John Sowle has given a fine rhythm to the play keeping it moving along and allowing the emotions of the characters every opportunity to be expressed in fine Chekhovian style. The adaptation by Conor McPherson lets us hear Chekhov's thoughts and concepts in easy English. Carmen Borgia's cumbersome set is fascinating while Eric Leary's lighting design does what it must to show us night throughout the play. Vadim Neselovskyi's music is also a treat. Michelle Rogers' costumes are a bit too confusing, not truly representing the year 1909.

Chekhov get a first-rate treatment by the Bridge Street company and the show is quite worthy of your attention. But do stay for the second act; it's worth the time, believe me.

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moves this play so well. Their final scene in the play is so worthwhile that the concept of leaving at the intermission and missing it sets my heart into a flutter of rage.

Equally good is Richard Neil as Astrov, the drunken doctor. If Burns' Sonyas is frustrated, his Astrov's frustrations are worse and equally under-played in this edition of the play. His covetous nature, when it comes to Sonya's step-mother Yelena - nicely played by Sarah Jayne Rothkopf, holds our attention magnificently. It is Yelena's own frustration with the situation she finds herself in in central Ukraine give Rothkopf numerous opportunities to play that emotion in a variety of ways.

Among the smaller roles there are stellar performances by Eileen Schuyler as Nana, Renee Hewitt as Mariya and Eamon Martin as Telegin.



Richard Neil, Sarah Jayne Rothkopf;
Photo: John Sowle.

Uncle Vanya plays at the Bridge Street Theatre, 44 W. Bridge Street in Catskill, New York through May 19. For information and tickets go to <https://:bridgest.org/uncle-vanya/tickets>.