

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Soulpepper's Lab Series presents *The Cherry Orchard*

Toronto, ON – June 7, 2010 – **Albert Schultz**, Founding Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre Company, today announced the second offering of the company's Lab Series – Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. Soulpepper's Lab Series provides the company's artists and audience an opportunity to share in the creative process by experiencing together various approaches to theatrical storytelling.

Under the guidance of director **Daniel Brooks**, the artists of the Soulpepper Academy: **Ins Choi, Tatjana Cornij, Raquel Duffy, Ken MacKenzie, Gregory Prest, Karen Rae, Jason Patrick Rothery** and **Brendan Wall** culminate a year-long journey of discovery of one of the seminal texts of the Western Canon.

**Brooks** and the **Academy**, have constructed a condensed version of *The Cherry Orchard* to fully explore Chekhov's profoundly rich tapestry of text and create theatre that challenges and entertains. This exploration of *The Cherry Orchard* is also meant to inspire the **Academy** and give them techniques and ideas they can apply to the analysis and activation of any text. Brooks chose *The Cherry Orchard* because of its superb text that demands (and rewards) rigorous exploration and for its timeliness – a family in financial crisis, a mortgage they cannot pay and a way of life under threat.

Following *The Cherry Orchard*, **László Marton** will direct the **Academy** in the last installment of the Lab Series in a new work entitled *Window on Toronto*, running August 20 – 28. Tickets for all performances in the Lab Series are \$22 (including 13% HST).

*The Cherry Orchard* runs July 1 – 10 at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, located at 55 Mill Street, Building 49, in the Distillery Historic District. Tickets are \$20 plus HST and are available by visiting [www.soulpepper.ca](http://www.soulpepper.ca) or by calling the Young Centre box office at 416.866.8666.

The Soulpepper Lab Series is supported by the Garland Schultz Artistic Development Fund, with additional 2010 support from the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund. Daniel Brooks' residency at Soulpepper is supported by the Charles and Marilyn Baillie Artistic Fellowship Fund. 2010 Soulpepper Lead Sponsors are: Sun Life Financial, Scotiabank Group and TELUS. Soulpepper gratefully acknowledges annual operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council.

*Soulpepper Theatre Company is an artist-founded, classical repertory theatre company with a three-tiered mandate: to present the world's greatest stories in vital Canadian interpretations; to train a new generation of theatre artists; and to inspire and enrich youth through mentorship and access programs.*

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTES BY DANIEL BROOKS

I came to the Soulpepper Academy as a teacher, and decided to use Chekhov's great play as a teaching tool before I had met any of the actors chosen for the Academy. We have been working intermittently on *The Cherry Orchard* for over a year, and have approached the text from many angles. The actors have performed various roles, at various times, in various styles. Towards the end of May, we decided to cut the servants from the play, and settled on the casting you will see this evening.

Six actors are playing six roles.

I have chosen to work with *The Cherry Orchard* because Chekhov is a great artist and a great teacher. His play invites endless investigation, and demands rigorous work from an actor. Its themes are timeless and timely.

As I write this, we are more than three weeks away from our first performance, and I do not know what you will see this evening. We are in rehearsal now, struggling with the consequences of removing the servants from the play, and the consequences of cutting other characters. Chekhov's construction of the play was careful and precise. What we are doing is not really Chekhov, but something else. We are trying to find a form for our presentation.

A laboratory is a "room or a building equipped for scientific experiments, research, or teaching," and what we will show you tonight is an experiment in process. We hope it thrills you.

## ANTON CHEKHOV TIMELINE

**Jan 29, 1860:** Anton Chekhov, the son of a grocer and the grandson of a serf, is born in the tiny seaport town of Taganrog in southern Russia.

**1868-76:** He attends local schools, suffering mightily under his father's religious fanaticism and dedicated belief in flogging his children.

**1876:** His father's store goes bankrupt and to avoid debtor's prison his father relocates the entire family - minus 16-year-old Anton - to Moscow.

**1877 - 79:** Young Anton lives with a man named Selivanov, who, like the character of Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard*, bailed the Chekhov family out for the price of their house. The determined young man stays three more years, studying and supporting himself by catching and selling goldfinches, and by tutoring. In this period, he begins a lifelong habit of short, intense and multiple love affairs.

**1880 - 84:** Chekhov studies at the University of Moscow medical school. He is now responsible for supporting his entire family, mother, father, two brothers and one sister. He begins writing short stories for newspapers to make money.

**1887:** Chekhov has his first professional production of a play called *Ivanov*. He describes the experience as "sickening" in a letter to his brother Alexander.

**1888:** Chekhov is now a practicing doctor with a flourishing dual career as a writer. His short story collection *At Dusk* is awarded the Pushkin Prize.

**1889:** He's elected to the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature. His beloved brother Nikolai dies of tuberculosis, plunging Chekhov into a deep depression. His play *The Wood Demon*, a sprawling 25 character epic, that includes both a climactic suicide and a happy ending, is so badly received that he not only renounces the theatre, he stops writing altogether.

**1890:** He embarks on a perilous and physically demanding journey to the outskirts of the Russian Empire: the penal colony on Sakhalin Island, north of Siberia. He interviews thousands of convicts and settlers for a census. His findings are later published in a work of social science but his long short story, *The Murder* is perhaps a truer expression of his horror and disgust at what he saw on this journey.

**1891:** He travels to South East Asia, the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent.

## ANTON CHEKHOV TIMELINE CONTINUED...

**1892:** He buys a country estate, Melikhovo, and becomes a full time writer, though he continues to serve as a doctor in the village where he lives, treating peasants for free, spending vast sums on drugs for them. There are accounts of lines of hopeful patients waiting at his door each morning. He gardens passionately, dreaming, like Colonel Vershinin in *Three Sisters*, about what his trees will look like in two or three hundred years.

**1896:** His play *The Seagull* has a disastrous opening and he renounces the theatre once more. He really means it this time.

**1897:** He falls ill with tuberculosis and moves to Yalta, where he writes, among other well-known stories, *Lady with Lap Dog* and *In the Ravine*.

**1898:** He is persuaded by Konstantin Stanislavski to allow the innovative Moscow Art Theatre to produce *The Seagull* again and their sensitive production is an instant success. A lovely young actress named Olga Knipper not only plays Nina but catches the writer's eye.

**1900:** The Moscow Art Theatre stages an extensively re-written version of *The Wood Demon*, now titled *Uncle Vanya*.

**1901:** The notoriously commitment-phobic Chekhov marries Olga Knipper - though she continues to live in Moscow and pursue her career and he continues to live in Yalta and pursue his. This in fact was his dream marital scenario, as years before he'd written to a friend: "A wife should be like the moon. She should not appear in your sky every day."

**1904:** *The Cherry Orchard*, his final play, is warmly received in Moscow.

**July 15, 1904:** Chekhov dies in Badenweiler with his beloved Knipper at his side. His body is brought back to Moscow and thousands of people turn out for his funeral but in an irony Chekhov would surely have appreciated, many in the crowd mistakenly follow the procession of a General Keller instead. He is buried in the cemetery of the Novodeviche Monastery in Moscow.

**1920s:** Chekhov becomes more widely known - and appreciated - outside his native land when his works begin to be translated into English.

Anton Chekhov Timeline by Paula Wing