

With **The Anniversary** the farce continues, as the Director of a Russian Mutual Bank is expecting a citation from the Leader of the Deputation but instead meets Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina, a stubborn woman who mistakenly comes to the bank to dispute her husband's withheld pay and drives everyone crazy. Again the actors take ownership of Chekhov's material and push it to the limit, creating a scenario that rivals early slapstick farces. Since Chekhov predated films, it would not be too much of a stretch to imagine where some of the early Eastern European film makers got their ideas for their silent film comedies.

One of Chekhov's early plays, **The Bear** keeps the folly going, but falters some as the dialog from the "Bear" begins to ramble as reason and logic seems to have left him. The "Bear" comes to collect a debt owed him by a deceased man, and his widow agrees to pay him in two days, when her steward will arrive. The "Bear" wants the money now, accusing her of not wanting to pay at all. Since when does "I'll pay you in two days" translate to "I won't pay you?" We get a feeling that this part of the story may have been lost in translation, although the essence of the play remains the same as he becomes so enthralled by her strong will and her courage at agreeing to duel with him over the debt, that he falls in love. She also finds a strong attraction and eventually they connect - presumably to live happily ever after.

The last play, **Swan Song** depicts an actor who is aware that the lights are fading for him, and expounds a long soliloquy about his life, his career and his angst after a performance of dubious success. A prompter happens to be on the same stage, and the actor uses him as a sounding board as he goes on and on and on and on about his life. This one also rambles and prompts several yawns across the full house.

In spite of these minor problems, the production is elegant and rich, and the actors are excellent in the first presentation of this fine classical company. Chekhov is well served by these presentations and those not familiar with his works will find this presentation a pleasant and convincing entry into his works.

Comments? Write to us at: Letters@ReviewPlays.com

The cast and directors were:

The Proposal:

Arye Gross, Emily Bergl (alternating with Angela Goethals), and Martin Ferrero. Director, Sabin Epstein

The Anniversary:

John Apicella, Anne Gee Byrd, JD Cullum, Tamara Krinsky (alternating with Laura Russell), Philip Proctor, and Jeremy Lawrence: Director, Michael Michetti

The Bear:

Harry Groener, Dawn Didawick Jeremy Lawrence: Director Stephanie Shroyer