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## The Cherry Orchard | Winterfall Theatre

Written by [Liza Dezfouli](#)  
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Left - David Lamb and Marissa Ben. Photo - Alex De La Rambelle

Is it a comedy? There are some fine moments of humour and much irony in *The Cherry Orchard* but pathos and poignancy as well, especially in this production by Winterfall Theatre (using a modern translation by playwright **Sir Tom Stoppard**). **Chekhov's** famed play is presented with verve, the cast creating an unholy sense of claustrophobia, tension and decay along with a subtly contemporary mood. There's an elegant sense of timelessness about this production, crammed as it is into the intimacy of Husk Theatre's minimalist space. When a production makes you feel like you're part of the proceedings and you have to hold yourself back from joining in, then something's going right.

The team is led by Winterfall's co-director, **Michele Williams**, as *Liubov*, extraordinary as the needy self-destructive mother on the verge of a nervous breakdown. They're all good; **Trent Baker's** direction has a sure touch and the tone of the play sits well between the laughs and the tragedy. **Justin Hosking** brings an Aussie male sensibility to his *Lopachin*; the character is familiar yet still right at home in the period setting. There is a palpable sexual tension between him and *Liubov*, beautifully calibrated by the expressive **Williams**. **Kasia Kazmareck** elegantly understates the unfulfilled *Varya* waiting in vain on *Lopachin's* proposal. The stoic **Phil Roberts** (sustaining a painful injury) is unnervingly poignant as *Gayev*, confluent with his sister's denial and delusion. The ancient *Firs* is ably presented by **Kirk Alexander**; his demise at the end completely believable. *The Cherry Orchard* is a populous play but here the cast are well individuated and the story easy to follow so there's no danger of getting lost.

The actors' dishevelled costumes illustrate the gradual destruction of their physical world along with the declining of their respective psychologies and that of the social privilege they once enjoyed. The old order is changing and the fortunes of this once prosperous landowning family parallel the changes in Russian society leading up to 1912. Being so close to the actors creates an odd intimacy with the performers, their moments of human vulnerability particularly, but not unbearably, intense. Yet there is a self-containment about the production, too, despite the emotionality we witness, to do with the fact that each individual is ultimately weak and self-concerned, unable to effectively support one another; the family structure is as fragile as the soon-to-be demolished cherry orchard.

**Baker** avoids having the family watching through the window as the trees are felled, the enormity of the loss is reflected rather in *Liubov's* lonely sorrowing. There is a strong sense of the inevitability of the family destruction, both in their relationships and finances, so much so that the fact of the orchard coming down doesn't feel as sad as the family's coming apart; the loss of the trees is appreciated here more on a symbolic level.

**Winterfall Theatre** gives us a fine version of this well-loved play, accessible and convincing. A delight well worth seeking out.

Winterfall Theatre Company Presents  
**THE CHERRY ORCHARD**  
 by *Anton Chekhov* | translated by *Tom Stoppard*

Directed by **Trent Baker**

**Venue:** The Theatre Husk | 161a Heidelberg Road Northcote  
**Dates:** 24 Feb – 20 March, 2011  
**Times:** Thurs - Sat @7.30pm; Sun @6pm  
**Tickets:** \$26/\$32  
**Bookings:** [www.ticketmaster.com.au](http://www.ticketmaster.com.au) | [www.winterfalltheatre.com](http://www.winterfalltheatre.com)

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