

The Cherry Orchard
Directed by Janet Haley
Peer response by Lauren Friesen



UMFlint theatre students and audience members had the opportunity to participate in this challenging play in fall 2009. The production highlighted Ms. Haley's skills as a director and this reviewer also wishes to identify items for future consideration.

The strengths, first. This is a difficult play with hidden traps. I say hidden because on the surface it seems easy enough to follow the plot and establish characters but a second look makes it seem less certain as to establishing the plot and developing the characters.

The plot is about loss, certainly. The plot is also about what is gained. What is lost is significant – the estate, past wealth, social status, freedom to create a personal direction in life, the infant and a sense of place in society. What is gained is a new sense of place, a new economy, hope where there had been hopelessness and new directions for life. What seems to be lost but is not in reality is love, identity and the value of the past. The value of a production of *Cherry Orchard* hangs on the balance or imbalance on these matters. But I will get to that later.

The strengths of this work included the elegance and grace of movement, the clarity of voice and expression and the physicality of the moments in the play. Each character had a distinct identity that was consistent with the role and their function in the script. The sense of loss was developed from the start with the pre-show material and also emphasized throughout the production. This became a dominate motif that seemed to overshadow other elements.

The costumes were elegant and worked well for each character and the advancing action. This was especially true for Madame Ravnescaya and Charlotta. The color palette was excellent. The sense of time and place was on target.

Along with the many positive elements in this production there are also a few observations I wish to make. The relationships, and I mean the key relationships, were not as clearly established as might be needed. My assumption here is that the subtext is alive and kicking on these wave lengths: love/dislike/respect/disrespect/ loss/gain (more could be added). The tension that may have been created by this bonding/unbonding cycle of relationships was not evident enough.

Finally, it was an elegant production that brought a complex work to the UMFlint stage and everyone gained from that experience.