

# A Perfectly Cast Character Study

You don't have to have seen or read Chekhov to appreciate *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, now running at the Arena Dinner Theatre, but it may help to at least be aware that the Christopher Durang comedy makes many allusions to Chekhov characters and plays.

Chekhovian characters tend to be privileged people living in remote locations with feelings of discontent and an inability or unwillingness to do anything about it. Such is also the case in Durang's comedy about sibling rivalry, aging gracefully and wasting one's life.

Vanya (Todd Frymier) and Sonia (Nancy Kartholl) are 50-somethings living together in the Pennsylvania cabin they grew up in and cared for their elderly parents in for 15 years. They are visited by their sister Masha (Suzan Moriarty), a famous movie star, and her extremely physically fit boy toy and aspiring actor Spike (Mason Dillon). Spike meets an ethereal young lady named Nina who also just happens to be an aspiring actress herself. Meanwhile, psychic cleaning lady Cassandra (Renee Gonzalez) spouts dire, Greek-tragedy-style warnings about the future.

Durang is not trying to make a flat-out Chekhov parody, but there is just enough surrealism in the play's literary and Chekhovian references (Spike's real name is Vlad; nobody believes Cassandra's prophetic warnings until it is too late) to almost count as absurdist satire.

Masha invites her siblings to a costume party with



## Curtain Call

JEN POIRY-PROUGH

the secret intention of outshining them (she will be dressed as Snow White and the siblings as dwarves). Sonia, however, steps out of herself and dresses as "the Evil Queen as played by Maggie Smith on her way to win an Oscar." She is a bigger hit than Masha, who has a bombshell to share with her brother and sister. It seems that Cassandra's warning "Beware of Hootie Pie!" is about to come true.

The plot is thin, but the play isn't about plot; it's about relationships, aging and finding the motivation to live life.

Director Christopher Murphy has assembled the perfect cast. Frymier is quiet and thoughtful as Vanya, and he absolutely nails his impassioned, show-stopping soliloquy near the end of the play.

Kartholl's Sonia shifts effortlessly from mousy to hysterical to enraged within the span of seconds. Her shining moment is during and immediately following an act-two telephone call that provides Sonia a glimmer of hope for her future happiness. Kartholl conveys so many emotions successively and simultaneously – fear, self-doubt, giddiness, apprehension,

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# A Great Script Is a Director's Best Friend

Nothing makes a director's job easier than a good script. *33 Variations* by Moisés Kaufmann is not just good, it is brilliantly written and masterfully constructed. The play debuted in 2007, leading to a run on Broadway featuring Jane Fonda in 2009. The rave reviews contained adjectives such as "impactful," "dynamic" and "stunning." I agree with the learned critics. A description that I would add is "relevant." Incredibly relevant, that is.

Over the past summer months a lot of people were getting ice water dumped on their heads, myself included. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was all the rage, bringing awareness to the debilitating disease made famous by baseball player Lou Gehrig. In its cruelest form, ALS literally freezes the afflicted, taking away the ability to communicate and be mobile. The play's heroine, Katherine, is dealing with ALS, fighting through all of the challenges brought forth from her diagnosis through the progression of the disease.

Her modern-day journey to solve a riddle in classical music lore is paralleled by the struggles of one of the great artistic minds in history, Ludwig Van Beethoven. As the famous composer's physical facility begins to betray him, his obsession with creating a body of work and adding further to his genius drives him to the breaking point. In both time periods, a common ground is shared: the work is the thing.

The following are passages from my directing



## Director's Notes

GREGORY STIEBER

journal, depicting our work as actors, designers and production staff:

Friday, 2/13 – Production meeting with Robert Shoquist (scenic designer), Schellie Engelhart (costume designer), Luke Holliger (lighting designer), Del Proctor (properties). Very exciting stuff. Given that the play requires us to jump from time period to time period, all of the designers are pursuing a stark, clean, dynamic conceptualization that I believe will be very engaging for the audience, not to mention totally appropriate to the text.

Monday, 2/16: – First read-through w/ cast. Always a concern – if you made the right

choices in casting. Indeed, we have. Lead actress Julie Donnell's reading of the part makes one think that the role was written just for her. Eileen Ahlersmeyer, as her daughter, is equally strong. Stuart Hepler is such a great choice for Ludwig Van Beethoven. His strong, deep voice, combined with his sense of musicality in the language, is so very right. Paul Faulkner's reading was nearly opening-night-ready. James Del Priore

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## Now Playing

**33 VARIATIONS** — Imaginative play following a modern day musicologist diagnosed with ALS as she races to finish her work on Beethoven, presented by Fort Wayne Civic Theatre, **8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 20-21; 2 p.m. Sunday, March 22; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 27-28; 2 p.m. Sunday, March 29; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, April 3-4**, Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, \$17-\$26 (includes ArtsTix fees), 424-5220

**DAYTON CONTEMPORARY DANCE COMPANY** — Contemporary dance performance by multi-cultural traveling dance troupe, **8 p.m. Saturday, March 21**, Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, \$20-\$25, 424-6574

**GUYS AND DOLLS** — Broadway production of the classic play based upon Damon Runyon's short stories, part of the Broadway at the Embassy series, **7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 25** Embassy Theatre, Fort Wayne, \$25-\$50 thru Ticketmaster and Embassy box office, 424-5665

**THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE SOUL AND BELTESHAZZAR** — Three act ballet performed by Chicago-Ballet 5:8 performing company, **6:30 p.m. Saturday, March 21 and 3 p.m. Sunday, March 22**, First Presbyterian Theater, Fort Wayne, \$18-\$32, 422-6329

**PICNIC** — Pulitzer Prize winning play about youth, love and desire; presented by University of Saint Francis School of Creative Arts, **8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 20-21; 2 p.m. Sunday, March 22; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 27-28 and 2 p.m. Sunday, March 29**, USF Robert Goldstine Performing Arts Center, Fort Wayne, \$11-\$17, 422-4226

**SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** — Compilation of famous love scenes from various plays, **7 p.m. Friday, March 20; 7 p.m. Saturday, March 21 and 2 p.m. Sunday, March 22**, Mount Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, free, donations accepted, 989-971-9027

**VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE** — Comedy about two middle-aged siblings living together, their movie star sister and her newest boy toy, rated mature, **8 p.m. (7 p.m. dinner) Friday-Saturday, March 20-21; March 27-28**, Arena Dinner Theatre, Fort Wayne, \$35, includes dinner and show, 424-5622

## Asides

### AUDITIONS

**IS THIS SEAT TAKEN? AND TOUCH AND GO (MAY 29-JUNE 7)** — Auditions for two winning plays of the Northern Indiana Playwright Festival, **6 p.m. Sunday, March 22**, West Rehearsal Hall, Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, \$10 refundable deposit to sign out script, 422-6329

**T.B.D. AND BETWEEN THE SHEETS (MAY 30-31)** — Auditions for stage reading in the Northern Indiana Playwright Festival, **7 p.m. Sunday, March 22**, East Rehearsal Hall, Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, \$10 refundable deposit to sign out script, 422-6329

**33 variations**

By Moisés Kaufman

runs **March 20 to April 4** with **Thursday performances!**  
Auer Center ArtsLab

The mystery surrounding Beethoven's composition - crossing time to a modern day musicologist facing the progression of ALS.

**Civic theatre**

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March 13-28, 2015

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Directed by Christopher Murphy

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Arena Dinner Theatre  
719 Rockhill St., Fort Wayne

(260) 424-5622

arenadinnertheatre.org

## Current Exhibits

**ALEXANDER SOLOMON: TEMPORARY TRAGEDY** — Landscape photography with the implication of tragedy ahead, **Tuesday-Sunday thru May 17**, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, \$5-\$7 (members, free), 422-6467

**ALEXANDRA HALL** — Whimsical paintings and limited edition prints, **Tuesday-Sunday thru May 1**, The Gallery at Prana Yoga, Fort Wayne, 627-9642

**ART MADNESS** — Pieces from CW Mundy, Rick Wilson, Fred Doloresco, Forrest Formsma, B. Eric Rhoads, Robert Eberle, Pamela C. Newell, Diane Lyon, Jody Hemphill Smith, Katy McMurray, Michael Poorman, Mike Kelly, Joey Frisillo, Shelby Keefe, Doug Runyan, Susan Suraci, Terri Buchholz, Andrea Bojrab, Bill Inman, Terry Armstrong, Mark Daly, Dan Woodson, Donna Shortt, Lori Putman and Mark Burkett, **Tuesday-Saturday and by appointment thru March 31**, Castle Gallery Fine Art, Fort Wayne, 426-6568

**C'EST MAGNIFIQUE** — Paintings inspired by artists' trip to Paris, **Tuesday-Sunday thru April 5**, Artworks Galleria of Fine Art, Fort Wayne, 387-6943

**CHANGING TIDES** — Upcycled seascape by Sayaka Ganz, **Tuesday-Sunday thru April 5**, Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, Fort Wayne, \$3-\$5 (2 and under, free), 427-6440

**CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FAMILY** — Two and three dimensional mixed media pieces from fifteen area artists, **Tuesday-Sunday thru April 15**, Mirro Family Foundation and Sauerteig Family Galleries, Artlink Contemporary Art Gallery, Fort Wayne, 424-7195

**DIVERSIFIED PORTFOLIO** — Pieces by Artworks' Blue Chip Artists Penny French-Deal, Karen Moriarty, Nazhar Harran, Vicki Junk-Wright, David Buenostro, Randall Scott Harden, Terry Pulley and Chas Davis, **Tuesday-Sunday thru May 10**, Artworks Galleria of Fine Art, Fort Wayne, 387-6943

**EXPEDITION EARTH** — Traveling exhibit featuring grassland, forest and tundra biomes, **Wednesday-Sunday thru May 17**, Science Central, Fort Wayne, \$6-\$8 (2 and under, free), 424-2400 ext. 423

**FAME'S FUSION OF CONCERT COLORS** — FAME artwork from Northern Indiana elementary school children, **Tuesday-Sunday thru April 15** (reception 2 p.m. Saturday, April), Freistrotter Gallery, Artlink Contemporary Art Gallery, Fort Wayne, 424-7195

**FINDING ME: AN INTROSPECTIVE RETROSPECTIVE** — 35-year retrospective of the art work of Santa Jensen, **Tuesday-Sunday thru May 10**, Artworks Galleria of Fine Art, Fort Wayne, 387-6943

**HIGH SCHOOL ART EXHIBITION** — Artwork by students from regional high schools, **daily thru March 22**, John P. Weatherhead Gallery, Rolland Arts Center, University of Saint Francis, Fort Wayne, 399-7999

**INDELIBLE (P)INK** — Pink Panther and popular culture; animation cels, production sketches and ephemera, **daily thru March 31**, Jeffrey R. Krull Gallery, Main Library, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, 421-1210

**JAY BASTIN** — Impressionist paintings, **Tuesday-Sunday thru April 30**, Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, Fort Wayne, \$3-\$5 (2 and under, free), 427-6440

**MARY KLOPPER: NEW WORKS** — Sculptures, **daily thru March 27**, Lupke Gallery, University of St. Francis, Fort Wayne, 399-7999

**SCHOLASTIC ART AND WRITING AWARDS** — Student artwork and writing from the region, **Tuesday-Sunday thru April 12**, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, \$5-\$7 (members, free), 422-6467

**SKY ABOVE-EARTH BELOW** — Earth and sky inspired art from artist members and invited regional artists, **Monday-Saturday thru March 31**, Orchard Gallery of Fine Art, Fort Wayne, 436-0927

**TRAVELS IN PLASTIC** — Photographs by Cara Wade taken using Holga and Sprocket Rocket "toy" cameras, **Tuesday-Sunday thru April 15**, Freistrotter Gallery, Artlink Contemporary Art Gallery, Fort Wayne, 424-7195

**UNIVERSITY OF SAINT FRANCIS FACULTY** — Mixed media pieces from USF faculty members, **Tuesday-Saturday thru April 18** (artist reception 3-6 p.m. Saturday, March 21), Crestwoods Frame Shop & Gallery, Roanoke, 672-2080

## Upcoming Exhibits

### MARCH

**STEVEN SORMAN: ONLY WHEN** — Paintings and prints, **Tuesday-Sunday, March 28-June 14**, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, \$5-\$7 (members, free), 422-6467

### APRIL

**JOHN BAUMAN AND VINNIE SUTHERLAND** — Pottery and metal art, **Monday-Saturday, April 2-30**, Orchard Gallery of Fine Art, Fort Wayne, 436-0927

**SOCA STUDENT EXHIBITION** — Works by students currently enrolled at the School of Creative Arts, **daily April 11-29** (opening reception, 6-9 p.m. Saturday, April 11), John P. Weatherhead Gallery, Rolland Arts Center, University of Saint Francis, Fort Wayne, 399-7999

### MAY

**JANET WEBB AND SARAH THOMPSON** — Chain jewelry and ceramics, **Monday-Saturday, April 2-30**, Orchard Gallery of Fine Art, Fort Wayne, 436-0927

## Featured Events

**FORT WAYNE DANCE COLLECTIVE** — Workshops and classes for movement, dance, yoga and more offered by Fort Wayne Dance Collective, Fort Wayne, fees vary, 424-6574

**IPFW COMMUNITY ARTS ACADEMY** — Art, dance, music and theatre classes for grades pre-K through 12 offered by IPFW College of Visual and Performing Arts, fees vary, 481-6977, www.ipfw.edu/caa

**SWEETWATER ACADEMY OF MUSIC** — Private lessons for a variety of instruments available from professional instructors, ongoing weekly lessons, Sweetwater Sound, Fort Wayne, call for pricing, 432-8176 ext. 1961, academy.sweetwater.com

## This Week

**FAME FESTIVAL** — 6,000 pieces of student art, over 100 performance groups, visiting artists, FAMEous Imaginarium and more, **9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, March 21 and 12-5 p.m. Sunday, March 22**, Grand Wayne Center, Fort Wayne, \$5, 18 and under free, 247-7325

**INDIANA SPORTS FESTIVAL** — Hands on demonstrations, clinics and competitions for dozens of traditional and nontraditional sports, **10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, March 21-22**, Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, Fort Wayne, \$5-\$10, 414-3371

**KINGSTON'S TASTE OF WAYNEDEALE** — Food and beverage sampling to benefit Honor Flight Northeast Indiana and Community Harvest Food Bank, **4:30-7 p.m. Tuesday, March 24**, Mount Calvary Life Center, Fort Wayne, \$15-\$20, 747-1523

**PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ** — Live music with Chris Worth and Co., gourmet edibles, live and silent auctions to benefit Active 20-30 Club in helping underprivileged children, **7-11 p.m. Saturday, March 21**, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, \$40-\$45, 441-2030

**WOMEN MAKING HISTORY** — Women's History Month celebration featuring guest speakers, music and dance performance, **7 p.m. Monday, March 23**, Walb International Ballroom, IPFW, Fort Wayne, free, 481-6206

## Lectures, Discussions, Authors, Readings & Films

**THE WORD OF GOD: CLOSING DRAMA OF THE VATICAN II** — Dr. Kumer discusses the people, issues and processes that surrounded Vatican II, **3 p.m. Sunday, March 22**, North Campus auditorium, University of St. Francis, Fort Wayne, free, 399-8066

**ISSUES AND ALES** — Panels of experts and community leaders discuss the topics of downtown developments, downtown living and riverfront development; presented by 89.1 WBOI, **7-9 p.m. Thursday, March 26**, Phoenix, Fort Wayne, free, 387-6571

**JILL McDEVITT** — ARCH's Historic Preservation Specialist gives an update on the ongoing Allen County Historic Sites and Structures survey, **11 a.m. Saturday, March 28**, meeting room C, Main Branch, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, free, 426-5177

**AN EVENING WITH GARRISON KEILLOR** — Tour broadcast of Prairie Home Companion as part of the Omnibus Lecture Series, **7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 1**, Auer Performance Hall, IPFW, Fort Wayne, free, ticket required, 481-6555

## Storytimes

**STORYTIMES, ACTIVITIES AND CRAFTS AT ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY:**

**ABOITE BRANCH** — Born to Read Storytime, **10:30 a.m. Mondays**, Smart Start Storytime, **10:30 a.m. Tuesdays**, Baby Steps, **10:30 a.m. Wednesdays**, 421-1320

**DUPONT BRANCH** — Smart Start Storytime for ages 3-5, **1:30 p.m. Tuesdays and 10:30 a.m. Thursdays**, 421-1315

**GEORGETOWN BRANCH** — Born to Read Storytime, **10:15 a.m. and 11 a.m. Mondays**, Baby Steps, **10:15 a.m. and 11 a.m. Tuesdays**, Smart Start Storytime, **10:15 a.m. and 11 a.m. Thursdays**, 421-1320

**GRABILL BRANCH** — Born to Read, **10:30 a.m. Tuesdays**, Smart Start Storytime **10:30 a.m. Wednesdays**, 421-1325

**HESSEN CASSEL BRANCH** — Stories, songs and fingerplays for the whole family, **6:30 p.m. Tuesdays**, 421-1330

**LITTLE TURTLE BRANCH** — Storytime for preschoolers, **10:30 a.m. Mondays and Tuesdays**, 421-1335

**MAIN LIBRARY** — Smart Start Story Time, **10:30 a.m. Wednesdays**; Storytime for preschoolers, daycares and other groups, **9:30 a.m. Wednesdays**; 421-1220

**NEW HAVEN BRANCH** — Babies and books for kids birth to age 2, **10:30 a.m. Thursdays**, 421-1345

**PONTIAC BRANCH** — Teen cafe **4 p.m. Tuesdays**, Smart Start Storytime for preschoolers, **10:30 a.m. Fridays**, 421-1350

**TECUMSEH BRANCH** — Smart Start Storytime for kids age 3-6, **10:30 a.m. Tuesdays**, YA Day for teens **3:30 p.m. Wednesdays**, Wondertots reading for ages 1-3, **10:30 a.m. Thursdays**, 421-1360

**SHAWNEE BRANCH** — Born to Read for babies and toddlers, **10:30 a.m. Thursdays**, Smart Start Storytime for preschoolers, **11 a.m. Thursdays**, 421-1355

**WAYNEDEALE BRANCH** — Smart Start Storytime, **10:30 a.m. Mondays and Tuesdays**, Born to Read Storytime for babies and toddlers, **10:30 a.m. Tuesdays**, 421-1365

**WOODBURN BRANCH** — Smart Start Storytime, **10:30 a.m. Fridays**, 421-1370

## Kid Stuff

**EASTER EGG HUNT** — Peter Cotton Tail, Easter egg hunt, children's activities and snacks **1:30-3:30 p.m. Saturday, April 4**, Byron Health Center, Fort Wayne, free, 637-3166 ext.271

# VANYA AND SONIA ET AL - From Page 17

pride, and hope – that it's breathtaking.

Moriarty plays Masha as a larger-than-life narcissist. For all her sarcasm and cruelty, Masha's insecurity as an aging actress with five failed marriages and dwindling movie roles is just beneath the surface.

Mason Dillon is perfect as Spike. Even more self-absorbed than Masha, Spike is playfully open with his sexuality, but uses it (and his youth) almost as a weapon. Sophia D'Virgilio is lovely as the young and ethereal Nina, an "old soul" who inspires Vanya and Sonia to create and to hope. As the fiery Latina clean-

ing lady Cassandra, Gonzalez hilariously switches accents when she goes into long psychic tears.

The costumes, designed by Pam Good, and the set, designed by director Christopher J. Murphy, lend authenticity and charm to the production. Even the scene changes are done entertainingly by way of silent vignettes by Gonzalez and Dillon.

The dinner, catered by Goegleins, included Caesar salad, spaghetti with meat sauce, Key West blend vegetables, garlic bread, and Italian crème cake.

jen@greenroomonline.org

# 33 VARIATIONS - From Page 17

is well on his way to finding the self-importance and blind ambition of Diabelli. Newcomer Cody Steele brings an ease and charm to the ever-likable Mike. We're on our way.

Friday, 2/20 – First night with live piano. We scored the huge talents of Hope Arthur and Kenneth Xiaoling Jiang as our pianists. I cannot imagine this production without their involvement. Hearing the music being played as Katherine describes it, or as we see Beethoven creating it is so powerful. Apparently, the variations are incredibly difficult to play. You wouldn't know it hearing the two of them execute it.

Tuesday, 3/3 – We are so lucky to have Bruce Hancock, Jennifer Garrett and Jim Hulbert on the pro-

duction team. This play is so full of stunning visuals in terms of projections and lighting effects that the artistry and precision of the offstage souls is equal to those in the light.

Friday, 3/6 – As we approach tech week I am further reminded of how fortunate we all are to work with such great and important material. The top notch script. Beethoven's mastery. The impact of ALS. It is driving us with a sense of purpose and responsibility. Maybe, like Katherine and Ludwig, we are a little obsessed.

On behalf of the actors and the technical team, we hope you enjoy the experience of *33 Variations* as much as we have enjoyed bringing it to the stage.

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