

# IVANOV

BY

ANTON CHEKHOV

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED BY

CURT COLUMBUS



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INC.

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## Adapter's Note

I arrived late in my appreciation of Anton Chekhov's *Ivanov*. I have been working on translations of Chekhov's plays for nearly twenty years, and yet, I always dismissed this early work by the great writer. "It's a problem play," I would say to anyone who mentioned it, "there's no good way to solve it dramaturgically."

Everything changed several years ago when the visionary director Brian Mertes asked me to do a new translation for his Lake Lucille Chekhov project. I found a surprisingly contemporary hero in Nikolai Ivanov. Often referred to as "the comic Russian Hamlet," Ivanov struggles with money problems, societal pressures, and depression. In the same way that Hamlet does, he reminds us as modern viewers to think less and do more when faced with economic woes, narrow-minded people, and a twenty-four hour news cycle (a constant source of contemporary depression).

I realized that there were, indeed, good dramaturgical solutions that could help actors and audiences enter the play. This required a change in my approach as a translator. Where I normally strive to render Chekhov's text into English as faithfully as possible, an adaptation has emerged through a series of judicious cuts and some rearranging of text, all made with the help of some of the best American artists working on Chekhov today. There have been too many collaborators along the way to name them individually, but they have included the great ensemble at Lake Lucille; another extraordinary group of actors at the Arden Theatre in Philadelphia under the direction of Terry Nolen; and the incomparable resident company at my own theater, Trinity Rep, where this version was first produced.

At Trinity, the production was under the remarkable direction of Brian McEleney and featured the brilliant Stephen Thorne as Nikolai Ivanov. We found that one of the deceptions of the play, induced by its title, is that it is only about that one, central character. However, as with all of Chekhov's plays, this is an ensemble piece that only comes alive if the world of the play and every person in it is as interesting as the titular hero. *Ivanov* played like lightning at Trinity, raucous in its comedy, filled with music generated by the actors (and written by the talented Ian McNeely), and eliciting

cries and gasps in its final image. McEleney staged that moment, when Ivanov kills himself, onstage and in slow motion, allowing it to expand beyond the brutal reality of the act and into the realm of poetry and dance. It was a brilliant, powerful, theatrical solution to one of the play's biggest challenges.

One final note, regarding the virulent anti-Semitism portrayed within the play. Chekhov intentionally has the characters use the most vile, most anti-Semitic word in the Russian language when describing Anna, the converted Jew who is married to Ivanov. There is only one accurate equivalent in modern English — what we called “the K-word” in rehearsals — and while the original text uses it liberally, I have chosen to employ it in a much more targeted fashion. It is not an act of political correctness that motivates this choice, simply a desire not to throw contemporary audiences out of the hearing of the entire play by the overuse of one, uncomfortable word.

Thanks to everyone who had a hand in making this translation and its adaptation possible (truly a legion of talented people), and especially to my first and final reader of this and everything, my husband, Nate Watson.

—*Curt Columbus*  
*Providence, Rhode Island*  
*January 25, 2015*

IVANOV was first produced by Trinity Repertory Company (Curt Columbus, Artistic Director; Michael Gennaro, Executive Director) in Providence, Rhode Island, on September 4, 2014. It was directed by Brian McEleney; the set design was by Michael McGarty; the costume design was by Toni Spadafora Sadler; the lighting design was by John Ambrosone; the sound design was by Peter Hurowitz; the original music was by Ian McNeely; and the stage manager was Buzz Cohen. The cast was as follows:

NIKOLAI IVANOV .....	Stephen Thorne
ANNA .....	Rebecca Gibel
COUNT MATVEY SHABELSKY .....	Fred Sullivan, Jr.
PASHA LEBEDEV .....	Timothy Crowe
ZINAIDA .....	Anne Scurria
SASHA .....	Marina Shay
YEVGENY LVOV .....	Richard Williams
MARTHA BABAKINA .....	Angela Brazil
DMITRY KOSIKH .....	Stephen Berenson
MISHA BORKIN.....	Joe Wilson, Jr.
AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA .....	Barbara Meek
FIRST GUEST .....	Max Wolkowitz
SECOND GUEST .....	Sophie Netanel
GAVRIL.....	Ian McNeely
PETER/YEGORSHKA .....	Andrew Polec

## **CHARACTERS**

NIKOLAI IVANOV, a permanent member of the local agricultural board.

ANNA, his wife, born Sarah Abrahamson.

COUNT MATVEY SHABELSKY, his uncle on his mother's side.

PASHA LEBEDEV, president of the county council.

ZINAIDA, his wife.

SASHA, their twenty-something daughter.

YEVGENY LVOV, a young country doctor.

MARTHA BABAKINA, a young widow and landowner, the daughter of a wealthy merchant.

DMITRY KOSIKH, the excise tax collector.

MISHA BORKIN, a distant relative of Ivanov and the manager of his estate.

AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA, a woman with indeterminate means of support.

FIRST GUEST

SECOND GUEST

YEGORSHKA

PETER, Ivanov's servant.

GAVRIL, the Lebedevs' servant.

## **PLACE**

The play takes place in a small district in central Russia.

# IVANOV

## ACT ONE

*The garden on the Ivanov estate. To the left, the front of the house with a terrace. One window is open. In front of the terrace runs a wide half-circle of lawn. In the background is an orchard, running up center and off right in long, uniform rows of trees. Stage right, there is some garden furniture, benches, and tables. On one of the tables, a lamp is burning. Evening approaches. As the curtain rises, a duet for piano and cello can be heard coming from the house.*

*Ivanov sits at the table and reads a book. Borkin appears in the back of the orchard, wearing big boots and carrying a gun. He is a little drunk. When he sees Ivanov, Borkin tiptoes over to him and raises the rifle to his face.*

IVANOV. *(Seeing Borkin, he starts and jumps up.)* Misha, God knows what ... You scared me ... I am so nervous, and you with your stupid jokes ... *(Sits.)* Scares me and it makes him happy ...

BORKIN. *(Laughing loudly.)* Okay, okay ... guilty, guilty. *(Sits next to him.)* I won't anymore, I won't ... *(Takes off his hat.)* Hot. Believe me, my friend, somehow I covered seventeen miles in the last three hours ... I'm worn out ... feel how my heart is beating ...

IVANOV. *(Reading.)* Alright, later ...

BORKIN. No, feel now. *(Takes his hand and lays it on his chest.)* Hear that? Tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu. Of course, that means I have a heart murmur. Any minute I could drop over dead. Listen, would you be sad if I died?

IVANOV. I'm busy, later ...

BORKIN. No, I'm serious, would you be sad if I suddenly died? Mr. Nikolai, would you be sad if I died?

IVANOV. Get out of here!

BORKIN. Just say: Would you be sad?

IVANOV. I'm sad that you reek of vodka. Misha, it's disgusting.

BORKIN. (*Laughing.*) Do I really reek? That's funny ... Actually, it's not really that funny. In the village I ran into the district attorney, and I confess, him and me threw back eight or so shots. I got to admit, drinking is bad for you. Right, isn't it bad for you? Huh? Isn't it bad for you?

IVANOV. I can't take it ... Seriously, Misha, you are irritating me ...

BORKIN. Okay, okay ... guilty, guilty! (*Stands and goes.*) People are unbelievable, can't even talk to them. (*Coming back.*) Oh, yeah! I almost forgot ... You need to give me eighty-two rubles!

IVANOV. Why do you need eighty-two rubles?

BORKIN. I have to pay the workmen tomorrow.

IVANOV. I don't have it.

BORKIN. Thank you so very much! (*Mocking him.*) "I don't have it" ... What am I supposed to pay them with? What?

IVANOV. I don't know. I don't have any money right now. Wait 'til the first of the month, that's when the rents come in.

BORKIN. But the workmen don't come for their money on the first of the month, they come tomorrow, in the morning!

IVANOV. What do you want me to do about it? You can cut me open, you can nag me all you want ... And why do you have to come here in this disgusting state right now, when I'm busy ...

BORKIN. I'm asking you. Do the workers have to be paid or not? Eh, why even try to talk to you! (*Waves his hand.*) Landowners are all the same, to hell with them all, gentlemen farmers ... Scientific farm management ... Two thousand acres and not a penny in his pocket ... He has a whole wine cellar, but no corkscrew ... Let's just sell the farm tomorrow! Oh yes, sir! We've sold the oats down to the roots, and tomorrow we'll take all the rye and sell that too. (*Pacing.*) You think I'll stand on ceremony? Huh? Well, no sir, don't count on it ...

ANNA. (*Enters.*) Who's out here shouting? Is that you, Misha? Why are you yelling like that?

BORKIN. I'm with your Nikolai — *voilà*. He would start you yelling, too.

ANNA. Listen, Misha, tell them to bring some hay up to the croquet green.

BORKIN. (*Waving her off.*) Just leave me alone, please ...

ANNA. Well, I like your tone ... Talking like that doesn't suit you



at all. If you want women to fall in love with you, you shouldn't ever be rude to them like that ... *(To her husband.)* Nicky, let's go do cartwheels in the hay!

IVANOV. Anna, it's bad for you to exert yourself like that. Leave us alone, please. *(Yells.)* Uncle Matvey! *(Anna exits.)*

BORKIN. Don't forget that you also have to pay Lebedev his interest in two days.

IVANOV. I remember. I'm going to Lebedev's tonight to ask him if he'll wait a little ... *(Looks at his watch.)*

BORKIN. When are you going over there?

IVANOV. Now.

BORKIN. *(Animated.)* Wait a minute, wait! Today is Sasha's birthday isn't it ... Tch-tch-tch ... and I forgot ... my memory, huh? *(Jumps up.)* I'm going, I'm going ... *(Sings.)* I'm going ... Mr. Nikolai, my little angel heart, you're all nervous, good God, you're in pain, you're depressed, but you know that the two of us, good God, together we could make whatever the hell we want happen! I've got a great idea, I could marry Martha Babakina for you? Half of the dowry for you ... no, not half, the whole thing, you can take it all!

IVANOV. Stop talking all this crap ...

BORKIN. No, I'm serious, good God, do you want me to marry Martha? Split the dowry with you ... Why am I talking to you? You don't understand. *(Mocking him.)* "Talking all this crap." You're a good man, smart, but you don't have enough inside you, this, you know, to really get moving. You're a lunatic and a whiner. If you were a little more of a normal person, you could be a millionaire in a year. For example, if I had two thousand three hundred rubles right this minute, in two weeks I could have twenty thousand. On that side of the river, they are selling a strip of land, just across from us, for two thousand three hundred rubles. If we buy that strip of land, then both sides of the river will be ours. And if both sides of the river are ours, then we have the right to dam up the river. See what I mean? We can build a mill, and as soon as we announce it, that we want to build a dam, then everyone who lives downstream of us will raise a ruckus, and we can say, *kommen sie hier*, if you want water, then pay up. Understand? Zarevsky's factory will give us five thousand, Korolkov will give us three thousand, the monastery will give five thousand ...

IVANOV. This is all just hocus-pocus, Misha ... If you don't want to start a fight with me, keep that kind of stuff to yourself.

BORKIN. (*Sits at the table.*) Of course! I knew it! You won't do anything yourself, and you tie my hands ...

SHABELSKY. (*Entering with Lvov from the house.*) A doctor is the same thing as a lawyer, the only difference is that a lawyer just robs you, but the doctor robs you, then kills you. Present company excluded, naturally. Charlatans, exploiters, all of them ... Maybe an exception to the general rule once in a great while, but ... I have spent twenty thousand rubles on doctors in my life, I've never seen a one of them that wasn't a patent swindler.

BORKIN. (*To Ivanov.*) Yep, you won't do anything and you tie my hands. That's why you don't have any money ...

SHABELSKY. I say again, present company excepted. There may be other exceptions, though, when you get right down to it ... (*Yawns.*)

IVANOV. What do you want, Doctor?

LVOV. I'll say the same thing I said this morning, she needs to go to Yalta, where it's warm, and immediately. (*Begins to pace.*)

SHABELSKY. Yalta! Misha, why don't the two of us take the cure? Don't be ridiculous ... She has started to wheeze and cough out of boredom. Write down the following scientific principle: Take one healthy young woman, prescribe one trip to Yalta, in Yalta, add one handsome young doctor ...

IVANOV. (*To Shabelsky.*) Stop your nagging, you old nag! (*To Lvov.*) In order to go to Yalta, you have to have money. And let's say I found the money, she still utterly refuses to make the journey.

LVOV. Well, she refuses to go without you.

BORKIN. Listen, Doctor, is Miss Anna really that seriously sick that she absolutely has to go to Yalta?

SHABELSKY. Nonsense.

LVOV. Yes, it's consumption.

BORKIN. Phew! That's not good ... I actually noticed it myself for a while now, in her face, she doesn't have very long.

SHABELSKY. Nonsense.

LVOV. Still ... talk softly ... she can hear you in the house. (*Pause.*)

BORKIN. What a life we live ... A man's life is like a flower, growing magnificently in a field. Along comes a goat, one bite, that's the end of the flower ...

SHABELSKY. It's all nonsense! (*Yawns.*) Nonsense and swindlers. (*Pause.*)

BORKIN. And I, gentlemen, am trying to teach Mr. Nikolai how to make a little money. I just informed him of a brilliant idea, but,

# IVANOV

by Anton Chekhov

translated and adapted by Curt Columbus

8M, 8W (doubling)

Often called “the comic Russian Hamlet,” Chekhov’s Nikolai Ivanov is a man constantly at odds with the world around him. His personal and professional lives collide in unexpected and humorous ways, as he struggles to dig himself out of debt and out of provincial boredom. The local doctor informs him that his wife is dying and accuses him of worsening her condition with his foul moods, yet Ivanov finds himself drawn to a beautiful young woman who happens to be the daughter of the family to whom he owes an enormous sum of money. In this fascinating early work by Anton Chekhov, we see the union of humor and pathos that would become his trademark. This version is in a sparkling translation by Curt Columbus, whose Chekhov translations have been proclaimed by *Variety* as “savvy, clear, fair-minded, and right-headed.”

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