

CHEKHOV AND PINTER TAKE A...PAUSE

By Marika Barnett

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A Ten Minute Comedic Duet

By Marika Barnett

SYNOPSIS: This "10 minute avant-garde play" is based on the absurd situation in which Anton Chekhov (1860 – 1904) and Harold Pinter (1930 – 2008) meet in a park. We can somehow assume that this is not their first meeting either! While sitting on a park bench they discuss each other's plays, their characters, and the Nobel Prize. See how their relationship develops through their humorous banter.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 males)

PINTER (m).....English playwright, screenwriter, director and actor was one of the most important British dramatists in modern times. His writing career spanned more than 50 years. In 2005 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was also recognized as an active and influential fighter for human rights. *(34 lines)*

CHEKHOV (m)Russian playwright and short story writer, is considered to be among the greatest writers of short fiction in history. He practiced as a country doctor and this experience enabled him to observe and capture for eternity the characters and the unique life of rural Russia. *(34 lines)*

TIME: Present.

SETTING: A bench in a Park. If easily available – a couple of birch trees would be ideal to suggest the park.

PROPS: Newspaper

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In this play Chekhov sounds like the older man and Pinter is the more energetic, younger writer. In reality however Chekhov died at age 44 and Pinter died at age 78. The Producer/Director should decide which role should be played by an older or a younger actor. It could be interesting to switch the roles for consecutive performances. Or just see which actor can imitate a Russian accent better and assign the roles accordingly. In this play we assume that Chekhov and Pinter regularly meet at this park bench and this conversation is just one of many they have here.

Do Not Copy

AT RISE: *Lights up. PINTER is sitting on the bench, reading the paper. CHEKHOV walks by and sits down on the bench.*

CHEKHOV: What a beautiful day Pinter! On days like this I can bear my great unhappiness better. On days like this I am not so terribly unhappy. Life is sad but on days like this, I have hope. What do you think?

PINTER: *(Turns a page.)* Yes.

CHEKHOV: I really want to hear your opinion Pinter. I want to know what you think? Isn't it easier to live through days like these? When the sun is shining, when the birds are singing in the orchards. Don't you agree?

PINTER: *(Turns a page.)* With what?

CHEKHOV: That on days like this we can bare our fate much easier. On days like these, there is a little glimpse of hope. Oh, life is so difficult. It is so hard to go through life, don't you think?

PINTER: *(Turns a page.)* Right!

CHEKHOV: I knew you'll agree with me. We have so much in common. We always think the same way about things. *(Pause.)* By the way Pinter, congratulations to the Nobel Prize.

PINTER: By the way? Just by the way? That's it?

CHEKHOV: What do you want me to say? I am impressed. I really am. They just started this prize before I died. I read about it while convalescing in Bavaria. I was sure it will only last for a few years, and then everyone will get tired of it. They'll run out of the money... *(He is looking for words.)* You know? The money he got for the gunpowder...

PINTER: Dynamite!

CHEKHOV: What did you say?

PINTER: *(Impatiently.)* Dynamite. Alfred Nobel invented the dynamite ...

CHEKHOV: *(Short pause.)* Oh, yes, yes... *(Shrugs his shoulder.)* What's the difference? *(Pause.)* And I read about your award. How did the Nobel Committee say it? "...who in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle..." It sounded so beautiful! So impressing! *(Pause, turns toward PINTER.)* What's the hell is precipice? *(Pause.)* ...and what is prattle?

PINTER: You could have Googled it! Precipice means danger and prattle is conversation, you know - chit-chat...

CHEKHOV: Couldn't they have said simply: "...who in his plays uncovers the danger under everyday chit-chat?" What's wrong with that?

PINTER: C'mon, Chekhov! The Nobel Committee doesn't talk like that. They always pick the most esoteric words possible. They have to. That's why they are on the Nobel Committee.

CHEKHOV: I wonder what they would have written about my work. I should have gotten that prize. I was still alive you know, when they started it. *(Pause.)* Well, perhaps if I wrote the Three Sisters backwards, like you wrote Betrayal...

PINTER: The Three Sisters backwards? *(Long pause.)* That's a thought! You should have tried that. Nobody would have noticed!

CHEKHOV: What do you mean? Why would not have anyone noticed if I wrote it backwards?

PINTER: Why? Because nothing is happening in that play... Nothing is happening in any of your plays! How could anyone tell in which direction nothing is happening?

CHEKHOV: How can you say that? Nothing is happening? How can you say that? I finalized the goals of the naturalist-impressionist theater.

PINTER: *(Slowly, like he is thinking about it.)* Naturalist-impressionist? Most of my characters could not even pronounce that.

CHEKHOV: *(With slight contempt.)* True! Most of your characters can't say sentences that consist of more than five words.

PINTER: *(Defensive.)* Yes, but my characters speak with pauses.

CHEKHOV: *(Upset.)* How can you speak with pauses? How can anyone speak with pauses? You are talking nonsense, Pinter! Utter nonsense! What could pauses mean?

PINTER: *(With great pride.)* Apparently a lot. One of my critics claimed that he found 31 pauses in my plays that have totally different meanings. 31 different types of pauses...

CHEKHOV: He was pulling your leg, Pinter! A pause, is a pause, is a pause... *(Pause.)* That sounds familiar... Why does that sound so familiar? Who said that?

PINTER: Hemingway..., I mean Gertrude Stein... (*Waves impatiently.*)
Never mind! That's not what they said! Forget it! Let's get back to the Nobel Prize!

CHEKHOV: What about it? You got it! Congratulations! And you are a big success already. Now you are a Nobel Laureate!

PINTER: (*To the side.*) Come to think of it, my characters couldn't pronounce that either.

CHEKHOV: You started as a poet...

PINTER: And I wasn't very good at it!

CHEKHOV: (*Sadly and kindly.*) And now you are the most successful playwright, Pinter!

PINTER: Only because I changed the dashes into dots.

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