

***Chekhov's Life in the Country* from short works by Anton Chekhov, with
translations by Paul Schmidt, Ryan McKittrick, and Julia Smeliansky
Program Notes**

"Any idiot can face a crisis; it is this day-to-day living that wears you out." ~ Anton P. Chekhov

Much has been made during this election season about the differences between life in "small town" America and life in our larger cities, places like Chicago. The notion that life in small towns is somehow more genuine, more authentic, and that the Americans who reside in small towns are more patriotic, more religious, moral, and hardworking than those in our urban centers is one that has been brought into stark relief in recent months. And the contrasting notion that Americans who live life in urban areas are amoral, hipster, degenerate freaks with no sense of loyalty to anything beyond the brand of coffee they buy is also a prevalent theme. These assumptions are so ingrained in our current national political discourse that it is safe to say they are part of the myth of our American identity.

And yet, we know that the myth is false. As Yeats once stated, the center cannot hold. It has no truth to weigh it to the ground. Small towns are not all extraordinarily patriotic or, alternately, filled with ignorant bumpkins; and large towns are not centers of hedonism, nor are they the ultimate Meccas of opportunity. America is more purple than it is red or blue. And instead of despairing in the stereotype, most of us laugh at it on *Saturday Night Live*, or *The Daily Show*, caught up more in the day-to-day dramas of running our lives. This is life in our country.

It shares characteristics to life in Chekhov's country. That people can be stereotyped into moral and amoral, that life is either sweet or harsh only, tragedy or comedy as a whole, has no center to it, no truth. And so we find with the characters in *Chekhov's Life in the Country* – they are more contradictory than would ever fit into a strict dichotomy. And likewise for the world. With the four pieces presented here tonight, Chekhov reminds us that life is not made in overarching pronouncements. It is made in the small moments we hardly notice as they pass. Our most quiet acts make the loudest pronouncements about who we really are, in all our human complexity. You make and remake your own "inner-country" with each personal decision.

This thought that life is not split into an obvious taxonomy is terrifying to some people, which is part of the reason Chekhov was considered revolutionary in the way he approached his characters. Because his ear was finely tuned to human experience, Chekhov's country is heartbreaking. It is also hilarious. It is also real, containing a beautiful and haunting landscape. Now Greasy Joan invites you into *Chekhov's Life in the Country*. How closely it resembles our own.

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