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## THE BIRDS & THE BEES RUN AMOK IN CHEKHOV'S FIRST & NEWEST PLAY

"Brilliant!" (London Guardian) "The world can rejoice in a 'new' play by Chekhov" (London Sunday Express)

There is one play that informs our understanding of all the later works of master Russian playwright Anton Chekhov... but it was almost never found.

Lying forgotten in his sister's safety deposit box until 17 years after his death, the untitled manuscript – later referred to as *Platonov* – was discovered by communist soldiers in 1921. In its original form, *Platonov* was an almost six-hour marathon featuring many familiar characters – characters that Chekhov would later resurrect for his more famous works, including *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*. In 1984, translator and writer Michael Frayn adapted and shortened the play, retitling it **Wild Honey**. It premiered at the National Theatre in London starring Ian McKellen to wild acclaim and was declared "Brilliant!" by *The Guardian*.

This spring, the University of Victoria's Phoenix Theatre presents **Wild Honey** from February 11 to 20, 2016.

As with many of Chekhov's plays, **Wild Honey** delves into the intricacies of love and the human condition via the charming but roguish main character Platonov. Platonov is a schoolteacher and pseudo-philosopher who has a way with women: it's both a blessing and a curse! When the village welcomes home the socialite and widow Anna Petrovna with a get-together on her country estate, the festivities get out of hand and everyone starts playing elaborate games of romantic cat-and-mouse resulting in multitudinous love triangles.

**Wild Honey** has long been on director and faculty member Peter McGuire's shortlist to direct at the Phoenix. "I've always felt that this wonderfully witty play would be perfect for students to explore," says McGuire who directed *Picnic*, another play from his wish list, two years ago. "Young people are living the chaotic nature of love every day. Chekhov himself was only 21 when he wrote this play, around the same age as our students. It's also an opportunity for them to study a classic that also has a contemporary sense of life by Michael Frayn," says McGuire.

Frayn is an award-winning British playwright, novelist, reporter and translator. He first studied Russian during his compulsory service in the UK military and has since become one of the world's best-respected Chekhov translators. Previously a satirist and comic writer for *The Guardian*, his plays have received both the London Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy and the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Comedy. He is probably most well known for his plays *Noises Off* and *Copenhagen*, which earned a Tony Award for Best Play.

With a nod to rural Russian architecture, graduating fifth-year student and set designer **Dallas Ashby** gives us lush yet rugged portrayals of estate gardens, an old schoolhouse and birch forests (of course!). Over 4400 linear feet of aged and weatherworn wood planks have been laid in patterns that allude to the chaos of the relationships playing out on stage. Returning to school for an MFA in costume design after a successful career as a professional ballet dancer, **Graham McMonagle's** eclectic and detailed costumes merge elements of Russia in the early 1900s with the more contemporary revisiting of similar styles in the 1970s. While beautiful and luxurious, the costumes also reflect the fading wealth of the characters. Sessional lighting instructor and previous Resident Lighting Designer for Stratford Festival for over 25 years, **Michael Whitfield** has created a lighting design that highlights birch trees and creates shadows for characters to lurk in clandestinely. The sound design by fourth-year student **Carolyn Moon** contrasts the playful chaos of the play with its moments of sheer romance by using lively Klezmer melodies and sexy Tango music. The two styles emphasize the play's polar opposites of melodrama and farce, and helps shake them into an intoxicating cocktail.

Director Peter McGuire will discuss his approach to **Wild Honey** and his process of collaboration with students on **Friday, February 12 at 7pm**. This free lecture is open to all (no matter which night you have tickets for) and will be recorded for podcast. Performances for **Wild Honey** run as follows:

**Public Previews @8pm:** February 9 & 10

**Evenings @8pm:** (Mondays to Saturdays) Feb. 11 (opening), 12 (with preshow lecture), 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

**Matinee @2pm:** Saturday, February 20

**Preshow Lecture:** Friday, February 12 @7pm: Director Peter McGuire speaks about his approach to the play.

**Single Tickets:** \$15 Student /\$20 Senior /\$25 Adult /\$25 Weekends @ 8pm (Preview \$7.50 avail. after 5pm)

**Phoenix Box Office Opens:** February 2 in person or by calling: **(250) 721-8000**.

### Wild Honey

February 11 – 20, 2016

By Michael Frayn,  
Adapted from an original play  
by Anton Chekhov

*A summer gathering turns a love triangle into a hilarious game of cat-and-mouse.*

Director: Peter McGuire  
Set Designer: Dallas Ashby  
Costume Designer: Graham McMonagle  
Lighting Designer: Michael Whitfield  
Sound Designer: Carolyn Moon  
Stage Manager: Rebecca Marchand

Our last show of  
the season:

### Summer and Smoke

March 10 – 19, 2016

By Tennessee Williams  
Directed by Alan Brodie (MFA Candidate)  
*One woman's passionate and bittersweet story of love and longing in a small southern town.*

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