



Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike

Christopher Durang

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Nominated for six Tony Awards®, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is one of the most lauded and beloved Broadway plays of recent years. Vanya and his adopted sister Sonia live a quiet life in the Pennsylvania farmhouse where they grew up, but their peace is disturbed when their movie star sister Masha returns unannounced with her twenty-something boy toy, Spike. A weekend of rivalry, regret, and raucousness begins!

Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike Details

Date : Published August 13th 2013 by Grove Press

ISBN : 9780802122384

Author : Christopher Durang

Format : Paperback 120 pages

Genre : Plays, Theatre, Drama, Humor, Comedy

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From Reader Review Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike for online ebook

Steven says

Extremely funny if you're an intellectual theater goer in your 50s or higher, who knows their Chekhov, Moliere, Bergman and Maggie Smith, and has nostalgic longing for simpler times ...

I'm only some of those things ... and it was quite funny and poignant.

Victoria says

witty play with plenty of references to pick up on. my only critique is that i dont feel the ending resonated with the rest of the play.

Ashley *Hufflepuff Kitten* says

As with all plays and other things meant to be performed, I think you really need a cast and human vocal inflection in order to really understand the whole thing. That said, Vanya & Sonia & Masha & Spike has its hilarious moments and its poignant moments. I'm excited to audition for this in a few weeks!

Joan says

I am not a Chekov lover of any sort. I will be part of the team who produce this show for a high school event, and truly hope that the costuming and student participation will inspire me. I did enjoy reading the end notes. C Durang isn't one of my usual go tos...so I would say I am outside of the regular genre on this one. But if you like the absurdist and emotional undercurrents in comedic theatre with a touch of irony, relevancy and so forth- read on.

Estefania says

Such a wacky play and absurd, I loved reading it and getting to know each character. I analyzed Nina's character for my class and she helps the family get back together just by being there with helping realize that Masha is going through her midlife crisis and that she should not be blinded by Spike and jealous of Nina. Vanya and Sonia both complement each other very well with there drastic differences, and you truly see Sonia grow.

Each character is develops, well not such if Spike or Cassandra.

Madelaine says

So excited that I will be performing this play in about a month!

Brian McCann says

Enjoyed reading it as much as I liked seeing it. Beware of Hootie Pie!

Taylor Hudson says

An extremely entertaining take on Chekhov from the reliably funny and absurd, Christopher Durang. A great cast of characters is the highlight of the script - and then there's that mostly naked man running around the whole time... What's not to like?

Heather Zehnder says

Seriously funny

John says

As a book to read, rather than a play seen in a theatre, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is a pleasant, amusing work that one can read in under two hours. Movie star Masha, accompanied by her younger lover Spike, visits her brother and adopted sister at the house in rural Pennsylvania where they live. Two other characters are a cleaning woman named Cassandra and a young woman named Nina who is visiting relatives in the vicinity. The dialogue, which is generally funny, with a few laugh-out-loud moments, is chiefly what the play has to offer. The drama and plot are a little slight. There were probably some references to the plays of Chekhov that escaped me, since, to be frank, I admit I have never paid attention to the plays of Chekhov.

Keith Moser says

I was in Christopher Durang's *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All for You* in college and I've read one or two other plays of his, but I recently picked up his most recent play which won the Tony last year and decided to read it after a local theater announced it'll be a part of their 2016 season.

Reading it made me wonder how the Tony voters choose the Best Play or Musical. I assume it has to be based on the production, so authors really get some great help from the directors and actors who bring their plays to life. I mean, if Tony voters were just reading the scripts, I think it would be hard for certain shows to

win. I'm thinking about recent winners such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* or *War Horse* which may have won simply because their Broadway productions were fully funded with great spectacle (I haven't read either play but I know their productions were something that regional theaters might not be able to duplicate).

Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike is another play I haven't seen on Broadway, but the cast and director are well-acclaimed. The script doesn't seem like it would be too hard to produce anywhere, but the script on the page didn't wow me. Did David Hyde Pierce, Sigourney Weaver, and others create characters wonderful enough to win the Best Play Tony?

The story is interesting—Vanya and Sonia are two siblings (Sonia was adopted) who live alone in their Berks County childhood home who have little to do ever since their parents died. Masha is their older sister—a movie star who pays for the house and gives them monthly stipends. She comes home to visit one weekend and brings her boy toy, Spike, who is half her age and a handsome aspiring actor. Vanya & Sonia have a regular housecleaner, Cassandra, who shares her name with the Greek prophet who was blessed with speaking true prophesies but damned so that no one believes her. This housecleaner also shares this sixth sense to funny effect. The final character in the play is Nina, a 20-something niece of their neighbor who also aspires to be an actress, but isn't as full of herself as Spike is. In fact, her disposition is positively sunny all the time, a stark difference to elderly Vanya and Sonia who are mostly fed up with life.

The characters are interesting. I wonder how much Vanya is based on Durang (who lives in Berks County with his partner). There's a lengthy monologue he has at the end decrying the youth of today while also complaining about a lot of stuff he had to grow up with. I doubt Durang is actually this miserable, but it does seem like it could be a fun role to play (in 20-some years). The siblings all hate and love each other in realistic ways and each have their own moments to shine. Spike seems like nothing more than eye candy while Cassandra and Nina both have great scenes to play.

There are plenty of Anton Chekhov references from the three siblings' names to several lines they say. I wouldn't have gotten any of them (I don't think I've ever read any of his plays) had I not read the last 18 pages before reading the play. The Author's Note summarizes the characters and some of the story (with mild spoilers) and the essay *My Life With Chekhov*, written for *The Lincoln Center Theater Review*, is a nice summary of Durang's encounters with the Russian playwright. I highly recommend reading these before the play as a sort of primer for everything. There's really no reliance on being familiar with anything Chekhov wrote to enjoy the play, but I did like the allusions throughout. I was just disappointed in what was supposed to be the "Best Play" of 2013 while reading it—it's good, but perhaps it was the production that was truly great...

Brian says

Although you do not need to be familiar with the works of Anton Chekhov to enjoy “Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike” I do believe you would more fully appreciate the very Chekhovian themes of this play, and would see it on another level, if you were.

I have not seen this play in performance, but reading it I did not find it especially hysterical. Clever at times and I chuckled frequently, but laugh out loud...not really. I think the performance dimension is what adds so much of the humor to this piece. The play reads okay, but again, I think it would come across as having more resonant themes in performance.

A strength of the play is the characters, and how readily we buy into their rather stereotypical roles.

Although the characters are broadly written, you do feel a familiarity with all of them at times. Especially frustrating (in a good way) are the moments where the characters, particularly Sonia and Vanya, express discontent with life. Mr. Durang does a nice job of getting you annoyed with their lack of appreciation for life on life's terms. The funniest written character is the housekeeper / soothsayer Cassandra. Her "prophecies" are some of the highlights of the text.

The play comes across as lacking however in some of its bigger moments. Vanya has a very long diatribe where he longs for the simplicity (as he imagines it) of the past. It has moments (some of them stellar) but overall it seems to fall just a little short. Another frustrating aspect of the piece is that many of the emotional transitions for the characters happen unrealistically fast, but such is the limitation of the genre.

Overall "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike" is an interesting read, and I believe would be an even more enjoyable performance. I certainly think the play merits rereading and I believe that like the best of Chekhov it will continue to yield new pleasures as you travel down life's road.

Ray says

...This is an extremely clever and intelligent play and I enjoyed it immensely. I only wish I could see a production of it at some time. It is literate, nostalgic and hilarious throughout. Great characters.

Jana Gueck says

I desperately want to see this play. Like with many plays, much is lost in translation when you merely read it. How different to see Sigourney Weaver as aging star Masha lamenting being cast as a grandmother and getting paid less than she did in her glory days then to read a faceless character you are somewhat ambivalent towards. I never connect as well to a play I'm reading unless there's a character I desperately want to play that I am imagining myself being.

And yet, it is funny. It is both current, three aging siblings considering their lives, and the state of global warming and the world in general, and ancient, with Cassandra, their maid, a modern version of The Cassandra, from Agamemnon touting prophesies at each turn of the page. Spike is the only character firmly routed in the current world while Vanya, Sonia, Masha, and Nina are all Chekhovian (Chekhov, Anton). I would love to hear reactions from someone with less knowledge of classic theatre, and also the reaction of someone who understood EVERYTHING. Who knows The Sea-Gull and The Cherry Orchard and The Three Sisters like I know The Hunger Games and Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone and A Game of Thrones.

Did I give it five stars because it's a Tony Award winner, and who am I to argue with the pros? Probably. But it also gave this 25-year-old a glimpse into the minds of those older than me. It did what all great art should do: it helped me understand a person different than myself. It may be funnier to someone who understands more Chekhov, but it made me want to dive back in and read Chekhov, and how many works can state that?

Most of all, I loved how beautifully Christopher Durang discussed the idea of a shared memory between the generations. How does a grandparent converse with a texting, tweeting teenager? What do they have in common? There are thousands of shows and everyone has their own tastes and opinions firmly staked, what can we all discuss?

"*The Ed Sullivan Show* was on...Richard Burton and Julie Andrews would sing songs from *Camelot*.' It was wonderful. It helped theatre be part of the national consciousness, which it isn't anymore."

And yet, NBC aired a live television broadcast of *The Sound of Music* this year. Maybe it was in response to the production of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* and perhaps it wasn't, but it was so popular that they are absolutely doing it again next year. Please, please do NBC! But maybe cast Audra as the lead this time? Or at least Lea Michele. Pretty please?

Read more of Jana's reviews at [Jana's Library](#)

Betsy says

A play about despair and hope, acting and aging, family and loneliness, Greek drama and Chekhov. I sincerely hope I will be able to see it performed some day.
