

'Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike'

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Correspondent

Last Friday, the Springfield Community Players opened their thoroughly entertaining production of Christopher Durang's "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike." It will continue Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. in their Studio Theater at 165 South St. in Springfield.

Director John MacDonald, who is also president of the players, has assembled an excellent cast who all fit their parts really well and turn in a great performance. Durang's comedy was introduced in New Jersey and played off Broadway in 2012, then moved to Broadway the next year, where it won a Tony Award for Best Play and the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play.

Set in current times, it has elements of the work of 1890s Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. In this play, deceased professors and community theater participant parents have named their children after Chekhov characters as in "Uncle Vanya." And the situation is similar to "The Cherry Orchard," where siblings fight over the fate of a large orchard and estate. This "estate" has nine or 10 cherry trees — they never seem certain of the number — but Sonia stubbornly keeps referring to them as their orchard.

MacDonald says he chose the play feeling "it was a good option for this theater," having "a lot of parts that make people laugh." He only sees a slight connection to Chekhov,



Cast of the Springfield Players production of "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike," from left, back row: Anna Kendall, Andy Freeman, Allie Gibbs; front row: Barbara Ball, Aprille Lawrence and Todd Hutchinson.

especially with the names, and I agree that no one need be a Chekhov scholar to thoroughly enjoy Durang's humor and pathos as well as this cast's excellent portrayal of it.

Though humorous, the play also contains social commentary, as some say Chekhov's

work did in his day, on aging parents, loneliness, narcissism, change, global warming, technology and the newer generation. Each character marches to his or her own beat, but they all accept each other. They become believable as one's neighbors. In

this well-paced presentation, the cast has you laughing with them, not at them, as they maneuver through some very serious insights into the human condition. All this takes place on an excellently put together set, and the costumes, especially when they

dress as characters from "Snow White" for a party, are excellent as well.

The cast consists of the three siblings, all having stories of equal importance in the plot. All have breakdowns and each evaluates their unfulfilled life. Vanya and Sonia have remained in the home to take care of their aging parents. Then after the parents died, they have just stayed without pursuing careers for years. Masha has become a successful actress, and she has continued to support them. Spike is Masha's young lover and Nina is a similarly young neighbor who becomes a distraction for Spike. Cassandra is the housekeeper and dabbles in Voodoo.

Todd Hutchinson plays Vanya, the male sibling. He says, "The character reminds me of myself in my younger years."

He feels Vanya presents a challenge having "a shyness that is hard to portray," but "I like a challenge." And I feel he and all of them were more than equal to the challenge Durang's characters gave them. Aprille Lawrence played the other stay-at-home sibling. She said she didn't know the play, but when she read it, she "immediately wanted to be Sonia." Her love of her character showed.

Anna Kendall equally fit Masha, who played the successful but extremely conflicted movie actress well. Andy Freeman plays the would-be star actor Spike, who has taken up with Masha. His specialty seems to be comedy, and he does it well.