

Track One

Welcome to this introduction to **Three Sisters** by Anton Chekhov in a version by Cordelia Lynn. It has been directed for the Almeida Theatre by Rebecca Frecknall.

This performance of **Three Sisters** on the 30th of May is a part of the Three Sisters For Free festival and will be audio described and captioned. Each year, the Almeida programs a festival offering young people free access to live theatre, music, poetry, panel discussions, workshops and masterclasses.

This year, the For Free festival is a one day event that centres around the themes and ideas of Chekhov's **Three Sisters**. We have directing masterclasses, acting workshops, the Poetry Takeaway Van, plus many more exciting events.

To book tickets to the performance or find out more information about the events taking place, please contact the Almeida Box Office on 0207 359 4404. If you are coming as part of a group, please contact your group leader who will be able to book tickets on your behalf.

For audiences accessing the audio description there will be a touch tour at 6 pm, the introductory notes will start at 7.15 pm and the performance itself at 7.30 pm.

The performance lasts for approximately 2 hours and 55 minutes including a 15 minute interval.

The following introduction to Three Sisters takes about 12 minutes to listen to and includes descriptions of the set, characters and costumes, plus an additional track featuring interviews with the cast, recorded at the Almeida Theatre.

[Track 2] In the programme Sarah Grochala writes '***Sibling relationships are the most enduring of family relationships. In most cases we lose our parents and live the latter part of our life without them. Children come into our lives in adulthood and never know our younger selves. Our siblings however live life beside us...***'

The action takes place over a period of roughly three years.

There are 14 characters played by a multiethnic cast. The costume design creates a feeling of something both contemporary and timeless. The eponymous “Three Sisters” of the play’s title are Olga, Masha and Irina.

Olga, the eldest, is 28 when we first meet her. Dressed in a palette of midnight blue her clothes are conservative and modest. Her dress is long sleeved and high collared, belted at the waist with a skirt that hangs to her calf. Her legs are bare, and she wears black ankle boots. A small watch glints on her right wrist. Olga is slight and petite; her black hair is tied in a neat pony tail and frames a pale face with large, watchful, dark eyes and neat, even features. Her movements seem careful and considered. She often wraps an arm across her chest as her other hand reaches up tentatively to caress her throat or stroke her jawline with the backs of her fingers.

Masha is the middle sister. Her clothes are black and less conservative. Her dress clings to her slim figure, the skirt touching her bare legs just below the knee, and the wrap around top creating a low V-neck exposing her pale collar bone and throat. Masha wears her brown hair loose, cut into a wavy bob. She is a beauty with dark brooding eyes, pronounced cheekbones and full pouting lips. Masha moves with a restless lethargy unable to stay still for long. She lies on the floor seemingly relaxed then sits upright, legs crossed, head cocked to one side, or listlessly goes from chair to chair almost draping herself onto them. She often whistles or sings to herself, lost in a memory of her own thoughts.

Irina is the youngest sister at 20, her thin, girlish body on the cusp on womanhood. Her pretty face is sometimes clouded with a small frown as she listens to the others, piecing together her own opinions and ideas. Her clothes are white and appear casual and a little thrown together. Her dress is calf length, belted at the waist with long sleeves and a modest round neck. Later she adds a baggy woollen jumper. Her shoes are beige ballet pumps but more often than not she is barefoot. Irina’s hair is long and blonde; she wears it up in a high pony tail or loose tumbling

down her back. Earlier in the play as she celebrates her 20th birthday; her large blue eyes shine with joy when she smiles, and she skips around the space with childlike energy.

Andrey is the sisters' brother. A pale, scholarly man. Of medium height he is slim, and his clothes are functional. His white shirt has a loose Nehru collar and is untucked, hanging down over his creased black trousers. Later he changes the shirt for a white t-shirt, topping it with a black V-neck jumper. Andrey is often carrying a book or perching on a chair, or in his study reading intently. His brown hair is thin and receding a little from his high forehead into a widow's peak. It is swept to the side where it flops limply almost hanging over one eye.

Fyodor is Masha's husband. In his mid-forties he is much older than his wife. His tousled dark hair, already tinged with flecks of grey, is pushed back from his lined, weathered face and he has a thick grey moustache. His small brown eyes dart as his expression flits from worried frown to eager, awkward smile with easy regularity. Fyodor wears a crumpled corduroy suit in soft grey, the trousers held up with green braces. His shirt is pale blue worn with the top button undone. His shoes are brown suede loafers and he wears no socks. He stands, hands stuffed deep into his trouser pockets and addresses the family as though teaching a lesson.

Natasha is the girlfriend of Andrey. Young and full of nervous energy her abundant corkscrew curls are held tied back from her soft featured pretty face with its smooth brown skin and large expressive eyes. When we first meet her, Natasha is dressed in a dusky pink chiffon dress with a full, pleated skirt to the knee and a pussy bow collar. She has teamed this with a clashing green belt. Later she wears a long pink pencil skirt with a slit at the back exposing her bare legs and tops it with a tight fitting green ribbed sweater. She speaks with a Scottish accent.

Ivan is an old friend of the family. He is 59, though moves with the care of an older man. He's tall, of medium build and his thick grey hair is uncombed as is his full beard. His watery blue eyes watch over the others with a fatherly affection or

frustration. Ivan is smart, he wears a black three-piece suit with the faintest white pinstripe in the fabric. The waistcoat is buttoned over a crisp white shirt and a black tie is knotted at his throat. Later he changes his waistcoat and jacket for a grey wool jumper.

We also meet five soldiers who are regular visitors to the house.

The Army Captain, **Alexander**, is 43, tall and muscular. His grey hair is cropped short and a neatly trimmed goatee adorns his handsome face. He has clear blue eyes that hold other people's gaze with unnerving sincerity. Alexander is a steady and calm presence, moving with a confident air. He is dressed in his military uniform; Khaki green wool jacket with shining brass buttons down the front and on the breast and waist pockets, and straight trousers of the same colour with a vivid red stripe on the outer leg, worn with black polished shoes. Later out of uniform he wears a brown tweed two-piece suit with a black grandad shirt and he speaks with a soft Irish accent.

Nikolay is in his mid-twenties, tall and slim with a mop of dark hair that flops in a side parting. His face is attractive with an open friendly expression and an easy smile, his brown eyes widening with joy. A shadow of stubble covers his jawline. Not in uniform he is dressed casually in a short sleeved, lemon yellow shirt tucked into fawn trousers. He teams this with brown suede loafers which he wears without socks. Later he adds an orange woollen cardigan. At times the others refer to him as "the Baron."

Vasily is a moody sullen young man in his twenties with a strong build; his very short light brown hair is brushed forward at the front over his forehead. His face is pale and his large blue eyes stare. He is in his soldier's uniform, a military green ribbed jumper worn with wool trousers in the same colour. The trousers are tucked into socks, and heavy boots are on his feet. Later had adds a grey donkey jacket and a rust coloured beanie hat.

Vladimir and **Alexey** appear younger than their comrades in arms. Both are dressed in military green jumpers and trousers tucked into boots. Vladimir is tall and slim; his fair hair is buzz cut and a small amount of stubble is visible on his chin. Alexey is shorter with dark hair and a clean-shaven face. He has a camera hanging around his neck on a leather strap and snaps photos at every opportunity; he also has a passion for giving small gifts.

We also meet **Ferapont** a local council official. In his forties his thin frame is swamped in a grey wool coat worn with black trousers and white shirt. His grey eyes are sunken in his pinched face and his hair is grey, thinning on top with a grey straggly beard dangling from his chin.

Anfisa is the family's elderly housekeeper. The siblings refer to her as nanny. In her eighties her face is lined and framed with stringy grey hair hanging limply to her jaw. She walks slowly leaning on a cane and wears a grey smock dress that hangs baggy and shapeless on her thin frame. A thick, black wool shawl is draped over her narrow shoulders.

The Setting

The simple setting is open to us and uses minimal items to create the sisters' family home. The main feature, a large platform about six metres square, is raised a metre or so from the auditorium floor and set at a slight angle to the seating. The floor of the platform is covered by a heavy canvas tarpaulin that's stretched taut over its pale cream surface.

Initially, twenty-two mismatched elegant wooden chairs face us in rows of two or three; the chairs are in two sections as though laid out for a church service, with an aisle in the centre. At the back on the right is an upright piano with a stool just in front. On top of the piano is a picture frame containing a photograph of the girls' father, in his army uniform with two other officers. Next to the photograph is a small carriage clock and a vase containing white flowers.

The platform is accessed by three sets of steps, one at the front towards the right of centre, one near the front left corner and another at the back on the left - this one is near a door in the theatre's back wall that leads out to other unseen parts of the house. At times characters also pass us as they come and go through the aisles in the auditorium.

Just behind the platform, dark earth banks around the back of the space. In the centre the earth reaches a similar height to that of the platform, sloping gently down to the sides as it follows the curve in the back wall. Occasionally enlarged photographic images are splashed over the back wall as memories of unfolding events, revealed just moments after the camera shutter clicks.

Resting against the back wall on the far left and right are a few items of furniture that indicate other aspects of the house; on the left a wooden dresser contains crockery and glassware, with several folded blankets on top, nearby is a small wooden trunk. On the right eleven steps made from chunky wooden beams, each about half a metre wide, make a stairway that leads up to a ledge of equal width that's about three metres in length – like a large shelf. This 'shelf' is big enough for a person to comfortably perch on - indeed it's where Andrey often retreats to read, and if the mood takes him, to play his violin, which hangs on a hook in the back wall. Further to the right a few shirts and other items of clothing hang in a neat glass fronted wardrobe. Dotted around the furniture are several angle poise lamps, each slightly different, some short and some tall.

Cast and Production Credits.

The three sisters are Olga played by **Patsy Ferran**, Masha played by **Pearl Chanda**, and Irina played by **Ria Zimitrowicz**. Their brother Andrey is played by **Freddie Meredith**.

Masha's husband, Fyodor Ilyich Kulyn is played by **Elliot Levey**

Natasha Ivanovna is played by **Lois Chimimba**

Ivan Romanovich Chebutykin is played by **Alan Williams**

Army captain Alexander Ignatevich Vershinin is played by **Peter McDonald**

The other soldiers we meet are Nikolai Lvovich Tuzenbach played by **Shubham Saraf**, his friend Vasily Vasilyevich Solony played by **Alexander Eliot**,

Vladimir played by **Sonny Poon Tip** and Alexy played by **Akshay Sharan**

Ferapont is played by **Eric MacLennan**.

Anfisa is the elderly housekeeper is played by **Annie Firbank**

Design is by **Hildegard Bechtler**

Sound by **George Dennis**

With Lighting by **Jack Knowles**.

The play was written by Anton Chekhov, adapted by **Cordelia Lynn** and has been directed by **Rebecca Frecknall**.