

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

VISUAL STORY

UNCLE VANYA

BY **Anton Chekhov**

ADAPTED BY **Joanna Murray-Smith**

DIRECTED BY **Anne-Louise Sarks**

Relaxed performance
Sat 22 Aug 2pm



Wominjeka / Welcome

Welcome to this Melbourne Theatre Company production at Arts Centre Melbourne.

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the recognised traditional owners of the land on which Arts Centre Melbourne stands, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people.

Melbourne Theatre Company also acknowledges the Boon Wurrung people, their deep and long-standing connections to the land and waterways we create on, and their generosity in working with us.

We pay our respects to all First Nations people, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories.

As a Company we remain committed to the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for voice, truth and treaty.

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Important information

The Production

Uncle Vanya is a play originally written by Anton Chekhov, a Russian playwright, in about 1896, and adapted by Joanna Murray-Smith, an Australian playwright, in 2024. This production of *Uncle Vanya* is directed by Anne-Louise Sarks.

Venue

This production of *Uncle Vanya* will be performed at the Playhouse, which is inside Arts Centre Melbourne. The Playhouse is wheelchair accessible.

Date and time

The relaxed performance of *Uncle Vanya* will take place on Saturday 22 August at 2pm.

Length

Uncle Vanya runs for approximately 2 hours and 5 minutes, including a 20-minute interval.

Content

Uncle Vanya contains frequent coarse language and mature themes. Please note that descriptions of strong coarse language and mature themes are included in the following pages of the visual story.

Age recommendation

Uncle Vanya is recommended for ages 14+ or school years 9–12.

Content guide

Language

- The play includes frequent strong language, including words such as “shit”, “fuck”, “prick” and “bitch”.

Alcohol

- Characters drink alcohol throughout the play.
- There are references to vodka and brandy, and some characters appear drunk.

Medical themes

- Mentions of illness, exhaustion, medical mistakes, and a patient dying after an accident.

Gender and relationships

- Comments about gender, attraction, and marriage.
- Yelena’s age gap with her husband is discussed.
- Vanya criticises his mother’s interests in women’s rights.

- Yelena challenges Vanya’s attitudes toward women.
- Several characters talk about Yelena’s beauty.
- Vanya expresses strong feelings for Yelena.

Suicide references

- Vanya says it is “a perfect day to hang oneself”.
- Astrov jokes that Vanya should practise firing a gun on himself.

Physical intimacy

- Short moments of physical affection, including hand-kissing, cheek-kissing, and two passionate kisses.

Sensory warnings

Sudden or loud sounds

- Two gunshots are fired in Act Three.
- A fake gun is brought on stage. There is a rehearsed struggle and items fall from a table, creating a loud noise.

Lighting and visual changes

- Leaves fall slowly from the ceiling through Act One.
- Lightning flash in Act Two
- Low lighting in Act Two (lamps)
- A full blackout at the end of Act Two and the end of the play.
- Vanya shakes a tree on stage vigorously between Act Three and Act Four; some branches may fall.

Sounds

- Characters argue and raise their voices often.
- Thunderstorm effects in Act Two: thunder and rain.
- Live guitar and piano are played on stage. There is music between the set changes.

Staging set changes

The set changes three times:

- Between Act One and Act Two
- After the interval
- Between Act Three and Act Four

Smell / smoke

- A pipe is smoked with herbal smoke at the beginning of Act One and the end of Act Four.

Relaxed performances

Relaxed Performances focus on relaxing or adapting the theatre environment while maintaining the creative integrity of the show. Relaxed Performances are for anyone who would benefit from a more relaxed environment. We embrace noisy enthusiasm and it's okay to move about and self-regulate.

During a relaxed performance:

- We may make minor changes to sensory elements of a show such as reducing bright lighting or loud noises
- There is a relaxed attitude to noise and movement.
- You are welcome to bring in, and use, stimming devices.
- The theatre doors remain open; and the house lights remain on, but dimmed, throughout the performance.
- Your ticket will have a seat row and number on it, but you can decide where you'd like to sit on the day of the performance. Feel free to ask an usher to recommend seats and take you to them.
- You can leave the venue at any time and a designated quiet area is available in the foyer.

Theatre guidelines

- Photography is not permitted during the performance. Mobile devices (e.g. iPads) are permitted to be used for live captioning and to assist with communication – please inform the ushers or ask for assistance. It's always fine to use a device in the foyer or quiet areas.
- For some audience members, clapping can be very loud and feel uncomfortable, so we encourage you to join us at the end of the performance by using the Deaf applause. This is done by waving your hands up in the air, which is the Deaf community's way to show appreciation. We invite you to applaud in whatever way is comfortable for you.



About the venue

Uncle Vanya is being
performed at

Arts Centre Melbourne
100 St Kilda Road,
Southbank, Victoria.

The building has a spire
on the top.

Entering the building

You might go into the building through the car park on Kavanagh Street or South Bank Boulevard, or through the doors at the St Kilda Road entrance.

There are construction works to the Theatres building at Arts Centre Melbourne. If you are travelling by car, please be aware this construction work may cause delays.

When you get to the building you will see other people who are also going to see shows. Some of them might be seeing *Uncle Vanya* like you.

You will also see people wearing black uniforms. They are called **ushers**. They can help you with directions or answer any questions you may have about the performance.



Find your way

There are three theatres inside Arts Centre Melbourne. For this Relaxed Performance you are going to the **Playhouse** on Level 5.

You might need to walk down some stairs or use the elevator to get to the Playhouse. The friendly ushers will help you find your way.

The place might be quite busy when you arrive, so you might wish to allow yourself extra time or wear headphones if it's noisy.

Before going inside the Playhouse Theatre, you may like to use the bathroom. Accessible toilets are available on all levels, so please feel free to ask for directions.



Seating

The doors to the theatre will open about 30 minutes before the start of the show. You can go into the theatre and find a seat early if you want to.

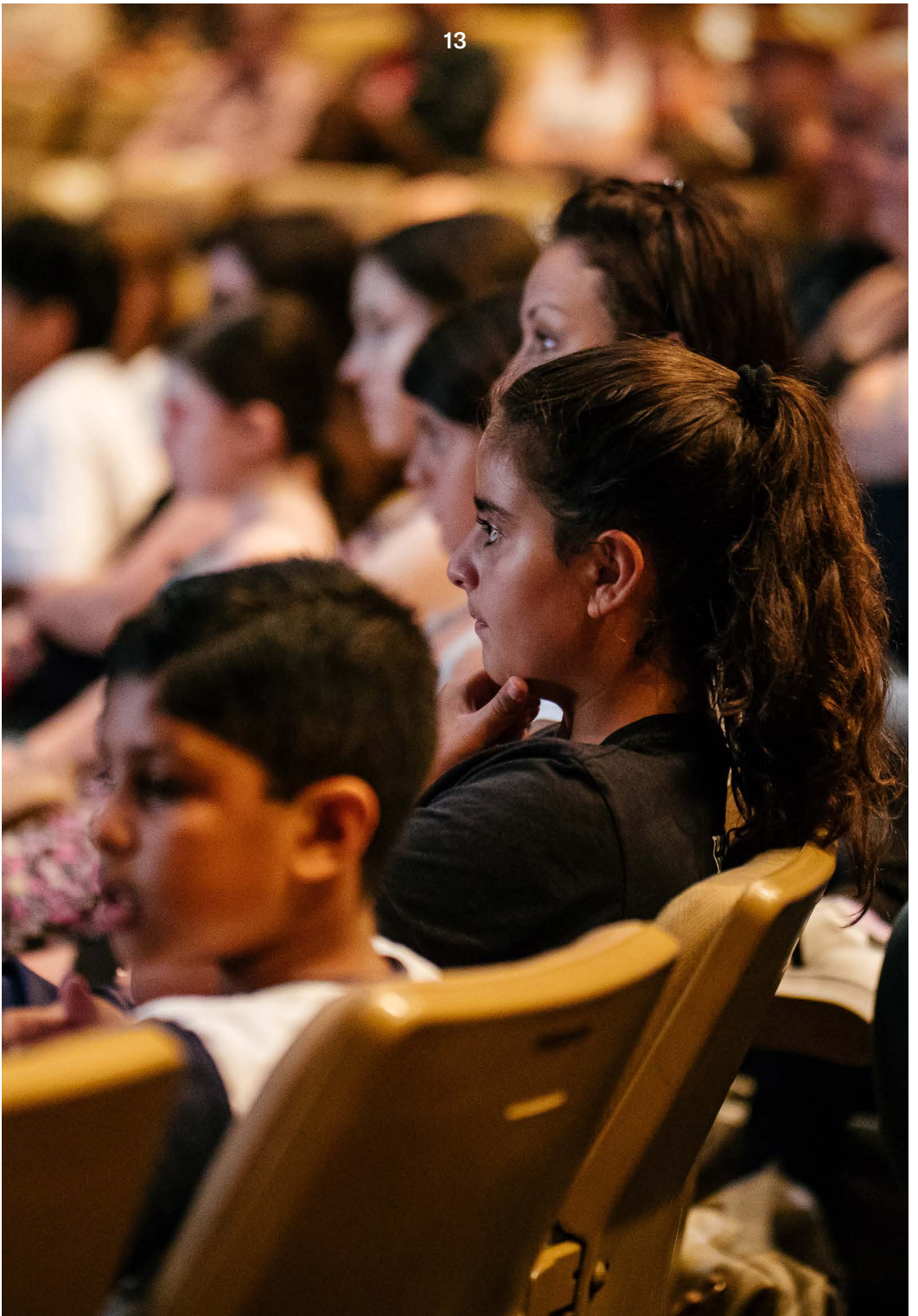
You will need a ticket to enter the theatre. If you can't find your ticket, please visit the Box Office on Level 5 and they will assist you.

Your ticket will let you know what door you can enter the theatre from. Doors 1 and 2 are down the stairs (or lift) on Level 3. Doors 4 and 5 are on Level 5.

You will need to show your ticket to the usher. Your seat number is also on your ticket. The ushers can help you find your seat or you can find it yourself.

At the Relaxed Performance, it's okay to change seats if you would feel more comfortable sitting somewhere else.

Wait until everyone is inside and then you can move to an empty seat. The ushers can assist you if you ask them.



During the show

Today's performance will begin with an announcement. Some actors may come on stage and introduce themselves and the story. They will tell you when you can move to an empty seat.

If you need to take a break during the show you can leave your seat and come out to the foyer area. You can do this whenever you need to.

There will be a Quiet Area in the foyer that has comfortable beanbags and nice soft lighting where you can relax if you want to.

You can return to the theatre and watch the rest of the show whenever you feel ready.

During the interval some audience members might go to the foyer to buy refreshments from the bar or use the bathroom.

After about 15 minutes a bell sound will ring and a verbal announcement over the loudspeaker to remind you that interval is nearly over and to return to your seat for the second half of the performance.



After the show

When the show is finished,
people will clap to say thank
you. Some might even cheer!

Some people may join in
with a Deaf clap, by waving
their hands in the air.

If it's too loud you can cover
your ears.



About the show

This play takes place on a once-grand but now worn family estate in the Russian countryside.

Vanya has spent years running the property for his brother-in-law, a retired professor.

When the professor and his young wife Yelena arrive to stay, the household's routines break down.

Vanya and the local doctor, Astrov, both fall for Yelena.

Sonya, the professor's daughter, quietly loves Astrov. Old frustrations rise, especially when the professor announces he wants to sell the estate. Vanya's anger boils over, leading to a near-violent moment.

By the end, the visitors leave. The remaining family returns to their everyday work carrying sadness, small hopes, and a gentle determination to keep going.

Set description

The set is made up of a lot of chairs and tables resembling an old house that is slowly coming apart. There are trees on stage that show the garden and three walls that move to create the house.

During the show what you see on stage will change between each Act. This is to create different parts of the house and property for each scene.

Cast and crew will move the set, including the walls and furniture between Acts to create the different scenes for the play.

Act One is set outdoors in the garden beneath trees. Leaves fall slowly during this act. After this act the scenery will be changed on stage.



Act Two moves inside the house at night, during a storm with the sounds of thunder and rain. After this act there is an interval and the scenery will be changed.



Act Three takes place in the sitting room in the day, featuring a piano. After this act the scenery will be changed on stage.



Act Four takes place the day after Act Three, in another room in the house.



The characters



Vanya

This is (Uncle) Vanya. He is a witty man in his late forties who runs the family estate. He is full of regrets, and he is in love with Yelena.

Uncle Vanya is played by actor Daniel Henshall.



Astrov

This is Astrov. He is the local doctor, overworked and drinks alcohol often. Passionate about protecting the forest, gentle and loved by both Sonya and Yelena.

Astrov is played by actor Fayssal Bazzi.





Sonya

This is Sonya. She is the professor's devoted daughter. She has quietly loved Astrov for years and throws herself into duty even as her heart aches.

Sonya is played by actor Philippa Northeast.



Serebryakov

This is Serebryakov. A retired, self-important professor and Vanya's brother-in-law. Anxious about his health, his arrival disrupts the household.

Serebryakov is played by actor Shaun Micallef.





Yelena

This is Yelena. She is Serebryakov's younger, beautiful wife. Bored, restless and unfulfilled, she draws the attention of both Vanya and Astrov while feeling trapped in an unhappy marriage.

Yelena is played by actor Catherine Văn-Davies.



Maryia

This is Maryia. She is Vanya's mother. She is devoted to ideas and duty.

Maryia is played by actor Carolyn Bock.





Nanny

This is Nanny. She is an elderly housekeeper, warm, practical, steady and comforting. She is treated as part of the family.

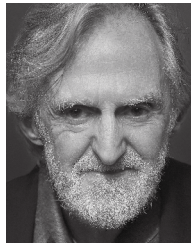
Nanny is played by actor Evelyn Krape.



Telyeghin (“Waffles”)

This is Telyeghin. He is a gentle, loyal family friend and Sonya’s godfather, nicknamed “Waffles.”

Telyeghin is played by actor Don Bridges.



The story

ACT 1 THE GARDEN, DAYTIME

Nanny and the doctor Astrov share tea outdoors under the Poplar tree. Astrov admits he feels burnt out from years of overwork and hardly allows himself to feel anything anymore. Vanya wakes from a nap and joins them, grumbling that the household's routines have been upside-down ever since the professor Serebryakov and his wife Yelena arrived to stay.

Professor Serebryakov, Sonya, Maryia and Telyeghin ("Waffles") return from a walk. Around the tea table, Vanya speaks openly about his frustrations with life, his low opinion of Professor Serebryakov, and his growing infatuation with Yelena. Maryia and Vanya clash over Vanya's belief that he has wasted his life. Sonya asks them both to stop.



Word arrives that there has been an accident at a factory, and Astrov is called away. Before Astrov leaves, he speaks with Yelena about his real passion, protecting and replanting the local forest and Sonya praises him warmly. Astrov gives a heartfelt speech about the meaning and pride he finds in that work.

Once everyone else has gone inside, Vanya is left alone with Yelena and confesses that he loves her. Unsettled, Yelena asks Vanya to stop, and she hurries into the house.



ACT 2 INSIDE THE HOUSE, NIGHT, DURING A STORM

Professor Serebryakov is awake due to the lightning and thunder of a storm.

Sonya urges her father to let Astrov examine him properly, but Serebryakov refuses to see Astrov.

Vanya arrives to sit with Serebryakov. Nanny takes Serebryakov to his room.

Left alone, Yelena and Vanya talk about the strain in the household. Vanya again declares his love, and Yelena turns him away. Alone, Vanya mourns the chances he let slip years earlier.

Astrov arrives, cheerfully drunk after a day's work, and Waffles plays guitar. Astrov and Vanya joke about love and disappointment. Sonya scolds Astrov and Vanya for drinking so much.



Sonya and Astrov later enjoy a warm conversation alone over cheese and wine. Sonya feels quietly wounded when Astrov mentions Yelena's beauty. Astrov admits he feels little love for anyone. He is unaware that Sonya has loved him in secret for years. Astrov leaves without realising.

Alone, Sonya processes her disappointment but finds a small, private happiness in

the time she and Astrov shared. Yelena enters, and she and Sonya make up after a period of tension, share a glass of wine, and grow close with Yelena gently encouraging Sonya's hopes about Astrov. The two begin playing piano together in a rare moment of joy until a sharp knock from upstairs cuts the music short.

Interval



ACT 3 IN THE HOUSE, DAYTIME

The family gathers at Serebryakov's request. Vanya teases Yelena about her boredom, and Sonya urges Yelena to find purposeful work to do. Vanya promises to bring Yelena a hundred roses.

Alone with Yelena, Sonya confides her long-held love for Astrov and asks Yelena to find out how Astrov feels.

Astrov arrives with maps charting the decline of the local forests and Yelena is drawn into his passion for conservation. Astrov is surprised to learn of Sonya's feelings for him. Astrov insists he does not feel the same way. The conversation becomes personal and Astrov and Yelena kiss.

Vanya enters unnoticed, carrying the promised roses, and witnesses the kiss.



Astrov quickly leaves as though nothing happened.

The whole household is called together. Serebryakov announces a plan to sell the estate to fund his retirement, leaving the household's future uncertain. From Yelena's reaction, Sonya understands that Astrov does not love her.

Already heartbroken, Vanya erupts in anger at years of unpaid, unacknowledged work and confronts Professor Serebryakov.

Vanya leaves and re-enters the scene with a gun. Vanya fires the gun at Serebryakov twice (gunshot sound effects). Vanya misses both times. He stops in shock at what he has done.



ACT 4 IN THE HOUSE

Waffles and Nanny wind wool together, relieved that Serebryakov and Yelena are finally leaving and hopeful that ordinary routines can return. Astrov confronts Vanya, insisting he return morphine taken from Astrov's medical bag.

Vanya admits his despair and asks Astrov how he is supposed to go on living.

Astrov offers unsentimental comfort, reflecting on mortality and disappointment, and the hope that future generations might live happier lives than their own.

Sonya persuades Vanya to hand back the morphine.

Astrov and Yelena share one last private moment, acknowledging a mutual attraction that will go unresolved. They kiss before parting for good.



Vanya and Serebryakov reconcile briefly, and Vanya agrees to keep sending money to them as before.

Serebryakov and Yelena depart and the house grows quiet. Astrov also says his goodbyes before leaving.

Vanya and Sonya settle back at their worktable to do the estate's accounts, joined by Nanny knitting, Maryia reading and Waffles softly playing guitar.

Sonya comforts her grieving uncle Vanya, expressing quiet faith that, after a lifetime of work and hardship, Sonya and Vanya will eventually find peace and rest.

The play ends gently, with the household settling back into its rhythms.



More information

You can discover more about *Uncle Vanya* and Melbourne Theatre Company on our website and social media channels.

***Uncle Vanya* programme**

[www.mtc.com.au/
mtc-programmes](http://www.mtc.com.au/mtc-programmes)

Season 2026 production content guide

[www.mtc.com.au/
2026-guide](http://www.mtc.com.au/2026-guide)

Backstage

[www.mtc.com.au/discover-
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Page 11 Kate Disher-Quill

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**MELBOURNE
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