

# British Theatre Guide

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## Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike

Christopher Durang

Steven M Levy and Vaughan Williams for Charing Cross Theatre Productions Limited and Joey Parnes.

Charing Cross Theatre

5 November 2021–8 January 2022

Theatre buffs will recognise the first three names—Vanya, Sonia and Masha—and it isn't only names from this Tony-winning comedy that feel familiar from Chekhov. It adds an extra bit of fun (and you can give yourself brownie points for spotting dramatist Durang's borrowings) but you don't need to know the Russian writer's plays to find this a big laugh.

It begins with gay Vanya (Michael Maloney) and his adopted sister, bipolar Sonia (Rebecca Lacey), taking morning coffee and looking out for a Blue Heron which usually visits the garden pond of the country house where they have spent their whole lives. Their delightful comic pairing immediately engages. It's a tranquil scene, despite Sonia's sudden outbursts, soon to be upset by the arrival of their sister Masha (Janie Dee).

Vanya and Sonia have stayed here in the sticks and looked after their parents while Masha made a life elsewhere but, unlike their Chekhovian hard-working namesakes, they've been the parasites, supported by film star Masha's money.

There is trouble in store, warns cleaning lady Cassandra (Sara Powell), who links voodoo with prophecies delivered like a drama queen (an ancient Greek one). Then Masha arrives with Spike (Charlie Maher), her latest toy boy. She's visiting to go to a posh neighbour's fancy dress party. She will be Snow White and they have to go as her dwarfs—she's brought their costumes with her.

Janie Dee's Masha is all ego but an insecure one, the diva isn't quite as big a star as she used to be and the boyfriend who flaunts his physique so freely may have eyes for others, including a sweet girl called Nina (Lukwesa Mwamba).

Director Walter Bobbie establishes a style that fits theatrical overkill with naturalism to become very funny. Rebecca Lacey is outrageously funny when her repressed and depressed Sonia finds release as a fancy dress Maggie Smith, but things become very serious when Vanya explodes in a passionate tirade comparing modern life with the 1950s that Michael Maloney delivers superbly.

This production premièred [at Bath's Theatre Royal in 2019](#) and would have opened in the West End a year ago had it not been for COVID. It is good that it has made it at last. Chekhov's plays used to be given sombre productions, though he called them comedies. *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is a comedy that has some heartfelt reality behind its hilarity.

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)