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Dramatic Publishing

UNCLE VANYA

By
ANTON CHEKHOV

Adapted by
EMILY MANN

Ellen Chances, Literature and Culture Consultant

This adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* was commissioned
by McCarter Theatre Center, Princeton, N.J.

Emily Mann, Artistic Director

Jeffrey Woodward, Managing Director

and originally produced by McCarter Theatre Center
and La Jolla Playhouse, La Jolla, Calif.

Des McAnuff, Artistic Director

Terrence Dwyer, Managing Director



Dramatic Publishing

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EMILY MANN

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(UNCLE VANYA)

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UNCLE VANYA was commissioned by McCarter Theatre Center, Princeton, N.J., Emily Mann, artistic director, Jeffrey Woodward, managing director, April 29, 2003, and included the following:

CAST

Mikhail Astrov Michael Siberry
Marina Isa Thomas
Ivan Voynitsky (Vanya) Steven Skybell
Professor Alexander Serebryakov . . . William Biff McGuire
Sonya Amanda Plummer
Ilya Telegin (Waffles) Jonathan Hogan
Yelena Natacha Roi
Maria Voynitsky Georgine Hall
a watchman Bill Caleo

PRODUCTION STAFF

Set design Michael Yeargan
Costume Design Myung Hee Cho
Lighting Design Nancy Schertler
Composer Baikida Carroll
Literature and Culture Consultant Ellen Chances
Producing Director Mara Isaacs
Director of Production David York
Stage Manager Mindy Richardson
Production Stage Manager Cheryl Mintz
Casting by Elissa Myers, CSA and Paul Fouquet, CSA

UNCLE VANYA was originally produced by McCarter Theatre Center and La Jolla Playhouse, La Jolla, Calif., May 30, 2003 - Des McAnuff, artistic director, Terrence Dwyer, managing director, and included the following:

CAST

Mikhail Astrov Michael Siberry
Marina Isa Thomas
Ivan Voynitsky (Vanya) Steven Skybell
Professor Alexander Serebryakov. . . William Biff McGuire
Sonya Amanda Plummer
Ilya Telegin (Waffles). Jonathan Hogan
Yelena. Natacha Roi
Maria Voynitsky Georgine Hall
a watchman. David Ari

PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Assistant. Esther Emery
Costume Design Assistant. Ivy Chou
Lighting Design Assistant Jennifer Setlow

Scenery, props and costumes built by McCarter Theatre's production shops.

UNCLE VANYA

A Play in Four Acts
For 4 Men, 4 Women, 1 Extra

CHARACTERS

PROFESSOR Alexander Serebryakov . . a retired professor
YELENA his wife, age 27
SONYA his daughter by his first wife, Vera
MARIA Voynitsky . . . the widow of a privy councillor and
. mother of the professor's first wife
VANYA (Ivan) Voynitsky her son, age 47
Mikhail ASTROV a doctor, age 37
Ilya TELEGIN (Waffles) an impoverished landowner
MARINA an old nurse/nanny
YEFIM a watchman

The action takes place on Serebryakov's country estate.

ACT ONE

SETTING: *A garden. Part of the house and terrace can be seen. In an avenue of trees, under an old poplar tree, a table is set for tea. Near the table are some benches and chairs; a guitar rests on one of them. Near the table, a hammock or swing. It is three o'clock on a muggy, overcast, and hot summer afternoon.*

AT RISE: *MARINA, a slow-moving, tiny old woman sits at the table knitting a stocking. ASTROV walks back and forth.*

MARINA *(pouring him a cup of tea).*

ASTROV. I don't feel like tea.

MARINA *(looks at him, with affection).* Vodka then?

ASTROV. I don't drink vodka *everyday*; anyway, it's too hot. *(She offers the cup of tea.)* Fine. *(He reluctantly takes the tea. Pause.)* Nanny, how long have we known each other? Let's see...I first moved around here...when was it?

MARINA. Sonya's mother was still alive...

ASTROV. Yes, I was coming here for at least two years before she died. So that would be...

MARINA. She died nine years ago...

ASTROV. Eleven years.

MARINA *(thinks for a moment).* Maybe more...

ASTROV. Have I changed much, since then?

MARINA. Oh, yes! You used to be young. And handsome.

Now you aren't young or handsome.

[ASTROV. ...Thank you.]

MARINA. And now, of course, you drink.

ASTROV. You're right. Eleven years and I am a completely changed man! Do you want to know why? Because I work too hard. I'm on my feet from morning 'til night and when I finally get to bed, I just lie there—awake. I can't sleep—I lie there, trembling, eyes open, waiting in fear for the next emergency call so it can start all over again. I haven't had one free day the entire time you've known me, and then you sit there and accuse me of looking old! Well, of course I look old! I'm bored; life is boring; it's a senseless dirty business, this living. And people around here are idiots, without exception. If you spend all your time with idiots, you become an idiot yourself. It's inevitable. (*Pulls at his long moustache.*) I let my moustache grow. It looks ridiculous, doesn't it? I am as idiotic as the rest of them, but I'm not quite as stupid, or at least not yet, thank God. I can still use my brain, unlike the others, but my heart doesn't work. No feelings, dead. Numb. I want nothing, I love no one—except you. (*He kisses her on the head.*) I had a nanny just like you when I was small.

MARINA. Don't you want something to eat?

ASTROV. No... Just before Easter, there was a typhoid epidemic in Malitskoye. I've never seen squalor like that—brutal—people jammed together lying side by side in their little hovels, the calves and pigs—the livestock!—were in with them, running over them while they were dying— The dirt, the smoke, the stench... Unspeakable.

I worked nonstop with them. No food, no drink. I was on my feet all day...but when I got home there was still no rest for me; the signalman from the railroad was carried in and needed to be operated on, right away. So I laid him on the operating table, and just as I was giving him the anesthesia, he died on me. Then those feelings I told you were dead or dormant decided to wake up, with a vengeance. I felt I'd murdered the man—killed him on purpose! I just sat down and closed my eyes—like this—and thought: all those generations who come after us, those people we think we're blazing the trail for—will they even think of us—will they remember to give us a kind word? I don't think so.

MARINA. People forget; God remembers.

(VANYA comes out of the house. He's been asleep since midday dinner; looks disheveled. He sits on the bench and straightens his stylish tie.)

VANYA. Hmm. Yes. *(Pause.)* Yes.

ASTROV. Did you have a good rest?

VANYA. Did I? I'm not sure. *(He yawns.)* Ever since the Professor and his wife have come to stay, our life has gone completely off track. I sleep at the wrong time, drink too much wine, eat all kinds of strange food. It's not healthy. Sonya and I used to work together all day; we never had an idle moment; but now, Sonya works all day—alone, and all I do is eat, drink, and sleep. It's not good.

MARINA *(shaking her head)*. It's chaos! The Professor doesn't get out of bed until noon. The samovar is on the boil all morning, waiting for him. Everything waits for

him. Before the two of them came to stay, we had dinner at one o'clock, like everybody else. Now we have dinner at seven! The Professor sits up all night reading and writing and then suddenly at two o'clock in the morning, there goes the bell! "Heavens, what was that? The Professor wants some tea?! Wake the servants, light the samovar!"... Good Lord, what a mess!

ASTROV. How long are they going to stay?

VANYA. Forever. The Professor has decided to move in and stay with us, forever and ever.

MARINA. Just look at this! The tea has been set out for two hours and they're all out for a walk!

(VOICES off. From the garden come the PROFESSOR, YELENA, SONYA and TELEGIN, returning from their walk.)

VANYA. Never mind. Don't get upset. They're coming...

PROFESSOR. Exquisite! Absolutely breathtaking views wherever you look! *Superbe!*

TELEGIN. Yes, sir. Remarkable, Your Excellency.

SONYA. Tomorrow let's go to the forest, Papa.

VANYA. Ladies and gentlemen, tea is served!

PROFESSOR. Will you please have mine sent up to my study? I still have a little work to do... Duty calls!

SONYA. I think you'll love the new forest, Papa...

(The PROFESSOR, SONYA and YELENA go into the house. TELEGIN goes to the tea table and sits next to MARINA.)

VANYA (*duty calls, he snorts*). It's boiling hot out, it's humid, it's summer for God's sake, and what does our resident genius wear? An overcoat, galoshes, gloves, and a scarf!

ASTROV. He's a careful man.

VANYA. But isn't she splendid? Isn't she the most beautiful woman you have ever seen?

TELEGIN. Marina, you know when I walk in the fields or the garden, or if I just look at this table, my heart is filled with a—how should I put this—a kind of ecstatic bliss!

MARINA. Good Lord...

TELEGIN. The weather is sublime, the birds are singing, we all live in peace and perfect harmony. What more could anyone want? (*MARINA gives him a glass of tea.*) Oh! Thank you... Yes...

VANYA (*dreaming*). Those eyes!... She's wonderful!

ASTROV. Come on, Vanya. Talk to us.

VANYA (*listlessly*). About what?

ASTROV. Anything... What's new?

VANYA. Nothing's new. I'm the same as always...maybe worse—I'm lazier. I'm crankier. I can't accomplish a thing. Mother, on the other hand, still chatters endlessly like a magpie about politics, about the emancipation of women... She's got one eye on the grave, but she's full of excitement—enthusiasms, like a young girl—avidly reading and discussing political causes, her political pamphlets, and books. She actually believes she will live to see the dawning of a new age...

ASTROV. And the Professor?

VANYA. The Professor sits in his study from morning 'til night, as usual. Scribbling. Scribble, scribble, scribble. I

pity the poor paper. You know what he ought to write? His autobiography! Yes, that's what he should do; he is the perfect subject for a book. Consider: a retired professor...stale—no—moldy as a piece of dried fish; racked with gout, headaches, and rheumatism, his liver bursting with envy and petty jealousies, living on the estate of his first wife. Why? Because the old fish can't afford to live in town! He whines about his sad fate, though he is in fact inordinately lucky. He should, quite frankly, feel extraordinarily grateful! The son of a common deacon, he has managed to attain a university chair; he is the son-in-law of a senator; he is called "Your Excellency" wherever he goes! And most important—he has had the pleasure of writing about art for twenty-five years. Unfortunately, he doesn't know the first thing about art! For twenty-five years he has been regurgitating the ideas of other men—on realism, on naturalism—but no matter. Students dutifully write down everything he says. For twenty-five years he has been writing pablum! useless little papers about things already well known to smart people and completely uninteresting to others. In other words, for twenty-five years all he has been doing is beating the air! But just think of this man's pretensions! He has finally been put out to pasture, but now that he's retired, absolutely no one has ever heard of him! He is a complete unknown. That means for twenty-five years he has lived an enormous lie, no doubt taking the seat of a truly worthy colleague. He is, in fact, a total fraud. But look at him! The conceited bastard struts around like he's just stepped down from Mount Olympus!

ASTROV. Could it be our Vanya is just a tiny bit jealous of him?

VANYA. I am! Of course I'm jealous of him! Women worship him! Don Juan himself didn't have this kind of success with women! His first wife, my sister, was an angel, an absolute angel. Beautiful, gentle, pure as the blue sky!—she had more admirers than he's had students, and she loved him completely. My own mother... his mother-in-law—is absolutely in awe of him. And his second wife, as you can see, is a breathtaking beauty. She married him when he was an old man and surrendered to him all her youth, all her beauty, all her freedom... *WHY?* I ask you...

ASTROV. Is she faithful to him?

VANYA. Unfortunately.

ASTROV. Is it unfortunate?

VANYA. Of course it's unfortunate! It's false. It's unnatural. It's illogical. It's supposedly immoral for a woman to deceive an old husband whom she hates. But for a young woman to stifle her youth, and her passion, and her excitement for life—what are we talking about? *That's* what's immoral!

TELEGIN (*tearfully*). Vanya, Vanya... How can you say that? Anyone who betrays a spouse could just as easily betray his country. What we are talking about is high treason.

VANYA. Oh, knock it off, Waffles. For God's sake.

TELEGIN. No. Allow me, Vanya. My wife ran off with a lover the day after our wedding because my appearance was...well... (*He makes a face.*) it must have been revolting to her, I suppose. But since that time, I have never been unfaithful to her; I have never once failed in my duty to her. I love her, and I'm true to her to this day. I help her every way I can, and in fact I sold my

property to pay for the education of our—I mean their—children, the children she had with her lover. Yes, I have lost all my happiness, but I have kept my dignity. I have my pride. And what does she have? She is no longer young; she's no longer beautiful. And what's more—now her lover is dead! So who's come out on top? I ask you.

ASTROV (*aghast*). Yes...well...

(YELENA and SONYA enter, followed by MARIA VOYNITSKY reading a pamphlet.)

SONYA. Nanny, some of the local people are here. Can you see what they want? I'll take care of the tea.

(MARINA exits. YELENA takes a cup of tea and sits in the garden swing. MARIA VOYNITSKY sits and begins to read. Someone hands her a glass of tea which she drinks without looking up.)

ASTROV (*to YELENA*). I came to see your husband. Your note said he's very ill, but he seems perfectly fine.

YELENA. Yes, well... He had a fit of temper last night and complained of pains in his legs, but he seems all right today.

ASTROV. I galloped over here, twenty miles at breakneck speed as I always do, whenever you ask. Now that I'm here, may I at least hope for a bed for tonight?

SONYA. Yes, you so rarely spend the night. Have you had your dinner?

ASTROV. No, actually...

SONYA. Good. You'll have it with us then. We don't have dinner 'til seven o'clock these days! (*Drinks her tea.*)

This tea is cold!

TELEGIN. Yes, the heat of the samovar has decreased at a remarkable rate. You see, the air temperature—

YELENA. Never mind, Ivan Ivanovich. We'll drink it cold.

TELEGIN. With all due respect, madame. My name isn't Ivan Ivanovich.

YELENA. Pardon me?

TELEGIN. It's Ilya Ilyitch. Waffles to friends.

YELENA. Excuse me?

TELEGIN. Waffles. Because of my pockmarked face. I am Sonyetchka's godfather and His Excellency, your esteemed husband, knows me well. In fact, I live with you on this estate and perhaps you will have noticed that I have dinner with you every day... In fact—

SONYA (*affectionately*). In fact, we would be lost without you; you are our right arm. Wouldn't you like some more tea?

MARIA. Oh! Oh!

SONYA. What's the matter, Grandma?

MARIA. I forgot to tell your father— I must be losing my mind! I got a letter from Pavel Alexeyevich today. He's sent me his new article—

ASTROV. Good?

MARIA. Disturbing! He is attacking the very principles he used to champion! It's hard to believe!... But it's so typical, isn't it? People nowadays change their opinions like they change clothes. It's disgraceful.

VANYA. Drink your tea, Mother.

MARIA. Don't you use that condescending tone with me! And don't you interrupt!

VANYA. I wasn't interrupting...I was merely thinking that you have been reading and talking about these damn articles for fifty years and maybe it's time you finally gave it a rest.

MARIA. You don't want to listen to a thing I have to say, do you? Excuse me, my dear *Jean*, but you used to have some strong opinions yourself. You have changed so much I hardly recognize you! You used to be tough-minded, informed, a brilliant young man wi—

VANYA. A brilliant young man! Living in the middle of nowhere where nobody could possibly notice...? (*Pause.*) Yes...what became of that brilliant young man? I'm forty-seven years old, Mother. Up until recently I was just like you—fooling myself that reading, and thinking, and forming opinions, and talking about them actually mattered. I thought I was actually doing something. Now I'm facing reality. I lie awake at night and feel a dead weight in the middle of my chest, a sinking feeling. I'm so angry! I've wasted so much time! I could have been doing what I wanted all this time and now I'm too old!

SONYA. Uncle Vanya, don't...

MARIA. You are the incarnation of everything you used to detest. Where are your principles? They are not at fault, you are! Ideas are meaningless unless they are translated into action, which is something you have decided not to do. For some reason, you have decided to just sit here and complain when you could be doing something truly useful!

VANYA. Truly useful? You mean, like Alexander? Like your beloved son-in law, the perpetual writing machine?

MARIA. And what is that supposed to mean?

SONYA. Uncle Vanya, Grandma, please! stop...

VANYA. All right! I'll stop. Silence...I apologize...

(Pause.)

YELENA. Lovely weather today; it's not too hot.

VANYA. Yes, it's lovely weather to hang yourself.

(TELEGIN tunes the guitar, plays a polka. MARINA comes from around the house, calling the chickens.)

MARINA. Here, chick, chick, chick. Here, chick...chick...

SONYA. What are you doing?

MARINA. The speckled hen has gone off someplace with her chicks again and there's a hawk around. Oh, Doctor! A man from the factory came by. There's an emergency. They want you... Here, chick, chick, chick...

ASTROV. Right. Of course. An emergency. Well, that's that then. Christ, wouldn't you know. Marina! Can I get a glass of vodka in the kitchen? *(She waves yes and goes. Looking for his cap.)* Where is my... Damn this is aggravating!

SONYA. Yes, it is. You will come back when you're finished and have dinner with us.

ASTROV. No, no—it'll be too late by then. Where the hell is my... *(Finds his cap.)* Oh, here it is. *(TELEGIN stops playing the polka. To YELENA.)* Well, it's been a short visit. Too short. I didn't even get a chance to see my patient! If you'd like to come and visit me, you and of course Sonya, too, I'd be delighted, you know. It's a small place—seventy-five, eighty acres or so, a nursery, with a garden the likes of which you won't find anywhere else around here, and next to my estate is a state

forest. The forester is old, always sick, so actually I end up managing it all.

YELENA. Sonya tells me your passion is forests.
(*ASTROV: Does she?*) But you're a medical doctor, aren't you? Isn't that your true calling?

ASTROV. God only knows what my true calling is.

YELENA. Is it interesting?

ASTROV. Interesting? What? Taking care of a forest? Well, yes...

VANYA (*ironic*). Extremely!

YELENA (*to ASTROV*). But you're a young man! Can it really be interesting to a man in his prime, looking after one spruce tree after another, acre after acre of evergreens? I suspect you actually find it pretty monotonous.

SONYA. No! The work is thrilling! Dr. Astrov watches over the old trees and plants new trees every year. He has received a citation from the government—you should show her your bronze medal! He protects the trees from being destroyed. If you listen to him talk about his work, I know you'd agree with him completely. He says that trees are the ornaments of the earth, that they inspire in man an understanding of natural beauty, and they bring man to a new level of spiritual consciousness. (*Flushed.*) I know it seems like a rather large leap—to go from planting trees to saving mankind—but forests temper a harsh climate, you know, and in countries where the climate is milder, people don't have to waste their time battling nature as we do, so they can turn to higher things. Humanism becomes possible. Philosophy, art, and science flourish; men's treatment of women is considerate, and tender— (*She looks at ASTROV, heart pounding.*)

VANYA (*laughing, with irony*). Brava! Brava! Lovely speech, Sonya, but also somehow unconvincing. So, Mikhail! you won't let me burn firewood in my stoves or build my barns out of wood!

ASTROV. Burn peat in your stoves and build your barns out of stone. Come on, Vanya. You know I don't object to cutting wood when it's a necessity, but why destroy the forests? The woods of Russia are being decimated as we speak; millions of trees have perished; the homes of countless birds and animals have been destroyed; the rivers are drying up and lots of absolutely beautiful areas are lost forever. And why? Because men are too lazy and too stupid to bend down and pick up their fuel from the ground. (*To YELENA.*) Aren't I right? I mean, who but a stupid barbarian would burn so much beauty in his stove and destroy what he cannot make? Man has been endowed with reason in order to increase what he's been given, and what have we done? We haven't created a thing! In fact, we've demolished what we should have cherished. The forests are disappearing, the rivers are running dry, wildlife is becoming extinct, the climate is ruined, and the earth gets poorer and uglier every day. (*To VANYA.*) I know you're not taking what I am saying seriously, but I must tell you, when I pass by forests I personally saved from the ax, or hear the rustle of leaves of plants I've seeded myself, I feel I've had at least some small part in preserving our little world. And that a thousand years from now, I may be just a tiny bit responsible for man's being a little bit happier. When I see a sapling budding into green and swaying in the breeze, I—I— (*Sees MARINA coming toward him with the vodka.*) I...have to go. It's probably all nonsense any-

way... `Bye... (*VANYA applauds. ASTROV goes toward the house. SONYA takes his arm and goes with him. MARINA gives him the vodka as they leave.*)

SONYA. That was beautiful! When are you coming to see us again?

ASTROV. I don't know.

SONYA. Do we have to wait a whole month?

(*ASTROV and SONYA go into the house. YELENA and VANYA walk to the terrace.*)

YELENA. You are absolutely impossible, Vanya! What's the use of torturing your mother by calling my husband names—the "perpetual writing machine"?... I mean really it's quite tedious and it's totally juvenile. At dinner you picked an argument with Alexander again! You can be so petty, you know, so—

VANYA. What if I hate him?

YELENA. You have no reason to hate him. He's like anyone else; no better and no worse than you.

VANYA. If you could only see yourself. Your beautiful, detached face, your indolent body! We bore you to tears, all of us, don't we?

YELENA. Yes... In fact, you do... You are incredibly tiresome. You abuse my husband and shower pity on me: "Tsk, tsk. That poor young woman, married to such an old, old man." Don't you know I can see right through your "sympathy"? As the doctor just said, look at yourself—look at how thoughtlessly you destroy things. Not just the forests. Look at how you destroy people—loyalty, purity, self-sacrifice—they'll all vanish with the trees if you're not careful. Why is it that you can't look

calmly at a woman unless she belongs to you? The doctor's right; you're all possessed by a will to destroy—the woods, the birds, women, and one another.

VANYA. What nonsense...I don't like your...moralizing.

YELENA. ...The doctor has an interesting face—very sensitive, somewhat weary... Sonya's in love with him; I can understand that. This is the third time he's been here since I've come and I haven't had a chance to have a real talk with him, but I'm shy, of course, and I haven't really known how to encourage him or show him any real attention. I'm afraid he thinks I'm disagreeable. Do you know, Vanya, why you and I are friends?... Because we are both lonely, uninteresting people. Yes... lonely and uninteresting. Don't look at me like that, I've told you I don't like it.

VANYA. How else can I look at you when I am madly in love with you? You are my happiness, my life, my youth. I know that the chances of your loving me are very, very slim, I know that—all right, there is *no* chance of your loving me—but just let me look at you, just let me stay here and listen to you—

YELENA. Be quiet, someone will hear you! (*They move toward the house.*)

VANYA (*going after her*). Just let me tell you how much I love you. Don't drive me away, Yelena. I have no other happiness but you!

YELENA. Vanya, my God! This is unbearable!

(*They go into the house. TELEGIN strikes the strings, plays a polka. MARIA makes a note in the margin of her pamphlet.*)

CURTAIN—END ACT ONE