

STEPPENWOLF

(VIRTUAL) **SEAGULL**

MEMBER-EXCLUSIVE CONTENT
AVAILABLE FOR STREAMING MAY 14 – 27, 2020



WELCOME TO (VIRTUAL) SEAGULL

We are heartbroken that we are not going to be able to join together in the same room as quickly as we thought we were going to be able to, but we want to extend our grateful thanks to you as members. The first offering we're making is ensemble member Yassen Peyankov's adaptation of *The Seagull*. As you all know, we are ecstatic to eventually open our new theatre-in-the-round with a production of this play. In normal times, audiences wouldn't get a look at this piece until it had been rehearsed, staged, and designed—in short, produced—at the quality you have come to expect from Steppenwolf. But as members, we'd like to invite you to this very special Zoom table read of *Seagull* featuring 10 ensemble members, and directed by ensemble member Yassen Peyankov. It was an absolute treat to create this piece in a process that is completely novel to us. Perhaps most thrilling is the chance to see each of these remarkable actors up close and in their own homes in a way that we don't rarely get to—even in our intimate theatre.



Anna D. Shapiro, Artistic Director,

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STEPPENWOLF THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

(VIRTUAL) SEAGULL

Based on the play *The Seagull* by **Anton Chekhov**

Translated and adapted by **Yasen Peyankov[†]**

Virtual reading directed by **Yasen Peyankov^{†‡}**

FEATURING

**Ian Barford^{†*}, Cliff Chamberlain^{†*}, Francis Guinan^{†*}, Tim Hopper^{†*}, Sandra Marquez^{†*},
James Vincent Meredith^{†*}, Amy Morton^{†*}, Caroline Neff^{†*}, Karen Rodriguez^{†*} and
Namir Smallwood^{†*}**

PRODUCTION

Leelai Demoz Associate Artistic Director

Hallie Gordon Artistic Producer

Joel Moorman Creative Director

Martha Wegener and **Gregor Mortis** Sound Engineers

Lowell Thomas Editor

Claire Haupt Production Manager

Christine D. Freeburg[†] Production Stage Manager

Kathleen Barrett[†] Assistant Stage Manager

Steppenwolf Theatre Company is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for nonprofit professional theater.

[†] member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble.

^{*} member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.

[‡] member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

CAST AND CONTRIBUTORS

CAST (in alphabetical order)

Ian Barford[†] Yevgeny Dorn
Cliff Chamberlain[†] Semyon Medvedenko
Francis Guinan[†] Peter Sorin
Tim Hopper[†] Boris Trigorin
Sandra Marquez[†] Paulina Andreevna
James Vincent Meredith[†] Ilya Shamraev
Amy Morton[†] Irina Arkadina
Caroline Neff[†] Nina Zarechnaya
Karen Rodriguez[†] Masha
Namir Smallwood[†] Konstantin Treplev

Entry and re-entry to your own living room after this performance begins is not guaranteed.

[†] member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble.

^{*} member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.

ADDITIONAL STAFF

Recorders:
Melissa Centgraf
Matthew Chapman
Daniel Etti-Williams
Nils Fritjofson
Claire Haupt
Elise Hausken
Shannon Higgins
JR Lederle
Gregor Mortis
Karen Thompson
Martha Wegener
Olivia Zapater-Charrette

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We recognize that Steppenwolf Theatre sits on Native land. This area is the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, including the Ojibwe, Potawatomi and Odawa. Although for over 200 years Native Nations have been forcibly removed from this territory, we must acknowledge that this land continues to be a site of gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Tribal Nations and remains home to over 100,000 tribal members in the state of Illinois.

WHAT IS A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT?

A land acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and honors the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous communities and their traditional homelands. The purpose of recognizing the original inhabitants of this land is to show respect, gratitude and appreciation to those whose land we reside on, as well as raise awareness about histories that are often erased or forgotten. It is important to understand the longstanding history that has brought us to reside on land currently occupied by non-Indigenous communities, and to pursue an understanding of everyone's place within that history. It is important to note that land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense: colonialism still lives with us today in various forms, and we hope you join us as we consider and interrogate our present participation.

FOR FURTHER RESOURCES AROUND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, PLEASE VISIT:

American Indian Center

www.aicchicago.org

Native Land Digital

<https://native-land.ca/about/>

Laurier Students' Public Interest Research Group

A politically-oriented, social justice organization connected to Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo, Ontario)

lspirg.org/knowtheland

"Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, Explained"

Teen Vogue Article (February 2018)

We are very grateful to our friends at the American Indian Center—Chicago, specifically Fawn Pochel, for their guidance on Steppenwolf's new practice around Land Acknowledgements.

(VIRTUAL) SEAGULL BIOS

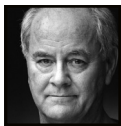


Ian Barford (Yevgeny Dorn) is recording in his little office at home. Ian most recently played Mr. Carp in *The Minutes* on Broadway. He originated the role of Wheeler in Tracy Letts's *Linda Vista*, which also played on Broadway and at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. He also originated the role of Little Charles in *August: Osage County*, which played on Broadway and at London's National Theatre. Additional Broadway: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* and *The Rise and Fall of a Little Voice*. He was an acting intern at Steppenwolf Theatre Company from Illinois State University in 1988 and began doing shows on the main stage in 1993. Steppenwolf: *As I Lay Dying*, *The Libertine*, *Berlin Circle*, *Betrayal*, *Endgame*, *Lost Land*, *The March*, *Love Song*, *Time Of My Life*, *Up*, *The Crucible*, *Mary Page Marlowe*, *Three Days of Rain*, among others. Los Angeles: *The Weir*, *Take Me Out*, *God's Man in Texas* (Geffen Playhouse); *Dead End* (Ahmanson Theatre). He has appeared in a number of television shows. Film: *Road to Perdition*, *The Last Rites of Joy May*, *Catch Hell*, *13 Going On 30*.



Cliff Chamberlain (Semyon Medvedenko) is recording from his bedroom in Valley Village, CA. Cliff has been a Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble member since 2018. Steppenwolf: *The Minutes*, *Belleville*, *Clybourne Park*, *Theatrical Essays*, *Superior Donuts*, among others. Chicago: *The Seagull* (Goodman Theatre); *The Sparrow* (The House Theatre of Chicago; company member). Broadway: *The Minutes*, *Superior Donuts*. Television and Film: *Homeland*, *Altered Carbon*, *The Act*, *Dirty John*: *Betty*, *Easy*, *Law & Order True Crime: The Menendez Murders*, *State of Affairs*, *Chicago PD*, *The Wise Kids*, *Win it All*. Cliff trained at UCSB and The School at Steppenwolf. He is a co-host of Steppenwolf's new podcast, *Half Hour*, featuring candid conversations with the en-

semble. Love to R + E + E + C.



Francis Guinan (Peter Sorin) is recording from the front room of his home in Elmhurst, IL. Francis has been a member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble since 1979. He has appeared in more than 30 Steppenwolf productions including *The Herd*, *The Night Alive*, *Tribes*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Book Thief*, *Time Stands Still*, *Endgame*, *American Buffalo*, *Fake*, *The Seafarer* and *August: Osage County*. He has also appeared in productions for Northlight Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Writers Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, TimeLine Theatre Company and American Blues Theater. Television: *The Exorcist*, *Boss*, *Mike and Molly*, *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago Med*, *Frasier*, several *Star Trek* episodes. Film: *The Last Airbender*, *Typing*, *Low Tide*, *Constantine*. For Kate.



Tim Hopper (Boris Trigorin) is recording from Yondorf Hall, Steppenwolf's rehearsal space. Tim is a member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble. Recent roles at Steppenwolf: Dance Teacher Pat in *Dance Nation*, Andy in *Downstate*, Paul in *Linda Vista*. He also appeared at the Goodman Theatre in the title role of *Uncle Vanya*. Television: the upcoming Amazon series from Gillian Flynn, *Utopia*, the 4th season of *Fargo*, a new series from Fox called *neXt*, *Chicago Fire*, *The Americans*, *The Exorcist*, *Empire*, *Chicago Med*. Film: *Knives and Skin*, *School of Rock*, *To Die For*, *An Acceptable Loss*, among others.



Sandra Marquez (Paulina Andreevna) Sandra is recording from her tree-house-like living room in Rogers Park in Chicago. Sandra joined the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble in 2016. Most recently,

she directed *Steppenwolf for Young Adults' I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sánchez, adapted by Isaac Gómez. *Steppenwolf: A Doll's House, Part 2, The Roommate, The Doppelgänger (an international farce), Mary Page Marlowe, The Motherf**ker with the Hat, A Streetcar Named Desire, Sonia Flew, One Arm.* At Teatro Vista, where she is a longtime company member and former Associate Artistic Director, she directed *Fade, My Mañana Comes, Breakfast Lunch & Dinner* and the Jeff nominated production of *Our Lady of the Underpass*. She is the recipient of a Jeff Award for her work in Teatro Vista's *A View from the Bridge*. Sandra completed a three-year arc playing Clytemnestra in Court Theatre's *Iphigenia Cycle* (*Iphigenia at Aulis, Electra* and *Agamemnon*). Film and Television: *The Red Line, Boss, Empire, Chicago Med, Chicago Justice, Timer*, among others. She is on the theater faculty at Northwestern University.



James Vincent Meredith (Ilya Shamraev) is recording from his basement in Oak Park. James received critical acclaim as John Proctor in *The Crucible*, his first role as an ensemble member. At Steppenwolf Theatre Company he has also appeared in *Clybourne Park, The Hot L Baltimore, The Bluest Eye* (also Off Broadway at the New Victory Theater), *The Pain and the Itch, Carter's Way, Superior Donuts*. Chicago: *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting* (Lookingglass Theatre); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); as well as about Face Theatre; Writers Theatre; Goodman Theatre; Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook; Piven Theatre Workshop, where he is a member of the company ensemble.



Amy Morton (Irina Arkadina) is recording from her home office in Lincoln Square. Amy is a director, actor and associate artist at Steppenwolf Theatre Company. She has directed or performed in over 30 plays at Steppenwolf including Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Tony nomination), *August:*

Osage County (Tony nomination), *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* (also on Broadway), *Hir, Cherry Orchard, The Berlin Circle, Three Days of Rain, The Unmentionables, Space, The Royal Family*, among others. She has directed *Guards at the Taj* (both Atlantic Theatre and Steppenwolf), *Glengarry Glen Ross, Clybourne Park, American Buffalo, The Dresser, The Pillowman, Topdog/Underdog, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Alliance Theatre), *Awake and Sing* (Northlight Theatre), among others. Film: *Rookie of the Year, 8MM, Falling Down, Backdraft, Up in the Air, Bluebird*. Television: *Bluebloods, Girls, Homeland*, currently on *Chicago PD* as Trudy Platt. Before joining Steppenwolf, Amy was a member of the Remains Theatre for 15 years.



Caroline Neff (Nina Zarechnaya) is recording from her friend's bedroom in Springfield, New Jersey. Caroline joined the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble in Spring 2016. *Steppenwolf: Dance Nation, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime, You Got Older, Linda Vista* (also at the Taper Forum and Second Stage Broadway), *The Fundamentals, The Flick, Airline Highway* (also on Broadway at Manhattan Theatre Club), *The Way West, Three Sisters, Annie Bosh is Missing, Where We're Born*. Select theatre credits include *Lettie* (Jeff Award Best Actor) at Victory Gardens; *Uncle Vanya* (Goodman Theatre); *A Brief History of Helen of Troy* (Jeff Award for Best Actress), *The Knowledge, Harper Regan, In Arabia We'd All Be Kings* (Steep Theatre); *The Downpour* (Route 66 Theatre); *Port* (Griffin Theatre); *4000 Miles* (Northlight Theatre); *Moonshiner* (Jackalope Theatre). Regional credits include *Peerless* (Yale Repertory Theatre). Film and Television: *The Red Line, Chicago PD, Chicago Fire, Open Tables, Older Children*. She is a proud company member of Steep Theatre and holds her BA from Columbia College Chicago.



Karen Rodriguez (Masha) is recording from her Roscoe Village apartment in Chicago. Karen is a proud Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble member. Steppenwolf: *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, *Dance Nation*, *La Ruta*, *The Doppelgänger* (an international farce), *The Rembrandt*. She also appeared in the world premiere of *Breach* by Antoinette Nwandu at Victory Gardens Theater and in the critically acclaimed solo show *The Way She Spoke* by Isaac Gómez at Greenhouse Theater Center. Additional Chicago: *The Displaced* (Haven); *Hookman* (Steep Theatre); *Blue Skies Process*, *Another Word for Beauty* (Goodman Theatre); *good friday* (Oracle, Jeff nomination for Best Ensemble); *Don Chipotle* (The Storefront Theater). Television: *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago Justice*. Awards: Make a Wave 3Arts (2017).



Namir Smallwood (Konstantin Treplev) is recording from his closet/drum room. Namir joined the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble in March 2017. Steppenwolf: *Bug*, *True West*, Steppenwolf for Young Adults' *Monster*, Christina Anderson's *Man In Love*, *The Hot L Baltimore*. Chicago: *The Lost Boys of Sudan* (Victory Gardens Theater); the world premiere of Philip Dawkins' *Charm* (Northlight Theatre); *The Grapes of Wrath* (Gift Theatre); *East Texas Hot Links* (Writers Theatre). Regional: Marin Theatre Company; Pillsbury House Theatre; Dominique Moris-seau's *Pipeline*; Antoinette Nwandu's *Pass Over* at Lincoln Center Theatre; *Ten Thousand Things* (Guthrie Theater). Television: *Chicago Fire*, *Betrayal*, *Elementary*, *Pipeline* (Live From Lincoln Center) on PBS.



Yassen Peyankov (Director /Adapter) recorded from the master bedroom of his house in Bronzeville in Chicago, which has currently become his Zoom central command center during the day and a place to sleep at night. Yassen

was last seen as the Keeper in *Lindiwe* and has been an ensemble member since 2002. He has appeared in 20 productions at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, some of which are: *Time of Your Life* (also in Seattle and San Francisco), *Morning Star* (Jeff Award), *Hysteria*, *Lost Land*, *Cherry Orchard*, *Frankie and Johnny at the Claire De Lune* (also in Dublin), *Superior Donuts* (also on Broadway), *The Tempest*, *The Pillowman*, *Penelope*, *Three Sisters*, *A Doll's House, Part 2*, among others. Steppenwolf (directing): *The Fundamentals*, *Between Riverside and Crazy*, *Grand Concourse*, *Russian Transport*, as well as *Hushabye* for First Look and *The Glass Menagerie* for Steppenwolf for Young Adults. He also translated and directed the Bulgarian premiere of *August: Osage County* at the National Theatre in Sofia. Film and Television: *Stranger Things*, *Madam Secretary*, *Captive State*, *A Very Harold and Kumar Christmas*, *Transformers 3*, *The Company*, *U.S. Marshals*, *The Mob Doctor*, *The Beast*, *Gifted Hands*, *Karen Sisco*, *Alias*, *The Practice*, *The Unit*, *Numb3rs*, *Chicago PD*, among others. Yassen is a Full Professor and the Head of Theatre at the School of Theatre and Music at UIC where he teaches acting and directs plays.

Christine D. Freeburg (Production Stage Manager) recorded from her home in West Rogers Park. Steppenwolf Theatre Company: *Bug*, *The Great Leap*, *MS. BLAKK FOR PRESIDENT*, *La Ruta*, *Downstate*, *The Roommate*, *The Doppelgänger* (an international farce), *The Minutes*, *Linda Vista*, *Visiting Edna*, *Constellations*, *The Flick*, John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, *The Herd*, *Airline Highway*, *Tribes*, *The Motherf**ker with the Hat*, *American Buffalo* (also at McCarter Theatre), *The Tempest*, *The Seafarer*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *after the quake*, *Cherry Orchard*. Chicago: Northlight Theatre, Court Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Apple Tree Theatre. Christine is an adjunct faculty member at The Theatre School at DePaul University and spent nine summers stage managing at Weston Playhouse. She is happily married to Thom Cox and the proud mother of Joan Marie. For Malcolm.

Kathleen Barrett (Assistant Stage Manager) Steppenwolf Theatre Company: *Dance Nation*, *The Great Leap*, *MS. BLAKK FOR PRESIDENT*, *The Crucible*, *Pass Over*, *The Fundamentals*, *Constellations*, *East of Eden*, *The Herd*, *Airline Highway*. Chicago: *The Secret of My Success* (Paramount Theatre); *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Seas* (Lookingglass Theatre Company); additional work for The Hypocrites, Victory Gardens Theater, Porchlight Music Theatre, Broadway in Chicago. Regional: world premieres of *Cambodian Rock Band*, *A Doll's House Part 2*, *Office Hour* (South Coast Repertory) and productions with Geva Theatre Center, Florida Repertory Theatre, Pasadena Playhouse, Mason Street Warehouse. Kat is a graduate of Kalamazoo College in Michigan.

Anna D. Shapiro (Artistic Director) is a Tony Award-winning director and Artistic Director of Steppenwolf Theatre Company. She joined the Steppenwolf ensemble in 2005 and was awarded the 2008 Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play for *August: Osage County* (Steppenwolf, Broadway, London). She was nominated in 2011 in the same category for *The Motherf**ker with the Hat* (Public Theater, Labyrinth Theater). Other Steppenwolf directing credits include the world premiere production of *The Minutes*, *Mary Page Marlowe*, *Visiting Edna*, *Three Sisters*, *A Parallelogram*, *Up*, *The Crucible*, *The Unmentionables* (also at Yale Repertory Theatre), *The Pain and the Itch* (also in New York), *I Never Sang for My Father*, *Man from Nebraska*, *Purple Heart* (also in Galway, Ireland), *The Drawer Boy*, *Side Man* (also in Ireland, Australia and Vail, Colorado), *Three Days of Rain*, *The Infidel* and *This Is Our Youth* (which transferred to Broadway). Additional Broadway credits include *Of Mice and Men* (with James Franco) and *Fish in the Dark* (with Larry David), and Off Broadway *Domesticated* (Lincoln Center Theater). She is directing the new Broadway musical *The Devil Wears Prada* with music by Sir Elton John, lyrics by Shaina Taub and book by Paul Rudnick. Shapiro is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and Columbia. She is a professor in Northwestern University's

Department of Theatre.

David Schmitz (Executive Director) has worked at Steppenwolf Theatre Company for 15 years, serving in the roles of Director of Finance and Administration, General Manager and currently as Executive Director. Prior to working at Steppenwolf, David was the General Manager at Lookingglass Theatre Company, Associate Artistic Director of Stage Left Theatre and Business Manager at the entertainment agency Adair Performance. Currently, he serves as Vice President of the Board for The House Theatre of Chicago as well as on the boards of the League of Chicago Theatres and Arts Alliance Illinois. David is a former board member for the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce and has worked as a strategic planning, business practices, finance and hiring consultant for numerous Chicago organizations, including The House Theatre of Chicago, The Hypocrites and Stage Left Theatre, among others. He holds a BA in theatre from the University of Northern Colorado, an MFA from the Theatre Conservatory at the Chicago College of Performing Arts, Roosevelt University and a Certificate in Non Profit Management from Roosevelt University.

CREATING THEATER IN THE AGE OF ISOLATION: ARTISTS ON THE MAKING OF

(VIRTUAL) SEAGULL

With Yasen Peyankov, Amy Morton, Sandra Marquez, Joel Moorman,
Hallie Gordon and Claire Haupt

EDITED BY PATRICK ZAKEM

To get us started: Yasen, how long have you been working on this adaptation? What's the story behind it?

Yasen Peyankov (Adapter and Director): I fell in love with the play when I first read it as a freshman in drama school. I've always wanted to direct it. I wrote this translation/adaptation in 2008 for a production at UIC Theatre and I have tweaked it several times over the last 12 years. My hope was that one day I would be able to direct it professionally, preferably at Steppenwolf. I couldn't ask for a better opportunity to direct it at my artistic home with an all ensemble cast of old and new friends.

How is it different, creating a virtual piece of theater versus one that is staged for a live audience?

Yasen: Well, for one, you don't have the actors in the same room with you. But once you start working on it, the invisible boundaries start melting and the actors on the screen are suddenly in the same space as you. Once you stop thinking about what you can't have and focus on the opportunities to create something new and exciting that none of us had done before, you're in for a very special maverick experience. All the actors came in hungry for the work and the energy was electrifying.

Amy Morton (Actor, Arkadina): The difference between doing a play with a live audience and a Zoom audience is night and day. I found myself getting frustrated easily because I couldn't react as spontaneously as I would on stage. It's sometimes difficult to hear or there's a lag or the internet connection is glitchy and you never really get a flow. It's also soul-crushing to deliver a funny line and hear... nothing. That juice I get from a live audience is sorely missed. That being said: it's also very interesting to do this work in a virtual format because it's a brand new world and I feel like I'm starting from scratch. It's exhilarating and terrifying to have to come up with new ways to ply my trade.

Sandra Marquez (Actor, Paulina): Well, the truth is I found it very hard! I DO NOT enjoy looking at myself on Zoom, so I kept trying to hide myself on the screen so I wouldn't be distracted by seeing the lines on my face or my makeup choices or my wild hair due to my DIY haircuts over the last few weeks. I'm not sure if I've always been so vain or if Zoom just pulls it out of me.

Joel Moorman (Creative Director): For this production, I was an A/V technical producer of a sort, something Steppenwolf doesn't have a role or title for with traditional play-making. As a long-time video staffer in the

Marketing Department, I helped plan out the process of recording through Zoom and provided some options for Yasen to consider stylistically in advance of recording. I'd say one of the biggest fundamental differences for this project was the idea of embracing the "lo-fi." Steppenwolf takes great pride in production value and aesthetic in our staged productions—this was an exercise in the complete opposite. There were so many variables way past our reach in terms of internet speeds, connectivity, computer equipment, room tone, sirens, lawnmowers. We had to not just accept, but embrace, a world of randomness in our production.

Hallie Gordon (Artistic Producer): The biggest difference for me was that no one was in the same room together. So, part of the creating came from that collective experience, of feeling that, which actually made the making of it more intimate. The rehearsal was fun, silly and surprisingly vulnerable. Everyone was learning something new as they tried to read a play together. Something so natural to actors became strangely new.

Claire Haupt (Production Manager): I was the production manager on the piece. *Seagull* certainly shifted the perception of what work our teams do. When patrons think about theater, they often first picture a massive set or the costumes people wear. Now, the focus is being put on our sound and other digital based technicians. In some ways, I'm excited and hopeful that when we get to the new normal, our patrons may take more notice of formerly less praised technical elements. They've always been there, and each department is so insanely talented, but it's interesting to see our audience's focus shift. It's also just wild to have to rely on what the performers have on hand to create the scenes. Typically, nobody's wearing their own clothes or bringing their own sets, but

with this new virtual set up, we knew we'd have to go with what each person had on hand for this table read style event. I think it's been a bit since we've felt this level of truly just working with what we have on hand to focus on lifting up the work and the performance.

What was rehearsal like? How did it work over video?

Joel: We had one tech call per actor and two group rehearsals total. I have to say each one of those meetings was filled with a unique type of joy, laughter and gratitude. It was, for many, the first real interaction with their Steppenwolf family since the call for Shelter in Place. So, for all of us participating—to be able to gather under the circumstances, and make something creative with the people you love to make art with—it felt like a gift.

"CHEKHOV'S WRITING IS SO WONDERFUL AND YASEN HAS DONE SUCH A BEAUTIFUL JOB WITH THE TRANSLATION SO I THINK THE WORDS SING."

Sandra: I think it was hilarious and fun. Everyone trying to figure out how Zoom works and the persistent questions "Can you hear me?" or "Uh, how do I mute myself?". The tech team must have been alternately entertained and supremely annoyed. They were all so patient and kind though. I'd say the experience was a bit *Noises Off*, Zoom-style.

Claire: One gem of a moment came during

...Feature cont'd

a break when Karen Rodriguez was just casually saying nice things about Namir Smallwood because he was away from the screen, but she hadn't realized he had actually just bent over. So all of a sudden he popped up quickly into frame and the two of them just burst into laughter. It brought her such great joy that she had him do it again so more people could see.

Joel: After the first rehearsal we shared out a sample recording with the cast to give them an idea of how the final recording might look. At the second rehearsal we checked in to make sure everyone saw the sample and understood the process. Ensemble member Amy Morton jumped in commenting how "mortified she, of all people, had such terrible sounding audio." She's married to award-winning sound designer Rob Milburn and was, in fact, using his computer for the reading. She added, "Rob was mortified, f*ck man!"

What part of the play do you think translates best to this virtual format?

Yasen: The two-person scenes and the few short monologues/asides. There is an almost voyeuristic sense of intimacy seeing the actors so close to you. You see the tears in their eyes and that quaint sparkle in the moments which Chekhov describes as "smiling through tears." That level of specific detail that takes you into the emotional world of these complex characters would often get lost when you watch it on the

stage, especially if you're sitting far back. We don't get to experience these kinds of extreme close-ups in theatre that you see on film or TV.

Amy: I'm not sure which part of *Seagull* translates best to this format. I will say that my favorite part was watching Tim and Caroline do the scene where he kind of blathers on about how insane it is to be a writer. Having a camera so close on his face and listening to that character spin out was fascinating.

Hallie: THE STORY! You hear the words, and ultimately isn't that what it's about?

Sandra: Chekhov's writing is so wonderful and Yasen has done such a beautiful job with the translation so I think the words sing. I was very inspired by my fellow ensemble members—their commitment and talent.

Joel: The level of intimacy on display with each of our ensemble members. By the time a traditional show gets to previews, an audience only sees the character, fully built and inhabited by the actor. In this virtual reading, we meet each ensemble member in their own clothing, in their homes, with the sounds of their families and neighborhoods in the background. It added a stunning level of humanness and vulnerability to the whole performance and, amazingly, it did not in any way inhibit the telling of a great 19th century Russian story.



STEPPENWOLF'S NEW STATE-OF-THE-ART THEATER BUILDING



Yasen Peyankov's adaptation of *The Seagull* with an all-ensemble cast will open the new theatre-in-the-round in 2021!

Only 400 seats and six rows deep, the new theatre-in-the-round brings audiences closer than ever before.



The theater building will also feature a dedicated education floor, tripling the reach and impact of Steppenwolf's education work. Visitors will enjoy a bright and open two-story atrium lobby, new bar and sidewalk lounge.

To support and learn more, visit
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20/21 SEASON

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STEPPENWOLF

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