I-L-

Konstanin becomes a well-known writer, and it has no living characters. In Act Two, lines uttered at half curtain. abruptness, while in display of Chekhov's gift the play, thus taking the stage away from her challenging the conventions of theatre to written by Konstanin with the intention of "insignificant." theatre, his mother's lover, Trigorin, is a through his writing. His mother is a star of the play, Konstanin, searches for his own identity of love and death within the context of theatre by drawing parallels to the relationship between true art and the appearance of art. Nina, a tall, slender woman, walks out onto a rock, the moon reflected is the lake surrounding her. In beau-

tifully flowing prose, she tells the audience about solitude and the devil's eyes. In this first scene, the audience is immersed in the emo-

tion of loss/loss. For the remainder of the play, the audience lives this solitude.

Chekhov's The Seagull explores the relation-

ship between a young man and his mother by drawing parallels to the relationship between true art and the appearance of art through conformity. It explores the concepts of love and death within the context of theatre and literature. The protagonist of Chekhov's play, Konstanin, searches for his own identity through his writing. His mother is a star of the theatre, her mother's lover, Trigorin, is a "famous" author. Konstanin believes himself "insignificant." The opening scene's play-within-a-play is written by Konstanin with the intention of challenging the conventions of theatre to which his mother, Arkadina, subscribes. The curtain comes crashing down when Arkadina begins to make humorous commentary during the play, thus taking the stage away from her son. It is fitting that this play, which repre-

sents the naked theatre, ends with blatant strugge

ess, while in display of Chekhov's gift for sub-

tlety, the actual play ends with the last lines uttered at half curtain.

As Nina is about to go on stage, she tells Konstanin that his play is difficult to act, that he has no living characters. In Act Two, Konstanin becomes a well-known writer, and his work is published in the same magazine as Trigorin's. Nina's initial criticism is echoed by Trigorin: "Your characters are all dead," he tells Konstanin.

The audience perceives the death in Konstanin's plays not as a flaw, but as a truth. At the opening of the play, Masha, a character later revealed to be in love with Konstanin, explains why she wears only black clothing. "I am in mourning for my life," she proclaims. Masha is one of the most appealing characters in the play, for unlike the others, she is aware of the ghostly state in which they function. Despite her intuitiveness, she consciously chooses to conform to the appearance of being alive to which the others in the play so eagerly cling. Arkadina saves all her money for her costumes. She believes her costumes are what make her a successful actress, as if she herself was unnecessary, a skeleton to fill the appro-

priate clothing. Her love, Trigorin, identifies his most spiritual moments to write about that which he was about to live himself.

In one scene, Nina, enamored of Trigorin, shows him the seagull Konstanin has killed to prove his love for her, a love she no longer wishes to return. Trigorin philosophizes over the image. He recites poetically that soaring of a manuscript he has been working on and yet finally decisive Konstanin picks up a page by drawing parallels to the relationship with Chekhov's time-

less play. Other symbolism includes the water imagery which permeates the entire play, from the moon's reflection in a lake to sounds of a storm and rain beating on a glass door. There is the sense that the water represents the eternal endurance of nature.

The set design is remarkable: a platform surrounded by the water of a wading-depth lake with a mountain backdrop at dusk, the sound of a running stream in the background. The audience is instantly transported from the confines of the concrete walls of the ART to the vast landscape of the countryside.

The ART production takes Chekhov's 1895 play and sets it in the modern day. Several of the characters smoke, including two of the women. Konstanin and Masha have the appearance of East Village beatnik intel-

lectuals. Arkadina dresses in the latest Fifth Avenue fashion and droops her three-quarter length mink after her from scene to scene. In this way, Ron Daniels manages to challenge modern day stereotypes with Chekhov's time-

less play.

The play has a cinematic quality to it, with lighting that highlights the set's contrasts of black and white, and background music piped in and out of scenes to provide the appropriate mood.

The quality of the acting is superb. Christine Estabrook is as thoroughly irritating as the character of Arkadina prescribes. Jeremy Geidt portrays Konstanin's uncle, Sorin, who provides the symbolic omi-

nence of the older generation. Geidt is engag-

ing and his high acting ability admirable. The performance of Stephanie Roth as Nina varies from skillful in the earlier scenes, to awe-

inspiring in her final scene, as Nina goes from vibrant and vibrant to virtually disinte-

gered. The set climaxes with an unforget-

tably haunting theatrical moment. A deserted yet finally decisive Konstanin picks up a page of a manuscript he has been working on and slowly begins to tear. The theatre is silent, the collective tension in the audience building with the intrusive sound of the gradual tearing of each additional inch of paper. Finally, a sigh of relief is uttered — the paper has been torn apart.