

Chichester Observer.....REVIEW: Theatre in a Tent at The Thomas Lord, West Meon Theatre, West Meon, Hampshire.

### **Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard adapted by Pam Gems, July 1,2,4,5,6 8pm**

After more than a century, the jury is still out as to whether Chekhov wrote – in The Cherry Orchard – the comedy he believed he had or the tragedy his first director insisted on.

West Meon Theatre wisely go for both and balance them beautifully in an impressive production which underlines the sillinesses, the pretensions and indeed the irrelevance of Russia's fading aristocrats but also evokes a sense of yearning and nostalgia which is genuinely poignant.

Chekhov marks a time of social change: the aristocracy suspect their time is up and can't summon the energy to do a thing about it. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie grab their chance but suspect just how brash they appear in the new order of things.

Director Mary Dawson catches it all in a production in which the measure of her success is the extent to which she gets her entire cast to work so wonderfully well together. This is a genuine ensemble production, and therein lies its great strength. Even so, it would be difficult not to pick out Rachel Wells' wistful to Madame Ranevskaya, Peter Barber's arriviste Lopakhin and Fi Beresford's bustling, warm-hearted Dunyasha.

But if you are looking for the star of the show, it's the concept itself.

After a week in which all our horizons seem to have been depressingly narrowed, how lovely it is to sit in an Indian-style tent watching Russian drama in a beautiful English country pub garden.

And The Thomas Lord is beautiful inside, a pub which matches quality with character to deliver a fine dining experience. Relaxed, friendly, unfussy and efficient service combines with imaginative, tasty and superbly-presented dining options for a delightful meal – the perfect prelude for your night at the theatre.

West Meon Theatre is a cut above the rest. So too is The Thomas Lord.

Phil Hewitt