

SEAGULL: PRESS RESPONSES

Pürtelaş Theatre (2017)

Written by: Anton Chekhov Directed By: Serdar Biliş

MIMESIS

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'The Seagull' Reimagined for Today

Serdar Biliş's staging of *The Seagull* is an audacious work of theatrical ingenuity, from its striking design to its compelling performances. A production that prompts the reaction, "Exactly what we'd expect from Biliş and his innovative interpretations," this version, with Tilbe Saran leading the charge, is a triumph.

Forget the image that springs to mind when someone mentions a "Chekhov play." This isn't a world of ruffled collars, grandiose period sets, or actors delivering Chekhov's 120-year-old lines with languid grace. If you're familiar with Biliş's past productions, this dynamic, nimble interpretation—while remaining faithful to Chekhov's deep exploration of the human condition—won't come as a surprise. Gamze Kuş's set and costume designs, Cem Yilmazer's lighting, and Sami Özbudak's fluid adaptation come together to create a refreshingly modern *Seagull*.

Chekhov's genius lies in capturing the spirit of his era—its aristocratic codes, its loves and losses, its futile dreams—and distilling the restless essence of a Russia on the brink of change. His characters, teetering between hope and despair, feel as vivid and relevant

today as they did over a century ago. The search for love, passion, and innovation in art and life remains timeless.

Biliş's actors, clad in contemporary attire and speaking with today's rhythm and language, breathe new life into Chekhov's tale without losing its core. Arkadina, a former stage star; her lover, the celebrated author Trigorin; her son Treplev, an aspiring playwright; and the tangled lives of the estate's inhabitants collide in a production brimming with vanity, longing, and moments of poignant self-awareness.

Gamze Kuş's set design is a masterpiece. The iconic lake, central to the story, is reimagined as a shallow pool with a muddy, textured floor. It serves as a versatile focal point, equally effective during the carefree revelry of sunlit afternoons and the intense confrontations that unravel in the play's darkest moments.

The cast, from seasoned veterans to emerging talents, performs with a confident grasp of Chekhov's nuanced humor. While there are subtle stylistic variations in delivery, these are likely to harmonize with time. Gonca Vuslateri's portrayal of Masha, the servant's daughter, occasionally feels too commanding, overshadowing the character's melancholic resignation. Adjusting the tone from petulance to quiet despair would bring her closer to the essence of Chekhov's Masha.

Similarly, Ecem Uzun's Nina would benefit from greater vitality to fully embody the character's aspirations and heartbreak. Tilbe Saran delivers an impeccable Arkadina, exuding charisma and complexity. Şerif Erol, from his chair, crafts a delicate comedic masterpiece, while Firat Tanış complements Saran with a seamless synergy. Serdar Orçin injects the doctor with an idiosyncratic energy that enriches the ensemble.

In short, *The Seagull* under Biliş's direction is a must-see. Vibrant, thought-provoking, and utterly contemporary, it challenges preconceived notions of Chekhov while honoring the spirit of his work. Don't miss the chance to experience this remarkable production!

MİLLİYET

ASU MARO

LINK: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/asu-mar0/farkli-bir-marti-2571494>

When it comes to directors like Serdar Biliş—who possess an extraordinary ability to craft entire worlds—I'm one of those eagerly anticipating how timeless classics can resonate with our present moment. Last year, he transported Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* into a high school classroom. This time, at Pürtelaş Theatre, he has brought the disenchanting, misunderstood, and solitary souls of Chekhov's *The Seagull*—one of the “big four”—across 120 years to our contemporary world.

As you might expect, the transition wasn't arduous. Loneliness remains loneliness; misunderstanding still abounds, and generational conflict has only grown more pronounced. Is this testament to Chekhov's genius or humanity's unyielding folly? For centuries, we've floundered in the same existential quagmires, whether in Tsarist Russia or any modern-day nation. Against this backdrop, it feels entirely natural to see Konstantin Treplev seated at his laptop, striving for his actress mother, Arkadina, to appreciate his play. Her disdain for the new is as painfully familiar as his desperate need for validation.

The strength of Biliş's contemporary *Seagull* lies not just in his vision but in the collaborative brilliance surrounding it. Sami Özbudak's translation renders Chekhov's text into a fluid, modern-day vernacular, while Gamze Kuş's design transforms the iconic lake into a murky, shallow pool. It's a stroke of genius. Whether Nina flounders through the pool as she performs Konstantin's play or the family sprawls around it in swimsuits, sunbathing as if to escape their own emptiness, the pool becomes a poignant symbol of their stifling lives. Ultimately, each character is trapped in an unreciprocated love, struggling within the confines of this pool—a metaphorical and literal stage for their futile attempts to break free.

Pürtelaş's *The Seagull* is a brisk, tightly woven 100-minute production that keeps the audience riveted from start to finish. While the play's time and setting may feel abstract, its essence—rooted in the human spirit—remains intact. It's both lively and thoughtful, a performance that surprises and delights.

This *Seagull* soars differently, yes, but it flies beautifully on its own wings.

TİYATRO ONLINE

YAŞAM KAYA

LINK: https://tiyatronline.com/tiyatro-purteles_-marti--5863

A Bold Flight: Serdar Biliş Reinvents Chekhov's *The Seagull*

In the pantheon of rising theatrical auteurs, Serdar Biliş stands as a beacon of innovation. With Pürtelaş Theatre, he has forged a distinctive creative realm, continuously pushing boundaries to explore the uncharted and the unseen. His latest offering, *The Seagull*, opened the 21st Istanbul Theatre Festival with dazzling aplomb, transforming Anton Chekhov's timeless masterpiece into a vivid, contemporary installation. Brought to life through Sami Özbudak's razor-sharp adaptation and Biliş's visionary direction, this production navigates the delicate balance between homage and reinvention.

Chekhov, writing in 1895, delved deeply into the artistic turmoil of Tsarist Russia, dissecting the anxieties of creation and relevance. Özbudak's adaptation transposes these themes into the landscape of modern Turkey, using irony to critique contemporary theatrical principles. The result is a production that not only bridges centuries but also interrogates the universality of human struggle in art, love, and ambition.

The ensemble cast breathes new life into Chekhov's characters: Boran Kuzum's tormented Treplev, Ecem Uzun's fragile Nina, Tilbe Saran's commanding yet aloof

Arkadina, and Firat Tanış's quietly self-serving Trigorin. These roles are woven together with precision, their performances underscored by Çiğdem Erken's evocative score—a haunting blend of soundscapes that lends depth to moments of isolation and longing.

At the heart of this staging lies Gamze Kuş's striking set design. The iconic lake becomes a shallow pool, its murky waters an evocative metaphor for the characters' muddled dreams and unresolved desires. The stage, surrounded by sawdust and playing out in an experimental four-sided configuration, transforms into a living, breathing installation. This minimalist yet charged environment serves as both anchor and mirror, reflecting the fragility and fervor of the lives unfolding upon it.

Biliş's direction masterfully intertwines past and present. Trepnev's avant-garde theatrical experiments—echoing *In-Yer-Face* Theatre and physical dramaturgy—collide with Arkadina's dismissive scorn, exposing generational and artistic divides that feel painfully familiar. Özbudak's dialogue brims with incisive wit, crafting a narrative that is both grounded and transcendent.

Projected X-rays reveal the inner workings of the characters, a brilliant visual metaphor for their fractured psyches. The economic critiques interwoven into the production bring a sharp edge, subtly yet powerfully commenting on Turkey's sociopolitical climate. Costumes, too, have been reimagined with modern sensibilities, further rooting the production in today's world while honoring the spirit of Chekhov's original vision.

This *Seagull* is no ordinary revival. It soars boldly into uncharted skies, shedding the weight of tradition and embracing the thrill of discovery. Biliş has not only preserved the essence of Chekhov's exploration of human nature but elevated it, offering audiences a piece that is as provocative as it is poignant.

If you have grown weary of staid, predictable renditions of the classics, *The Seagull* by Pürtelaş Theatre is a revelation. It is theatre reimagined—raw, incisive, and unapologetically modern. Serdar Biliş, with his unerring theatrical instinct, proves once again that the stage is a place of infinite possibility.

RANINI TV

BEYZA T.

LINK: <http://www.ranini.tv/ozel/28236/1/marti-bir-cehov-ruhu>

I count myself among the fortunate few who had the chance to witness *The Seagull*, the opening production of the 21st Istanbul Theatre Festival—a privilege indeed, considering how quickly tickets sold out.

Serdar Biliş's masterful direction brings a refreshing, contemporary interpretation to *The Seagull*, yet retains its timeless essence. With its inventive set design, evocative music that transports you to a dreamlike realm, and a stellar cast, the production was nothing short of extraordinary. The play opens, as in Chekhov's original, with Masha (Gonca Vuslateri), setting a steady and seamless rhythm that never falters. The nuanced emotions, rich atmosphere, and unbroken flow kept me riveted, as though pinned to my seat by its spellbinding charm.

The cast was carefully assembled, with remarkable actors like Serdar Orçin, Sevil Akı, Şerif Erol, Cem Cücenoğlu, Kayhan Açıkgöz, and Yasin Bardakçı shining alongside their peers. Each actor embodied their character so wholly that they seemed not to perform, but to live their roles, transmitting their authenticity directly to the audience. Their interplay and precise pacing ensured that the transitions between scenes were fluid, maintaining the production's cohesive rhythm.

Admittedly, I approached the performance with some trepidation. Modern adaptations of classics often leave me uneasy, fearing that the essence of the original might be diluted. Having never seen a staging of *The Seagull* before, my apprehension was heightened. My mind was brimming with words, unsure how they might translate into the contemporary visuals awaiting me.

But the production quickly dispelled my doubts. The scene where Arkadina tends to Treplev's wound stood out as a highlight—a masterfully rendered moment that exposed the tension and unspoken conflict of their mother-son relationship.

Tilbe Saran delivered a mesmerizing performance as Arkadina, but special recognition must go to Boran Kuzum, who held his ground against such a seasoned luminary. His ability to share the stage with Saran without being overshadowed was nothing short of remarkable.

One aspect I particularly admired was the balanced attention given to each character's story. Rather than centering on a single protagonist, the play explored every character's narrative with equal depth, allowing the audience to grasp the broader tapestry of interwoven lives.

Despite the passage of centuries, technological advances, and societal change, humanity remains, at its core, the same. It is this timeless resonance that makes *The Seagull*, written in 1896, feel as relevant in 2017 as ever. Our struggles with communication and our perpetual entrapment in the mire of unfulfilled dreams persist, making this production a poignant reminder of art's universal truths.

In conclusion, *The Seagull* by Pürtelaş Theatre is a faithful yet innovative adaptation. Serdar Biliş has preserved the soul of Chekhov's masterpiece while reshaping its exterior for a contemporary audience. The result is a production that masterfully intertwines the unspoken desires, inner conflicts, and failures of its characters with the flavor of our modern times, offering a fresh perspective on a classic tale.

As a theatre enthusiast from Anatolia, I was profoundly moved by this production. Here's hoping those who missed it get the chance to experience its magic. To the luminous Pürtelaş team, who carried Chekhov's spirit onto the stage with such brilliance: take a bow. You deserve every applause.

The harmony of the ensemble and the flawless execution of their vision left no doubt in my mind—Chekhov's *The Seagull* has taken vibrant flight once more.

MİLLİYET SANAT

ADALET ÇAVDAR

LINK: <https://www.milliyetsanat.com/haberler/sahne-sanatlari/yenilgiye-karsi-cehov-la-gulmek/8603>

"The Seagull: A Timeless Play for a Disoriented Generation"

Why did you choose to stage *The Seagull*, a play that seems to never lose its relevance and is performed on countless stages each year?

Serdar Biliş: *The Seagull* is, at its heart, a play about youth—a generation on the brink of being lost. It resonates deeply with the times we live in, where hope for the future feels scarce. If you ask many young people today, “What does the future mean to you?” the answer might be, “A little dark.” This sense of disillusionment existed in Chekhov’s time as well. His work grapples with defeat, blending it with a sense of tragicomedy.

Our interpretation leans into this, framing the play as an absurd comedy. It’s often said that Chekhov’s works have humor—something he himself emphasized, once remarking, “Why does everyone cry when these stories are comedies?” Drawing from that spirit, we’ve embraced a Beckettian absurdism. Audiences will laugh a lot.

Did you make any changes to the original text?

Serdar Biliş: We’ve stayed true to the essence of the text while employing a contemporary language. Chekhov himself wrote in a way that was modern for his time, giving ordinary people the chance to be heroes on stage. We’re simply continuing in his tradition, ensuring the dialogue feels relevant to today’s audience without losing the soul of his work.

What did you discuss during the rehearsal process, and what did you discover?

Ecem Uzun: We talked a lot about lost youth. In the play, there are so many lost young people, people of all ages who want to live, yet we see their lives slipping away. They are people who relentlessly strive for their desires, putting in all their effort to fulfill them. This struggle becomes their tragedy. While the play presents clear comedy, there are countless individuals within it who are actually suffering—people who, in trying to reach their desires, are in pain because they cannot communicate with one another. And then, there are the relationships between them.

What is it in Chekhov that remains always relevant, that we can still perform today when looking at society and people's lives?

Tilbe Saran: One thing that stands out is the generational conflict—the differences in communication and language between generations. The older generations always valuing their own time and what they've done, while the youth responds with discontent—this is something that will never change. The common thread in the characters here is their desire to be seen, heard, understood, and loved. That is the essence of being human.

Boran Kuzum: We choose a profession. We work hard to reach where we want to be. But many people are unhappy because they cannot satisfy something they deeply need. For my character, Treplev, this is the case. He has grand ambitions. He is passionate about a profession. Yet, he lives in a small, confined space, and his imagination cannot fit in there. He is abandoned by the woman he loves. His mother doesn't love him. He throws himself into writing. Two years later, he achieves a bit of success, but there is something missing inside him. Because of this emptiness, he decides to end his life. The void created in the soul by both extreme wealth and extreme poverty is the same.

"I'm Looking for My Own Arkadina"

You played Nina in *The Seagull* 17 years ago. How do you perceive Ecem Uzun's Nina?

Tilbe S.: I'm very envious. *The Seagull* holds a very different meaning for me. The first time I performed it, I was playing alongside my teachers, just like Ecem, and it marked an incredibly significant moment in my history. We were trying to understand the play with a

Russian director. Looking back now, I realize I missed many things—I could only grasp as much as I was able to carry back then. For me, Arkadina contains a challenge. There's Yıldız Hoca's Arkadina, which I will never forget, imprinted in my soul. I'm searching for my own Arkadina. The love, respect, and reverence I feel for her grows in the process of this search. Just as Arkadina always wants to remain on stage, I find myself wanting to stay in this rehearsal forever.
