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# Dublin Theatre Festival 2015: buckle up for 'Chekhov's First Play'

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*Photo by Jason Booher with kind permission of Dublin Theatre Festival*

## Chekhov's First Play by Anton Chekhov and Dead Centre

Rating: ★★★★★

It all begins innocently enough. The director, standing before a tall, red curtain, introduces himself, ensuring the audience can hear him through their individual headphones. He talks about "Chekhov's First Play," its contemporary relevance and his aspirations for it. The performance begins, it has a few problems, but the director's running commentary tries to tidy things up, even if the play is getting in the way of his explanation of it. Then, without quiet knowing when, we've clicked our heels three times and suddenly we're not in Kansas anymore. We're on a rollercoaster ride never knowing what's up ahead, the experience knocking you over with the force of a wrecking ball and the exhilaration of a game of Russian roulette where there's a bullet in every chamber, each one hitting the mark every time.

Contemporary meets the classical in Dead Centre's mind blowingly good "Chekhov's First Play,"

based on Chekhov's untitled, first play, most often called "Platanov." Rocketing through deconstructions of contemporary Ireland and 19th century Russia, along with deconstructing theatre itself, "Chekhov's First Play" barely pauses for breath. It doesn't just break the fourth wall, it shatters every wall it can get its hands on. Contrasts between 19th century Russia and contemporary Ireland are erased by their similarities. Debt, whether it's ten roubles or twenty two billion euro, never gets in the way of joyless entertainment for people with a hunger that feeds itself but is never satisfied, who own properties they never own and leave a generation with an inheritance of debt. The voice in our heads does us no favours, but we go on fiddling while Rome burns.

Production values are high throughout "Chekhov's First Play" but it is money well spent. With a large technical crew along with assistants, prosthetic and special effects artist, technical excellence throughout was flawless. Directors Bush Moukarzel and Ben Kidd marshal this cornucopia of theatrical brilliance and marry it to six outstanding performances from Liam Carney, Breffni Holahan, Rory Nolan, Rebecca O'Mara, Annie Ryan and Dylan Tighe, as well as ably directing their special guest.

A century may pass, but in "Chekhov's First Play" everything changes while everything remains the same. We're all still collectively isolated, sitting alone together in the dark listening to the voices in our head beating us up with the same old stories. Chekhov famously said if you place a gun in the first act you better use it in the third, making it a self-fulfilling prophesy, a destiny of doom. But we can always rewrite the script, make cuts, abandon it all together and start afresh with a single word to get us underway. Original, inventive, remarkable, glorious, shows this good don't come around that often. Don't dare miss it. For "Chekhov's First Play" is one of the best shows you'll see this year.

"Chekhov's First Play" by Dead Centre runs at The [Samuel Beckett Theatre](#) as part of the [Dublin Theatre Festival](#).

Headphones are worn throughout the performance. Contains nudity, strong language and loud and sudden noises

For information on dates, times and tickets visit [Dublin Theatre Festival](#)



**Chris O'Rourke**  
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