

THE THREE SISTERS

BY ANTON CHEKHOV // DIRECTED BY RON WILSON

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THE HELEN AT PLAYHOUSESQUARE



CASE
WESTERN
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PROGRAM

THE CALM BEFORE A GROWING STORM



The Announcement of the Emancipation Manifesto of 1861 by Boris Kustodiev.

Russia arrived to the 20th century on the brink of monumental change. Serfdom was out, capitalism was in, and it seemed, as *The Three Sisters*' Baron Tuzenbach says, that, "A new age [was] dawning ... a powerful, health-giving storm [was] gathering."

The Three Sisters' Prozorov siblings are Russian

nobles. Forty years prior to the setting of the play, the nobility held all the country's land and wealth. Serfs, who were essentially slaves, tended to the nobility's large estates. However soon after Alexander II became tsar in 1855, this long-standing social order changed. While maintaining autocratic rule, Alexander II implemented social and political reforms that began to permanently shift power in Russia, the most notable reform being the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.

Education and participation in local government were made available to former serfs through the Ministry of National Education and district Zemstvos—councils for local self-government, of which Andrei Prozorov is a member. The nobility lost their exclusive influence in these spheres. Even so, peasants were mostly without land and means to support themselves. They either worked in industrialized Moscow slums or eked out a living in the provinces, where *The Three Sisters* is set.

Left-wing terrorists assassinated Alexander II in 1881, kicking off decades of reactionary repression. In the early 1900s, Russia is at peace, but the future Bolsheviks plan their Second Congress where they will gain political traction. Nicholas II will soon oversee tremendous bloodshed from war, pogroms and suppression, paving the way for the Revolution of 1917 and rendering Tuzenbach's declaration that "in twenty-five or thirty years, every man will have to work" eerily prophetic.

— Maddie Gaw, CPH artistic apprentice

