

# THE GOOD DOCTOR

by Neil Simon



In the late 1800s, Russia's preeminent literary doctor, Anton Chekhov, wrote humorous newspaper articles to pay for medical school. Neil Simon, Broadway's master of comedy, elegantly weaves eight of Chekhov's stories into a laugh-out-loud experience complete with tricky con artists, ridiculous slapstick, and heartwarming musical numbers.

Neil Simon molds the stories of Anton Chekhov into exquisitely timed, often hilarious theatre, dramatizing seven stories which incorporate a wide variety of characters--a governess, a lady of the night, a blustering general, a wild woman with a nervous disorder, a roué flirting with a new bride, a man who earns money by "drowning," and an actress. The stories, adapted for the stage, are filled with dry humor, surprise endings, and clever common people in confrontations with "superiors," ending in absurdities. "The Writer," obviously Chekhov, who himself was a "good doctor," acts as narrator and serves to connect the various scenes.

The short stories/plays, all filled with irony, include "The Sneezer," who cannot apologize enough to a general for splattering a sneeze on his head. In "The Governess," an employer tricks a subservient governess out of her pay. "The Seduction" shows a man-about-town using a husband as the conduit for his attempted seduction of the man's new bride. "The Drowned Man" claims to be in the "maritime entertainment business" and will drown himself for a small fee. "The Defenseless Creature," a particularly hilarious scene, features a clever wife suffering from a "nervous disorder," who tries to extort money from a banker. In "The Arrangement" a father takes his shy, 19-year-old son to a house of ill repute. The most challenging scene for an actor is "The Audition." An actress who has walked for four days from another city in order to try out for a play, arrives with a temperature of 103, then insists on doing the audition. Playing the parts of all three sisters from Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, the actress begins as a sensitive sister, then bursts into tears on cue as the second sister, and ultimately becomes rational, composed, and straightforward as the third, the changes of mood requiring split second timing.

Throughout the play, a running joke revolves around Chekhov's reputation as a less "beloved" writer than Tolstoy and Turgenev. Often dealing with suffering characters, the scenes show that there is a kind of absurd humor underlying even the most tragic of circumstances. Though "Some of us are indeed trapped," and many are suffering, the world itself, according to Chekhov, has "gone mad." If one can see the humor in this mad world, life becomes bearable.

