

Theater Review

Anton in Show Business at the Dragon

By [Ben Marks](#) | May 03, 2010



There's a beautiful moment late in **Anton in Show Business**, now through May 23, 2010 at the Dragon Theatre in Palo Alto, when the polish director of a regional theater company's production of Anton Chekhov's **The Three Sisters** is bidding his leading ladies adieu. Funding problems are threatening to scuttle the production, but that's not why the revered Chekhov expert Wikewitch Konalkvis (Mary Horne) has packed his bag: His work here is done.

Naturally Casey (Jennifer Jane Parsons), who will play Olga in **Sisters**, Lisabette (Meredith Hagedorn), the wide-eyed Irina and Holly (Kristen Lo), a TV actress slumming for a bit of Hollywood street cred by taking the Masha role, want to know what the great director thinks of their performances. Though of disparate backgrounds, the women playing Chekhov's sisters share the curse of having been told they lack talent, so they crave either confirmation or denial of this soul-killing charge.

Konalkvis waves off their insecurity. "You are good enough," he says, "to do the Chekhov you are good enough to do." It's not meant as a put down, it's just a fact. As the director of umpteen productions of **Sisters** (he's sort of lost count), Konalkvis has seen better, and worse. The important thing for him is that in this production, the women who play his Olga, Masha and Irina have given it their all. He can ask for no more.

This sentiment, mushy as it sounds here, is what makes **Anton in Show Business** such a perfect play for small companies like the Dragon. The self-referential play, which cheerfully acknowledges its narcissism throughout, is less about how three actresses use **Sisters** for their own ends -- for Holly it's a career move; for Lisabette it's a first big break; for Casey it's the chance to work while she still can. Rather, **Anton** is about the theater world itself, where regional companies toil in the shadow of Broadway and community theaters are the poorest of cousins to the regionals. The further down the food chain you get, the less talent it is presumed you have.

For this production, the seven-member cast has done the best version of **Anton in Show Business** that it is good enough to do, which, in this case is saying a lot. The actors are uniformly strong, both individually and overall, creating surprisingly little hierarchy between the three principals and the rest of the cast. Horne, Vera Sloan and Lonnie Genelle all give memorable, multi-character performances. Even Lauren Burniges, whose Joby is limited by design, makes brief but spirited appearances.

In addition to Horne's Konalkvis, I liked Sloan's Jackey, the artistic director of San Antonio Actors Express, who rambles for hours without managing to express the company's mission, as well as her Ben, whose male ego is so flattered by the advances of a TV star that he gives up his wife and two kids. Men are such dopes, we think, but Sloan's Ben still manages to come off as sad and sweet.

Lo's Holly is also fun to watch, convincing us that her I-me-me-mine character is completely devoid of a soul. And Parsons as Casey is funny and heartbreaking, a woman, as she puts it, who at 36 is still paying off 40-grand in student loans and whose reward for having screwed every leading man on the East Coast is the opportunity to play their mother.

But a big reason why this **Anton** works so well is Hagedorn's Lisabette. With her crackling Texas accent, guilelessness and cheerleader enthusiasm (she's forever clapping her hands to applaud the pronouncements of her superiors), Lisabette is the one with the least to lose by the failure of the San Antonio production of St. Anton's **Sisters**. She also has the most to learn, and watching the realities of the theater business sink in without entirely altering her effervescent worldview is as delightful as it is inspiring.

Anton in Show Business runs through May 23, 2010 at the Dragon Theatre in Palo Alto. For [tickets and information](http://dragonproductions.net) visit dragonproductions.net.