

# ON THE AISLE

By GYNTER QUILL

## Spirit of Chekhov Captured In Baylor Theater Production

The future belongs to the young, Anton Chekhov is saying to the older generation in his last comedy, "The Cherry Orchard," and the young appear to have got the message in the Baylor Theater production which opened Friday night in Weston Studio.

In other words, youth must be served. And youth, in turn, serves the play quite well in some guidance by Director Patricia Cook. They have their limitations in communicating it to the fullest, but you sense their understanding, their involvement, in the bitter-sweet story of Madame Ranevskaya who returns from Paris with her daughter Anya to the home of her own youth with its memories as sweet as the cherry blossoms.

The estate is now mortgaged and Varya, her adopted daughter, has struggled in vain with its management. The future lies in cutting up the land into building lots, which means cutting down the cherry orchard, as suggested by the newly rich merchant Lopahin.

But Madame Ranevskaya, extravagant, generous and charming, cannot agree to such a wholesale destruction of the life in which she and her brother Gaev lived their charmed childhood. Nevertheless, the estate is auctioned off and Lopahin is the purchaser, and the last act sees her returning to Paris and enforced reunion with her faithless lover there.

**THE ACTION** of the play begins and ends in the nursery, and in between we have "seen" the cherry trees blossom and fade—in the same way that life begins and ends yet spreads its seed and looks to the future.

There are many subtle and delightful moments in the play, but perhaps the most memorable is the scene in the last act when Varya waits in vain for Lopahin to propose to her, and the sight of Dana Fletcher's face as embarrassment, hope and despair are reflected in it.

Linda Rodolph and Mercer Harris as the feckless Madame Ranevskaya and her brother capture expressively the bewilderment of those who do not realize the world has passed them by. And Charles Batte plays, with crumbling dignity, to old servant Firs who, at the end, is overlooked and abandoned in the empty and boarded-up house, lamenting that life has passed as if he hadn't existed.

**THE REST** of the company is generally helpful: Jeannie Gulizia as Anya and Bob Ousley as the perpetual student Trofi-

mov with whom she is in love and who believes life offers a rosy future; John Seely as the purchaser Lopahin; Liz Brazell as the servant Dunyasha and Guy Boyd as the fumbling, stumbling clerk Yepihodov, Ed Baker as the comical, borrowing landowner Pishchik, David Jones as the insolent young valet Yasha, and Betty Martin as the governess Charlotta.

The translation, which flows naturally and unstiltedly, is a recent one by Tyrone Guthrie and Leonial Kipnis. It is played on the thrust stage of Weston Studio, whose Elizabethan inner and upper stages are paneled over and whose open stage becomes a split-level nursery-drawing room, or, with some imagination and a tiny tree and a bench, the outdoors for Act II. The design is by Larry Roof.

The appropriate period costumes, Western for those who could afford it, Russian for those who could not, were designed by James W. Swain.