

Portland^{MONTHLY}

POP CULTURE DEEP DIVE

Mid-Year Pop Culture Report

From *Big Thief* to *Marcel the Shell* to a kinetic new take on Chekhov, these are the 2022 cultural nuggets that have spoken to us most directly

By Conner Reed July 8, 2022

THE BEST PLAY I'VE SEEN IN SO LONG

***The Cherry Orchard* at Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble**

I wrote a preview of this show last winter, when it was slated to open in February, and had a hunch it would be something special. Hunch confirmed. The folks at PETE have been tearing Chekhov apart and putting him back together for several years now, and their *Cherry Orchard* puts them in conversation with some of the most exciting theater artists currently working, full stop.

Transported from its original Russian countryside setting to the Arctic, this production roughly halves the text and works from a translation that makes Chekhov's dialogue sound like it could have been written yesterday. Director Alice Reagan pumps up the comedy, coaxing out arresting physical performances from her entire ensemble, and as the willfully oblivious Ranevskaya, Amber Whitehall is simply unforgettable: a gossamer woman ready to break at any moment who's gripping all the experience she can before her world crumbles forever. Chekhov's questions about locating peace in the face of catastrophe and learning to face the light even if it burns are expertly modernized without approaching heavy-handedness—the run has been extended through July 16, and you owe yourself a ticket.



Amber Whitehall and Murri Lazaroff-Babin in *The Cherry Orchard*

IMAGE: OWEN CAREY