

## MANNERS OF THE MANDATE with GUY BANNERMAN & SHARRY FLETT

### WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DAY...

We open with an appraisal of our own social conduct in relation to various life situations. We then compare the rewards and penalties of our behaviours with those that characterized the high Victorian and Edwardian periods (roughly 1870-1914).

For ChekhovFest, we will compare English and European customs to the concerns of the characters evidenced in Chekhov's Russia. As in the plays of Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, certain types of characters are common in Chekhov's plays: the doctor, the student, etc. Who are these people, and why are they represented so frequently? What aspects of the contemporary society do they embody? We discuss male and female roles in society and in the home, and how these roles were in flux during this period. We are prepared to develop the discussion in whatever direction the group suggests, to address specific questions.

### THEN PARTICIPANTS GET DRESSED...

We then dress in 19th century style clothing, with corsets, parasols, reticules, hats and gloves for women, and shirts and separate collars, studs, shirt fronts, vests, top hats, tail coats, gloves and walking sticks for men. As we familiarize ourselves with this everyday wear, we examine our own physical reactions to the clothing as we practice walking standing, sitting to experience it and bring it into our muscle memory.

### AND THEN PROMENADE...

In this segment we deal with introductions and other daily social behaviour. How and when do men and women become acquainted? We go walkabout in an imaginary street scene, often moving out of our workshop space to take advantage of architectural features such as staircases, doorways, etc., with appropriate instruction as to how to negotiate these challenges as couples.

### AFTER LUNCH - SCENE STUDY

We read together a short scene from *The Importance of Being Earnest* which illustrates how these social concerns are manifested in the theatre of the time. How do characters attempt to achieve their own aims, while also satisfying the demanding social codes? We believe that social customs, like fashions in clothing, change relatively rapidly: human beings (and their desires) change far more slowly. Much of Victorian theatre concerns itself with the conflict between the individual and his/her social situation. The more we understand the circumstances of Victorian life, the more we see the human parallels with our own behaviours.