

Concert is a single item output that illuminates Michael Chekhov's little-known principles on interdisciplinary theatre practice and design. It develops Chekhov's ideas in a dance-theatre production, which I directed for the Dublin Dance Festival and the Baryshnikov Arts Centre, New York. In line with Chekhov's propositions that artists must work beyond the parameters of their assigned roles and expertise, I elaborated a collaborative rehearsal methodology that prioritised a direct exchange between performer Colin Dunne and sound designer Mel Mercier, a relationship traditionally overlooked in theatre production yet central to Chekhov's philosophy. I address the importance of design in Chekhov's acting technique which has largely been ignored in Chekhov scholarship.

Concert expands the prevailing understanding of Chekhov's method; elaborates the technique in a devised, sound-driven performance in unconventional ways, answering Chekhov's demand for creating new forms and ways of producing theatre; and illustrates the restitution of the performer at the heart of a creative dialogue most commonly reserved for the director and designer.

Following a period of research (2013–19) at the Michael Chekhov Studio Dartington Hall archive, I led a series of international practical workshops for theatre designers, directors and performers. In collaboration with scenographer Aldona Cunningham, we tested Chekhov's exercises on aesthetics and form. Findings from these workshops fed into directing *Concert*: I placed design at the centre of the devising process, creating a rehearsal method where Dunne experimented with scenographic materials to create performance and choreographic motifs, and Mercier came to consider his sound propositions as psychophysical inspiration for Dunne. A new model for contemporary theatre-making emerged, born directly from the performer-designer exchange.

Between 2017 and 2019, *Concert* toured internationally to over 8,000 people. I disseminated my insights through a series of public talks, a practice book on Chekhov's technique, a book chapter and a published interview.

Concert

Sinead Rushe



Materials which comprise or support this submission can be found inside the box or on the USB drive  embedded in the box's interior lid. Within this publication, references for components of the submission are found in the right margin using a lettering system A–H. Items marked with an * are components of the output, all other items are contextual.

- A Book: Rushe, Sinéad. 2019. *Michael Chekhov's Acting Technique: A Practitioner's Guide* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen)
- B Book chapter from an edited volume: Rushe, Sinéad. 2020. 'Feeling Space, Making Space: Michael Chekhov's Approach to Theatre Design', in Tom Cornford and Cass Fleming. *Michael Chekhov in the Twenty-First Century: New Pathways* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2020), pp. 132–49
- C Interview: Rushe, Sinéad and Tom Cornford. 2020. 'A Feeling of Form: Directing *Concert* from the Michael Chekhov Perspective: A Conversation between Sinéad Rushe and Tom Cornford', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 30(3): 424–27
- D Video trailer of *Concert* 
- E* Full length film of *Concert* 
- F Video of post-show discussion at Barbican Theatre, London 
- G Video of an extract from *Concert* on Gradam Comharcheoil TG4 2018 Television Awards 
- H Selected press coverage 

Further information on these materials can be found on the reverse of the box's interior lid.

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She works with the methods of Michael Chekhov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Focusing and Shadow Yoga.

Her current research is on polyphonic characterisation.

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Overview

Concert is a single item practice research project consisting of a dance-theatre performance which I directed. It is supported by contextual information, press, a peer-reviewed book on Michael Chekhov's technique, a peer-reviewed book chapter on new applications of Chekhov's work and an interview in a peer-reviewed journal.

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Concert explores Michael Chekhov's little-known principles on interdisciplinary practice and theatre design in an award-winning, critically acclaimed dance-theatre production. Together with my collaborators, performer Colin Dunne (Olivier and Dance Critics' Circle Award nominee) and sound designer Mel Mercier (Drama Desk Award Winner and Tony Award nominee), we elaborated a rehearsal methodology that questioned the traditional disciplinary boundaries separating theatre director, performer, designer; a blurring of creative functions outlined by Chekhov as best practice in the making of new performance works. Chekhov's innovation is to stress how *performers* and designers are equally responsible for creating scenic expressiveness — rather than simply *directors* and designers — and that innovative forms of devising theatre can only come from performing and design artists engaging seriously with each other's practices. In *Concert*, we investigated Chekhov's ideas so that Dunne could incorporate a consideration of scenography and composition into his choreographic improvisations and Mercier could explore the psycho-physical processes of performing (see book chapter). *Concert* resituates the performer as the central axis around which the aesthetic and form of the show are constructed. It expands the role and agency of the performer and establishes a new conversation between performer and designer as being integral to the rehearsal process.

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Concert investigates the music of the virtuoso traditional Irish fiddle player, Tommie Potts (1912–88), in particular his 1972 album, *The Liffey Banks*, the only recording of his music released commercially before his death. Although renowned for its delicate, melancholic and playful qualities, the album's rhythmical irregularity renders it practically impossible to dance to. Nevertheless, Dunne set out to 'dance' this controversial album in a concert like no other.

In *Concert*, we needed a methodology that would allow the mise en scène of Potts's music on stage and Dunne's

kinaesthetic expression of it to evolve side-by-side. Chekhov asserted that the performing artist has to look beyond her immediate expertise in order to develop fully her craft and create art works of any significance. The performer, he proposes, must consider all elements of the performance — visual and sonic — as an extension of the act of performing itself. We considered Dunne's performing body, Potts's music and the sonic, scenic materials (mobile speakers, record player, cassette machine, wooden boards) as all part of the same continuum. This was only possible by Dunne incorporating a conscious consideration of design into his practice and enlarging his usual starting points for dance. Potts was renowned for his detailed research into other forms of music while Dunne, drawing upon contemporary dance, is celebrated for reinventing the vocabulary of Irish dance. Both traditional artists push the boundaries of their forms into the realm of high art, while at the same time remaining committed to their roots. Creating a show that best illuminated the contribution of and dialogue between Potts and Dunne required a methodology that was equally expansive. In addition, its evolution facilitated the subsequent dialogue between Dunne and Mercier. In this way, *Concert* embodies a research enquiry with the capacity to reconfigure practices in theatre-making.

Concert was co-commissioned by the Dublin Dance Festival, Centre Nationale de la Danse in Paris, MA Scène Nationale — Pays de Montbéliard and La Comète Scène Nationale de Châlons-en-Champagne. It was funded by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and Culture Ireland and supported by The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Limerick City Arts Office and Dance Limerick.

It toured internationally from 2017–19 to eleven venues with twenty-six performances:

2017	28–29 March	Centre National de la Danse, Paris
	10 May	MA Scène Nationale Pays de Montbéliard, France
	12 May	La Comète, Scène Nationale de Châlons-en-Champagne, France
	18–20 May	Project Arts Centre, Dublin Dance Festival, Ireland
	18–19 August	Kilkenny Arts Festival, Ireland
2018	24–26 August	Performing Arts Festival, Groningen, Holland
	10–12 October	Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland
	17–20 October	Barbican Theatre, Dance Umbrella, London

I Overview

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FIG 1 Colin Dunne in *Concert*, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018

2019 2–3 October Dansens Hus, Stockholm, Sweden
14–16 November Baryshnikov Arts Centre, New York

An extract of *Concert* was performed on live television on TG4 in Ireland as part of the Gradam Comharcheoil Award ceremony on 4 February 2018.

My methodology involved extensive archival research (2013–19) and four international practical workshops (2016).

II Questions, aims and objectives

The aim of the research was to consider what a full engagement with Russian actor and teacher Michael Chekhov's (1891–1955) ideas on design might offer to contemporary, interdisciplinary theatre-making and practice.

On the basis of this aim, I developed three objectives:

- ⊙ To investigate Chekhov's techniques specifically in relation to sound design. Given that the sonic materials would largely shape *Concert*, I set out to test how Chekhov's tools could help us determine our choreographic, dramaturgical and scenographic choices.
- ⊙ To explore how the Chekhov technique might be applied in nonconventional ways, provoking insights about Chekhov's work and our assumptions about that work.
- ⊙ To offer a practice model where Chekhov's technique can provide new devising tools for use in contemporary theatre-making, beyond its customary use as an acting method.

My principal research questions were:

- 1 *Can a full engagement with Chekhov's work reveal important contributions to contemporary devising, designing and collaborative, interdisciplinary theatre-making?*
- 2 *How can the integrated, embodied application of Chekhov's conception of scenography activate in new ways the various components to devising a show: stage composition, performance action and metaphor?*
- 3 *Can performers fulfil an important role in the design process?*

- 4 *If designers and directors engage with the performer's immersive, imaginative and kinaesthetic process, how can their practice be enhanced?*
- 5 *How might production processes and performances be innovated if design practice is reoriented to create environments with the kind of psychophysical properties that not only inspire performers to play, but shape the dramaturgy of a devised work?*

1, 2 Our main research problem was that *Concert* is a live performance with a 'recording' at its centre; a collaboration between two artists — one living, one deceased. We interrogated how this potentially difficult paradox might shape the *mise en scène*. Dunne, Mercier and I approached the whole production as an audiovisual landscape where the live Dunne 'conversed' with the recorded Potts through a variety of 'portals': a tape recorder, a record player, a set of hand-held speakers, large mobile speakers, a piano and fiddle. These elements all created the sonic topography in which Potts's recordings were played and played *with*. Dunne's active handling of the sonic artefacts came to portray his need in the present to understand Potts's music of the past. Different tunes required different portals of entry. In line with Chekhov's thinking, we set out to make each segment of the show by combining questions of scenography, sound design, stage composition, action and choreography altogether, as a whole. The choreography could not be created without the sound design; the sound design could only be crafted in relation to the composition of the mobile speakers and devices on stage. Our conscious choice was to make performing, designing, making and meaning all of equal importance.

3, 4 If sound could *shape* the dramaturgy, my next two research questions led me to consider whether Chekhov's tools could be used to *develop* it. For example, I reframed one of Chekhov's key principles in character development, 'psychological gesture' or 'PG', to flesh out the structure of the production overall (see book chapter). I displaced one of Chekhov's major tools, PG, away from any notion of character development towards the process of conceptual and dramaturgical development instead. I wanted to investigate what might be gained in a production process when the director, designer and dramaturg inhabit the embodied tools of the performer in order to activate their own process of understanding and creation. I interrogated how this approach can disrupt long-established dynamics in the rehearsal room that privilege a hierarchy under the director, traditionally the only person who collaborates on all strands of a production. Chekhov's proposition is to empower performers to play a major role in the creative process; my aim was to develop

concrete methodologies for the range of interactions this necessitates, not least that the designer can take responsibility for activating the act of performing itself.

5 The performing arts industry has increasing interest and demand for practitioners who have expertise in the interpretation of classical texts on the one hand, and who can devise and create collaboratively on the other. While well-established in the USA, the Chekhov technique is still a relatively new addition to actor-training programmes in the UK and Europe, and very few design, scenography and directing courses engage with acting at all. Offering a broader understanding of the scope of the Chekhov work and modelling new applications of it has the potential to transform theatre-training, equip future theatre-makers more effectively and impact interdisciplinary performance practice at large.

III Context

Chekhov's legacy is considered primarily to be a challenging, imaginative and psychophysical acting technique. His work at the end of his life in Hollywood as an actor and an acting coach to famous 'stars' has contributed to a narrow understanding of his practice as a path to psychological truth or naturalistic acting only. While new research has come to light on his practice as a director, up to now, the broad spectrum of his particular ideas on design — composition, colour, costume, set design, lighting and sound — has not been elaborated in detail. In addition, the importance of design as integral to his well-known concept of 'the theatre of the future' has been overlooked, where Chekhov sought new approaches to rehearsal practice at large, as well as new expressive forms of theatre and new styles of performance beyond the naturalism he actually despised. This research reveals that Chekhov intends actors in training to engage fully with design and that interdisciplinary practice is essential if theatre is to have a vital future. My contribution is a revisionist take on Chekhov's practice — that it is as much about theatre-making, designing, collaboration and creation as it is about acting — and understanding Chekhov's work in the way I outline in my research can alter theatre-making, and potentially actor-training, today.

Chekhov as a resource for actor-training is reflected in all the principal texts written on him such as Lenard Petit's *The Michael Chekhov Handbook* (2019), Franc Chamberlain's

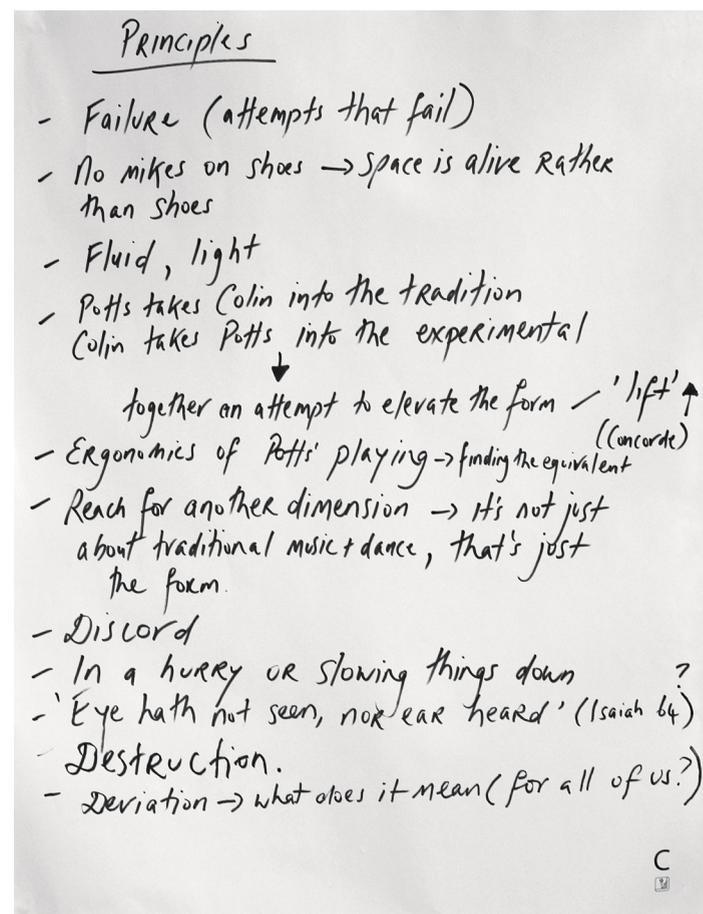


FIG 2 Extract from dramaturgy board in research and development for *Concert*, Shawbrook, Co. Longford, Ireland, January 2017



FIGS 3-4 Workshop at Michael Chekhov in the Twenty-First Century:
New Pathways Symposium, Goldsmiths, University of London,
September 2017

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Michael Chekhov (2003), Jonathan Pitches's *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (2006), Alison Hodge's *Actor Training* (2010). Pitches's text begins to stress the holistic aspect of Chekhov's method, and the following texts touch on the broader aspects of his training: *Acting Exercises for Non-Traditional Staging: Michael Chekhov Reimagined* by A. Hutchinson (2018), the articles 'Chekhov the director' by David Zinder, 'A new kind of conversation' by Tom Cornford, and 'The dancer of the future' by Suzanne M. Bennett, all published in the Michael Chekhov special issue of *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* (2013). However, to date, Chekhov's theories on design have not been published or written about as a topic in their own right. My book and book chapter, through archival research, chart for the first time how Chekhov taught stage, costume, lighting and sound design, dramaturgy and composition to his students at the Chekhov Studio at Dartington Hall, and how they applied the learning to their own productions by undertaking different roles. This research reveals that Chekhov intended his actors to develop an interdisciplinary facility, a fact that has largely become lost because his own published writings — given their commercial focus as acting manuals — do not emphasise this aspect. The series of workshops I ran (FIGS 3-4) were the first of their kind to explore Chekhov's exercises from the archives with contemporary designers, directors and performers and to test their relevance (discussed in the book chapter). *Concert* offers an original practice research model of how these tools can be employed directly in contemporary devising processes and performance creation, and inspire new methods of interdisciplinary collaboration (see book chapter and interview).

My contribution to the field of performance studies combines intellectual and embedded practice: it elucidates Michael Chekhov's ideas on aesthetics and tests his ideas on design in practice in a devised dance-theatre production. I present Chekhov's ideas on design and my experimentation with them in the making of *Concert* in the book chapter, 'Feeling Space, Making Space' and an interview in *Contemporary Theatre Review*. I propose a more challenging performance environment where performers engaging in design questions, and designers and directors embracing embodied practices is considered less a temporary, extra-curricular excursion and more a fundamental aspect of their creative practice. This doesn't mean abandoning expertise, but rather laying the groundwork for more productive and informed conversations in the profession. While there are examples of theatre companies, such as Improbable Theatre and Common Ground Theatre (UK), and The Actors Ensemble (USA), using the Chekhov technique in their devising

processes and working in interdisciplinary ways, *Concert* is an example of a contemporary application of Michael Chekhov's aesthetic and scenographic ideas in particular, specifically in relation to sound design and dramaturgy. My research highlights how the design-related aspects of Chekhov's work are marginalised to the primacy of a particular understanding of actor-training; *Concert* reinstates their significance, re-evaluates the overlooked designer-performer relationship and firmly resituates the performer at the heart of the creative dialogue that is most commonly reserved for the director and designer. Predominant industry practice permits only the occasional 'star' performer this amount of empowered, creative input. If dramaturgical and scenographic investigations are more of a fundamental part of actor-training and rehearsal processes, then contemporary theatre-making can experience a paradigm shift. In this sense, *Concert* illuminates and valorises an integral aspect of Chekhov's performance philosophy, explodes received perceptions of Chekhov's contribution and challenges mainstream creative hierarchies that limit alternative creative dialogues in contemporary theatre practice.

Concert follows Dunne and Rushe's first collaboration, *Out of Time* (2009), which was nominated for an Olivier and Dance Critic's Circle Award and gave over 100 performances worldwide.



IV Methodology

My methodology involved extensive archival research in the Michael Chekhov Studio/Deirdre Hurst Du Prey Dartington Hall archive (2013–19). During this time, I led four international workshops testing out Chekhov's design exercises in practice (2016). The work culminated in applying my insights to direct and co-create *Concert* (see film of production and other video documentation).

This overall approach allowed me to explore and show how Chekhov's philosophical ideas, theoretical writings, talks and unpublished materials on aesthetics and design are crucial in understanding how radically interdisciplinary Chekhov's proposition really was. I tested the ideas in a variety of practical ways (workshops, conversations, rehearsals, production) to investigate how a full engagement with them can enhance a production process as well as offer innovative approaches to actor and theatre-design training.

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FIG 5 Scenography research for *Concert*, Shawbrook, Co. Longford, Ireland, January 2017

FIG 6 Video experimentation in research and development for *Concert*, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, Limerick, Ireland, September 2017

FIG 7 Colin Dunne playing *The Liffey Banks* album in a photo shoot for *Concert*, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, Limerick, Ireland, September 2017 →



My archival research revealed four key considerations in Chekhov's design approach: the psychological gesture of settings and props, scenographic composition, colour and costume. I set out to examine each of these topics as they form the bedrock of Chekhov's theory of aesthetics.

Collaborating with theatre designer Aldona Cunningham, I designed a series of practical workshops where we took designers, performers and directors through Chekhov's proposed exercises from the archives on each of these themes. From this, I extrapolated the following points that I wanted to investigate while directing *Concert*:

- 1 Chekhov's proposition that all settings and props contain a hidden 'gesture' can be applied to a piece of music.
- 2 Well-considered scenic composition can function almost like an additional 'character' on stage, with a life and significance of its own.
- 3 Embodied practice of Chekhov's conception of scenography as 'gesture' and 'character' can activate many elements: stage composition, performance action and structure of the production overall.
- 4 Working consciously with colour on stage can open up new perspectives on developing the dramaturgy of a production.

I discuss these workshops in greater detail in the book chapter.

- 1 Chekhov's proposition that all settings and props contain a hidden 'gesture' can be applied to a piece of music.

Chekhov proposes that all characters have an inner drive or dynamic, what he calls a 'gesture'. His archival materials reveal that he believes that props and set design must also communicate a hidden gesture. In the workshops, we explored determining a dynamic psychological gesture 'hidden' in three-dimensional items — a small staircase, a stool, a coffee table, a bottle of water.

In rehearsing *Concert*, we treated Potts's tunes in the same way as the objects. Rather than Dunne moving to the music, for example, in a relational duet or dialogue, our aim was to articulate the music *itself*. Rather than try to mimic or interpret the external form of the music, we focused on determining the internal movement, or 'will', to use Chekhov's term, within it and express that in a gesture. This nuance is fundamental to Chekhov's exploration of scenic elements; designers must perceive the life and vitality that materials

express, their primary drive and movement, and develop them as an actor would a role, as 'players' with strong identities that radiate psychological as well as physical information. With each melody of Potts, we determined an inner 'gesture' such as 'a lift' (tune: *Ryan's Rant*), 'a return' (tune: *Fisherman's Lilt*), 'up and down' (tune: *Liffey Banks*), 'a breath of fresh air' (tune: *Patsy Touhey*), 'slipping and sliding' (tune: *The Butterfly*), 'a rest' (tune: *The Ship Comes Home*). These gestures became the guiding line for Dunne's choreography to each tune and gave us all a common ground with which to explore its *mise en scène*.

Working with gesture in this way brought Dunne, Mercier and I into an embodied relationship with our sonic material, bringing us closer to the kind of imaginative, psychophysical process that Potts himself might have engaged in. One of Potts's creative ambitions was to elevate traditional Irish music to the realm of high art, and this process of gesture helped us to make choices that put us in contact with Potts's impulse, enhancing both the emotional and technical aspects of the music.

- 2 Chekhov states that well-considered scenic composition can function almost like an additional 'character' on stage, with a life and significance of its own.

In the workshops, we studied the position of actors, furniture and props and their relationship to each other in space and noted how they create different narratives and sensations in both the actors and those watching. In *Concert*, we developed this idea in the placement of mobile speakers on stage. We employed Dunne's positioning of his materials to mirror the dramaturgy. In Part One, 'Searching for Potts', Dunne moved the speakers to different places on stage, creating focused and defined sites of exploration (FIG 8). In Part Two, 'Finding Potts', the speakers were positioned either side of an improvised 'stage' area (FIG 9), like a traditional music concert, where Dunne was in a more direct and performative 'conversation' with Potts (FIG 10). In Part Three, 'Beyond Potts', different kinds of speakers were dispersed all over the stage space (large, stage speakers on wheels; hand-held speakers; the built-in speakers of a tape cassette and record player), opening up into a broader, more loosely defined terrain of experimentation. Our mobile, sonic set inspired and provoked a range of psychophysical responses and behaviour in Dunne beyond Potts's music itself, and the set became another performer or player (FIG 11). The 'set' came to evoke Potts himself: an ethereal, three-dimensional presence hanging in the air.

B



FIG 8 Colin Dunne moving speakers to create different sites of exploration in *Concert*, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018

FIG 9 Colin Dunne sets up one of his 'stages' in *Concert*, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018

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A returning motif in the production was the object of the LP or album itself, *The Liffey Banks*, playing on the record player, and Dunne returned to it many times to start or stop a tune (FIG 7). We aimed for each encounter with the record player to be different, and a vocabulary evolved in the show where the record player began to take on a life of its own, beyond Dunne's control. Sometimes the record 'jumped' or 'skipped', sometimes it stopped or started without Dunne touching it, interrupting Dunne's movement or action. This 'play' created a dialogue between Dunne and the materials of the set, and evoked Potts's spirit of musical unpredictability.

- 3 Embodied practice of Chekhov's conception of scenography as 'gesture' and 'character' can activate many elements: stage composition, performance action and structure of the production overall.

Exploring the qualities and character of the record player in itself as an object with a life force activated new performance and choreographic possibilities for Dunne. In one rehearsal, Mercier responded spontaneously to Dunne's approach to the record player by fading in and out a particular tune dramatically and abruptly. A game ensued between them both with Mercier taking Dunne by surprise and Dunne attempting to follow the phrasing of the tune in the silences (FIG 12). This playful lead by Mercier opened up a new choreographic terrain for Dunne as he navigated the rise and fall of the sound. Dunne had articulated early on in the process how Potts's music demanded a different approach from just 'traditional dancing': he was searching for a 'behavioural' language. Through this interaction with the record player, Dunne contacted new, heightened ways of moving that he had not been able to access through movement exploration with the melodies alone. The set object and Mercier's embodied improvisation with it became a medium through which Dunne unlocked a new performance vocabulary.

Chekhov proposes that the design choices need to be in line with the main guiding idea of the play and, if articulated as a gesture, they can mould the structure of the production overall as well as inspire a conscious, meaningful stage composition. In *Concert*, the guiding idea was Potts's and Dunne's desire to transcend the limitations of their traditional repertoire. I articulated the 'gesture' as a reach for something beyond the ordinary, a yearning to elevate, reach new heights, take flight and



FIG 8 Colin Dunne moving speakers to create different sites of exploration in *Concert*, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018
 FIG 9 Colin Dunne sets up one of his 'stages' in *Concert*, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018



FIG 10 Colin Dunne 'in conversation' with Potts on the cassette machine, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018
 FIG 11 Tommie Potts's image appears fleetingly, projected on the boards Colin Dunne has danced on, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018



FIG 12 Colin Dunne improvises to the tune 'Crowleys reel' as the track fades in and out, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018
 FIG 13 Colin Dunne interprets the tune 'Rakish Paddy' in *Concert*, Barbican Theatre, London, 17–20 October 2018



'lift off'. We translated this gesture into the sound design where, towards the end of Part 2, Dunne deviated from the Potts's repertoire to explore improvised rhythms that were engineered live by the sound designer (through radio mics on Dunne's shoes and Ableton Live programming). The tunes and Potts disappeared for a period of time in order to let emerge a contemporary musicality that is part of Dunne's own innovative repertoire.

We also expressed the gesture of the guiding idea in the scenography and Dunne's manipulation of the elements of the set. This meant that any visual attempt at 'flight' on stage was to be an event of sorts. Height or verticality — our expression of flight or lifting off — featured twice: we lit a flown speaker when the audience heard Potts's spoken voice for the first time, and Dunne created a vertical 'screen' from his various timber floor boards that he danced on to show the first and only image of the man: a private film of Potts playing one of his most innovative variations (FIG 12). These isolated attempts at verticality were select and were juxtaposed throughout the rest of the show with a more 'earth-bound' material: the horizontal, wooden sheets of flooring that became Dunne's 'stages'. Potts in his lifetime expressed dissatisfaction with the limits of the traditional form and felt frustration with his own attempts at transcendence. While we sensed this gesture of elevation as an ambitious yearning in Potts, his own notion of success in this regard was humble. Our scenography aimed to reflect the modesty in Potts's self-assessment, and in *Concert*, Dunne, like Potts, attempted to take flight, but the moments were fleeting, unable to last (FIG 13).

4 Working consciously with colour on stage can open up new perspectives on developing the dramaturgy of a production.

The archival research revealed how Chekhov proposed using colours consciously to "catch and hold the interest of our audience" (*The Actor is the Theatre*, 15 March 1937). In a broad overview, he outlined that the colour of the set should express the atmosphere of the play at large. In his lighting design for *Concert*, Colin Grenfell created a palette that was largely cool white to create a laboratory, an investigative and 'frank' atmosphere as Dunne navigated his way through the Potts material.

Chekhov also suggested that the lighting design needs to convey the changing atmospheres of the different scenes within the play and his actors in training drew up colour charts of their productions and devised works,

identifying different sections by colour: a red, yellow or grey moment, for example (*The Actor is the Theatre*, 30 June 1937). In *Concert*, Grenfell began to define a simple colour 'map' where he introduced colour at two key moments. The first was a green backlight when Dunne listens to a jumbled mix of voice recordings of Potts on a cassette tape recorder in search of a relevant motif that would propel him into the next section of the show. The second was a steely blue for Part Three where Grenfell sought to unify the spaces and to create a sense of breath and opening (see book chapter; FIG 1). In this way, green came to evoke a connection with Potts's past, and the blue ushered the audience into an evocation of the future and the legacy of this music for the generations to come. We followed this impulse through in costume colour choices, according to Chekhov's proposal that the costumes and/or props should communicate the specific qualities and moods of the characters. Grenfell's design helped consolidate our three-part structure for the show that travelled through the past, present and future and helped create a sensory, embodied, affective side to our dramaturgy. This approach to colour exemplified Chekhov's attitude to style more generally: to resist realistic, representational choices, and to exploit, instead, the symbolic and expressive use of colour.

In the workshops, following Chekhov's proposed exercise of observing and receiving impressions of quality, direction, associations with time or the elements from a colour (*The Actor is the Theatre*, 15 March 1937), designers expressed the insight that investigating a colour with actors altogether can be the beginning of a collective imagining from a kinaesthetic and embodied place (see book chapter). Moreover, they expressed how they learnt that introducing the colour of the set in some form into the rehearsal room can create a helpful bridge for the performers before they encounter the actual set and influence their choices well in advance of technical rehearsals. Bringing Chekhov's work on colour to light in an applied manner opens up direct, accessible channels for designers to influence and inspire the performers' work and consolidates the performer-designer dialogue.

V

Timeline

2013–19	Research in Michael Chekhov Studio/Deirdre Hurst du Prey Dartington Hall archive, Exeter, UK. Identification of the main points in Chekhov's ideas on design: the psychological gesture of settings and props, scenographic composition, colour and costume.	
2016	Four practice-based workshops with designers, performers and directors exploring Chekhov's exercises and theories on the above points. The Actor's Centre, London, 14–15 May 2016; Victoria College of the Arts, Melbourne, 23–4 July; The Street Theatre, Canberra, Australia, 27–30 July and Goldsmiths, University of London, 9–11 September (part of 'Michael Chekhov in the Twenty-First Century' Symposium). Examination of Chekhov's principles in research and development on the production <i>Concert</i> , Limerick, Ireland, 1–7 May; 13–18 October. Identification of key findings to explore in a rehearsal/production context.	
2016–19	Sharing of archival research and insights in a series of public talks on Michael Chekhov and design: Pushkin House, London, 13 February 2019; The Street Theatre, Canberra, Australia, 30 July 2016 and Michael Chekhov Association USA (MICHA) international workshop and festival, Connecticut College, New London, USA, 18 June 2019.	
2017	Application of findings in rehearsals of <i>Concert</i> , Limerick, Ireland, 27 Feb–21 March 2017.	
2017–19	Presentation of practice research: international touring of <i>Concert</i> . Interviews with a range of designers and artists about Chekhov's exercises and theories on the above design points.	
2019	Publication of Michael Chekhov's Acting Technique: A Practitioner's Guide (London: Bloomsbury Methuen).	A
2020	Publication of archival research, insights and application to <i>Concert</i> in a book chapter: 'Feeling Space, Making Space: Michael Chekhov's Approach to Theatre Design', in <i>Michael Chekhov in the Twenty-First Century: New Pathways</i> , edited by Tom Cornford and Cass Fleming (London: Bloomsbury Methuen), pp.132–49.	B

Publication of application of Chekhov's design ideas in the interview 'A Feeling of Form: Directing Concert from the Michael Chekhov Perspective: A Conversation between Sinéad Rushe and Tom Cornford', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 30(3): 424–27.

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VI

Findings

The creative outcome was a critically acclaimed, award-winning production. The practice research embedded within the process of making led to several key findings and insights:

- ⦿ Michael Chekhov's technique offers more than an acting method: a full engagement with his work reveals important contributions to contemporary devising, designing and collaborative, interdisciplinary theatre-making.
- ⦿ Specifically, the integrated, embodied application of Chekhov's conception of scenography as inner gesture can activate many elements in devising a show: stage composition, performance action and metaphor.
- ⦿ Performers can fulfil an important role in the design process and, by employing aspects of design processes in creating their performance, they can open up surprising new avenues of inspiration.
- ⦿ Designers can enhance their practice by engaging with the performer's immersive, imaginative and kinaesthetic process.
- ⦿ Production processes and performances can be enhanced by reorienting design practice to create environments with the kind of psychophysical properties that not only inspire performers to play, but shape the dramaturgy of a devised work.

As well as the production, I disseminated my findings in three public talks (2016–19), a book on Chekhov's technique, a book chapter and a published interview.

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Concert's contribution is that it is a contemporary, devised dance-theatre show that is design-led and privileges sound as its principal, plastic, devising material. *Concert* pushes the boundaries on how sound can be used as part of the material and performance dramaturgy of a work, how questions of auditory experience and mise en scène can shape performance and rehearsal processes alike. By engaging with sound design as the central catalyst in

creating a theatre production and effectively disseminating our insights in publications and knowledge exchange in workshops (FIG 3), we are influencing the future practice of directors, designers and performers. By sharing our process through international talkbacks, press and public appearances (FIG 15), we disrupt narratives of the more familiar (and hierarchical) dynamics of decision-making, aim to raise the status of the designer and performer, and contribute to fresh perceptions of them as 'authors'.

Dunne, Mercier and I worked collaboratively as co-creators, co-designers and co-dramaturgs to create an aesthetic terrain with many moving parts. By understanding the negotiated, ever-shifting scenographic terrain that the material itself demanded, we realised how a design 'geography' — in this case, a sonic geography — can be used as a devising method to determine the emotional drive and narrative of a performance. We discovered that, by elevating the power, significance and responsibility of the design, we can influence the direction of a production overall in new, dynamic ways.

Furthermore, by seeking a non-hierarchical communication between object, space, sound and performer on stage, we determined that any one of these might lead on the decision-making process in rehearsal at any given time. We concluded that production methods can benefit from shifting the focus of the exploration away from the act of performing (towards, for example, object, action, set, sound stimulus) to find more surprising solutions.

By prioritising the designer-performer relationship in equal measure, *Concert* demonstrates a working model of a non-hierarchical collaboration that can be developed to create innovative performance and rehearsal processes. As well as the usual organisational and dramaturgical responsibilities, my role as director became one of facilitating the performer-designer dialogue, and my research and expertise in the Chekhov technique provided an interdisciplinary methodology with which to support that creative collaboration. We discovered how performers can inspire the development of the stage and sound design and how designers can activate the act of performing itself. Proposals from the designer can activate new vocabularies in the other artists at work in the room. When artists lay down their claim or limitations to certain 'roles' within a rehearsal process, new possibilities and languages emerge.

This research into collaborative, interdisciplinary processes that take artists beyond the parameters of their speciality points the way to new methodologies for training actors, directors and designers; a multi-dimensional, holistic and innovative training where designers practise

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FIG 14 Sinéad Rushe in a public talk on Chekhov and Design, Pushkin House, London, 13 February 2019

FIG 15 Colin Dunne, Sinéad Rushe and Mel Mercier awarded the Gradam Comharcheoil TG4 Award 2018 for Musical Collaboration

performing and directing, and performers and directors practise designing. By coaxing artists in training out of the safe confines of their own discipline, they will be better prepared for the demands of interdisciplinary, collaborative theatre-making increasingly prevalent in the performing arts profession.

Concert reached 8000 live public spectators. Over 4000 people have engaged with online videos and interviews. Over 600,000 television viewers (and 1000 live spectators) watched an extract of *Concert* and an interview on Irish Television, TG4 TV. In addition to my peer-reviewed book, book chapter and published interview, I have discussed the research across a variety of platforms with a range of diverse audiences: public, academic and professional. I participated in 8 talkbacks with live audiences, a total of roughly 1200 people. My public talks at Pushkin House, London; The Street Theatre, Canberra, Australia and MICHA international workshop and festival, Connecticut College, USA involved a total of 120 paying participants who consisted of members of the public and theatre professionals. My workshops at The Actor's Centre, London; Victoria College of the Arts, Melbourne; The Street Theatre, Canberra and Goldsmiths, University of London involved a total of 75 participants, 50 of whom were paying professionals and 25 who were invited.

Concert received the Gradam Comharccheoil TG4 Award 2018 for Musical Collaboration in Ireland (FIG 15), a five-star review and feature in *The Irish Times* and has been evaluated by Arts Council of Ireland, Culture Ireland and the four co-commissioning theatre venues. It was nominated for a 2020 Bessie Award for Outstanding Production (The New York Dance and Performance Awards).

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VII

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