



# Eugene Onegin [Евгений Онегин, Yevgény Onégin]











Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky; Libretto Konstantin and Modest Shilovsky with Tchiakovsky after Alexander Pushkin

Three Acts — Sung in Russian with English Subtitles — produced by Anchorage Opera

Alaska Center for the Performing Arts, Discovery Theatre, February 6, 10 & 12 & 14 2010

## Production Staff

Timothy Myers, Conductor, Cynthia Edwards, Director, Yoshi Tanokura, Set Design,  
Lauren MacKenzie Miller, Production Manager, Denise Jewell, Costume Design

Singer	Voice	Character	Role in Opera
 Anton BELOV	Baritone	Onegin [Oh NYAY gin]	Rich bored self-centered despondent aristocrat; gambler, roué, dandy; age 26 in Acts I and II / 31 in Act III, b. 1795; it's all about him; "paralyzed and perverted by social malaise"; can't bear the idea of domesticity until he sees Tatyana married
 Veronica MITINA	Soprano	Tatyana [Tat YAH neh]	Elder daughter of Larina, shy and melancholy; a dreamer; "ideal Russian woman – genuine instant emotion; expresses energy and life force"; age 17 Acts I and II / 22 in Act III, b. 1802 or 3; loves Onegin; marries Gremin
 Matthew PEÑA	Tenor	Lenski [LEN skee]	Idealistic, exuberant naive German educated country gentleman, poet, age 18; deeply loves and is engaged to Olga; Pushkin's muse
 Lara STEVENS	Mezzo-Soprano	Olga [OYL ga]	Younger daughter of Larina, pretty, brainless, cheerful, superficial, silly; age 16; engaged to Lenski
 Todd ROBINSON	Bass	Gremin [GREH min]	Retired General, now Prince, relative of Onegin, in Act III is married to Tatyana [In Pushkin's poem Tatyana is his "trophy wife"; in the opera, he really loves her.] Appears old because of outward "success" in society; but is not much older than Onegin; ~35
 Sherri WEILER	Mezzo-Soprano	Larina [Lah REEN yah]	Widowed owner of country estate; mother of Tatyana and Olga; when a girl, read English novels translated into French and dreamed grand dreams like Tatyana; not yet 40
 Janice MEYERSON	Mezzo-Soprano	Filipyevna [Fill ip YEV nah]	Tatyana's nurse – old – losing it a little; can be a comic role
 Kyle GANTZ	Bass	A Captain	Name-Day party guest in the opera
	Bass	Zaretsky [Zar YET skee]	Lenski's his second at the duel; one time gangster and drunk; now a man with many children and no wife; a prankster – no-good-nik
 John FRASER	Tenor	Triquet [Tree KAY]	French "poet;" recites at Tatyana's Name Day party; idol of overripe ladies; local wit. [In the poem, he puts Tatyana's name in another's poem and sings it to a kid's tune.]
 Frank DELANY	Silent	Guillot [Gee YO]	Onegin's valet/coachman – emergency second at duel with Lenski

Peasants, peasant women, ballroom guests, landowners and ladies of the manor, officers

All action takes place in the 1820s at a Russian country estate and in St. Petersburg

## Opera Timeline

Act / Scene	Julian* Date and Place	Main Action	Musical Highlights
Act I Scene 1	June 1820 Larina's estate	Onegin accompanies Lenski when he visits his fiancé, Olga; sister Tatyana falls in love with Onegin	"Ah, Tanya, Tanya" (Olga) <a href="#">Click to listen</a>
Act I Scene 2	Mid-summer 1820 Tatyana's room	Tatyana writes her of love to Onegin; silly interlude with Filipyevna, the old nurse about letter delivery to Onegin	Letter Aria "Let me die, but first..." (Tatyana) <a href="#">Click to listen</a>
Act I Scene 3	Late summer 1820 Garden at Larina's estate	Onegin meets with and chides Tatiana for writing her love to him	"Were I a man whom fate intended" (Onegin) <a href="#">Click to listen</a>
Act II Scene 1	January 12, 1821 Larina's estate	Tatyana's Name-Day party – Onegin gets bored and monopolizes Olga – Lenski challenges Onegin to duel	Waltz: <a href="#">Click to listen</a>
Act II Scene 2	January 14, 1821 An isolated mill	Dawn the day before Lenski and Olga's wedding; Onegin kills Lenski in duel	"Where are the golden days of my youth" (Lensky) <a href="#">Click to listen</a>
Act III Scene 1	November 1824 Gremin's palace; St. P.	Onegin sees Princess Gremina [Tatyana] now a sophisticated woman; falls in love with her; Gremin sings of his love for Tatyana	Polonaise: <a href="#">Click to listen</a> "Love is no respecter of age" (Gremin) <a href="#">Click to listen</a>
Act III Scene 2	April 1825 Gremin's palace; St. P.	Onegin tells Tatyana he loves her; she says she loves him but will not leave husband.	Finale: (Onegin and Tatyana) <a href="#">Click to listen</a>

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## Name-Days

In many European countries celebrating the day of birth was considered pagan, so calendars were developed by the church with the name of a female and male saint associated with each day. Every child was named after a saint [or angel] based on these calendars, and in rural Russia, at the time Pushkin wrote his poem and the opera composed, your birthday was the same day as your Name Day, or your Angel day. However, in urban Russian society, people named their children for family members, and frequently actual birthdays were celebrated in addition to Name Days based on the old calendars.

## The Duel

Duels were a significant military tradition in pre 1918 Russia, and had specific conventions and traditions. They were used to defend honor, and could be “voided” relatively easily if pride did not prevail. The duel in *Eugene Onegin* flaunted dueling conventions in several ways.

Lenski correctly had his second [read, agent, a trusted friend to check weapons, fairness, and choose the location of the duel], Zaretsky, deliver the letter of challenge. Because Onegin was genuinely sorry he had annoyed Lenski even before the party was over, and didn't take the duel seriously, he had chosen no second until the time of the duel. Conventions state that seconds should be peers, [neither Zaretsky nor Onegin's valet match that criteria], and that discussion be attempted at every stage. Since Lenski issued the challenge, discussions should have been initiated through his second. Onegin [without a second] replied to Lenski's challenge correctly; “at any time he'd be prepared,” and technically voided the duel by missing the start time by over 15 minutes [he overslept and was 2 hours late]. Here again, Zaretsky should have called the duel off, and potentially challenged Onegin, himself. Though certainly not a peer, Onegin's valet was pressed into service as his second only because Lenski's pride would not let him step down. “Nomination of an *unknown* French servant was a staggering breach in dueling etiquette and a direct offence to Zaretsky.” Zaretsky fails, by silence, to forestall the carnage.

Lenski's death, per the custom of many deaths by duel, was classified as a suicide; his body buried outside the churchyard. This tactic also allowed the survivor to avoid criminal proceedings.

## Onegin's reply to Tatyana

Onegin's reply to Tatyana's letter has been variously interpreted both as “reasonable, tactful honesty and as pompous condescension”. Here's what he said – What do you think?

*If I wished to pass my life within the confines of the family circle, and a kindly fate had decreed for me the role of husband and father, then, most like, I would not choose any other bride than you. But I was not made for wedded bliss, it is foreign to my soul, your perfections are vain, I am quite unworthy of them. Believe me, I give you my word; marriage would be a torment for us. No matter how much I loved you, habit would kill that love. Judge what a thorny bed of roses Hymen would prepare for us, and, perhaps, to be endured at*

*length! One cannot return to dreams and youth, I cannot renew my soul! I love you with a brother's love, a brother's love or, perhaps, more than that! Perhaps, perhaps more than that! Listen to me without getting angry, more than once will a girl exchange one passing fancy for another. Learn to control your feelings; not everyone will understand you as I do. Inexperience leads to disaster!*

## Two Tatyanas



These two images represent the two Tatyanas; one at the beginning of the opera, and the other, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> act as Princess Gremina. Onegin could not appreciate the true authentic beauty of Tatyana when she wrote him her love, but after many sophisticated society people admired her, he said he fell in love with her. Yes, she is beautiful in the second picture, but some lovely innocence is lost. She is in charge of her life and emotions in the second picture, unlike in the first act of the opera. Over the course of the poem, Tatiana grows, but Onegin remains static.

## Onegin and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Russian writer Nabokov argued in his *Commentary to Eugene Onegin* that Pushkin had read Byron during his years in exile just prior to composing *Eugene Onegin*. The first stages of *Eugene Onegin*, published in serial form between 1825 and 1832, appeared twelve years after Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Onegin's solitary brooding and disrespect for traditional privilege are but two characteristics found in the standard “Byronic Hero.”

## What the critics say

Dostoyevsky wrote, “Eugene is the perfect depiction of the Russian aristocracy in the post Peter the Great Russia — a class separated from the spiritual center of Russia's ordinary people.”

Russian critic Shklovsky wrote, “Tatyana falls in love with Onegin and nothing comes of it. Then Onegin falls in love with her and nothing comes of it. End of novel.” A game with non-events and by implication, non-characters seem to make the story *more* real. Every Russian knew the story so the opera could be, and is, very sketchy.

Per Michael Basker, “willfully inattentive readers as Dostoevsky and Tchaikovsky [painted] Gremin as elderly;” reference “fat general,” Chapter 7.LIV-LV, 2-3 years before the marriage, when Tatyana might have regarded even 30 as old. Chapter 8.XVII and XXIII show differently. Onegin uses the familiar form of address to Gremin indicating equality, and they recall youthful pranks and jokes; Gremin is about 5 years older than Onegin.

## Prepared for Anchorage Opera Guild by

Dana Anderson of Software North LLC, January 2010. Notes based on info from Marina Balashova Bell, Michael Basker, Anton Belov, Matthew Peña, Kobbes, Wikipedia and, of course, Pushkin, isbn: 0-14-044803-9. An electronic version with live links is available at [www.aoguild.org](http://www.aoguild.org).

\* In 1918 Russia changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, which added 2 weeks to the dates in the Opera Timeline.