



THE METROPOLITAN OPERA IN HD
Tchaikovsky's *EUGENE ONEGIN*
USC LIBRARIES RESOURCE GUIDE
Saturday, October 5, 2013, University of Southern California

Following a pre-opera discussion hosted by Ken Cazan, chair of vocal arts and opera/resident stage director at the USC Thornton School of Music, we will present a delayed satellite broadcast of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Anna Netrebko and Mariusz Kwiecien star as the lovestruck Tatiana and the imperious Onegin in Tchaikovsky's fateful romance. Deborah Warner's new production, set in the late nineteenth century, moves episodically from farmhouse to ballroom, with a powerful snowstorm providing the dramatic setting for the finale. Piotr Beczala is Lenski, Onegin's friend turned rival. Russian maestro Valery Gergiev conducts.

ROSS SCIMECA of the USC Libraries has selected the following resources to help you learn more about *Eugene Onegin*, Tchaikovsky and Russian opera.

Introduction

Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* is the fifth of the composer's eleven operas, composed in 1879. Because of the outstanding arias and duets, plus the choral and dance scenes, *Eugene Onegin* has remained as the composer's most popular opera and has been performed in all the great opera houses of the world.

Synopsis

The following synopsis is reproduced from the Metropolitan Opera's website.

Act I

On the country estate of the widowed Madame Larina, the peasants return from the fields celebrating the harvest with song and dance. Madame Larina's daughter Olga teases her older sister Tatiana for avoiding the festivities; Tatiana prefers her romantic novels. Olga's suitor, the poet Lenski, arrives with his friend Eugene Onegin and declares his love for Olga. Onegin strolls through the garden with Tatiana and asks how she doesn't get bored with country life. Unnerved by the handsome and elegant stranger, Tatiana answers with difficulty. The two couples go inside for dinner as night falls.

In her bedroom, Tatiana persuades her reluctant nurse Filippievna to tell her of her first love and marriage. Tatiana admits she is in love and asks to be left alone. She sits up the entire night writing a passionate letter to Onegin. When day breaks, she gives the letter to Filippievna for her grandson to deliver.

A group of women sing as they work in the Larins' garden. Tatiana appears, nervous, followed by Onegin who asks that she hear him out patiently. He admits he was touched by her letter, but adds that he would quickly grow bored with marriage and can only offer her friendship. He coldly advises her to better control her emotions in the future, lest another man take advantage of her innocence.

Act II

Some months later, a party is underway in the Larins' house for Tatiana's name day. Onegin dances with Tatiana but is bored by the provincial ways of the country people. Annoyed with Lenski for having dragged him there, Onegin then dances with Olga, who is momentarily distracted by the charming man. Monsieur Triquet, Tatiana's elderly French tutor, serenades her with a song he has written in her honor. When the dancing resumes, Lenski jealously confronts Onegin and accuses him of flirting with Olga. Madame Larina

begs the men not to quarrel in her house, but Lenski cannot be calmed and Onegin accepts his challenge to a duel. Lenski waits for Onegin at the appointed spot at dawn. He reflects on the folly of his brief life and imagines Olga visiting his grave. When Onegin finally arrives, he and Lenski both admit to themselves that the duel is pointless and they would prefer to laugh together than to fight, but honor must be satisfied. The duel is marked off and Onegin kills Lenski.

Act III

Several years later, at a ball in the Gremin Palace in St. Petersburg, Onegin reflects bitterly on the fact that he has traveled the world seeking some meaning in life, and all his efforts have led him to yet another dull social event. Suddenly he recognizes Tatiana across the ballroom, dressed in a beautiful gown and bearing herself with great dignity. He realizes she is no longer a country girl. Questioning his cousin, Prince Gremin, he learns that Tatiana is now Gremin's wife. The older man explains that he married Tatiana two years previously and describes Tatiana as his life's salvation. When Gremin introduces Onegin, Tatiana maintains her composure but excuses herself after a few words of polite conversation. Onegin is stunned to realize that he is in love with Tatiana.

The following day, Tatiana is distressed when she receives an impassioned letter from Onegin. He rushes in and falls at her feet, but she maintains her control, asking him if he desires her now for her wealth and position. She recalls the days when they might have been happy, but that time has passed. Onegin repeats he is in love with her. Faltering for a moment, Tatiana admits that she still loves him, but she will not leave her husband and ruin her life. She leaves him regretting his bitter destiny.

Recommended Recordings

The USC Libraries have acquired streaming videos of many of the productions originating at the Metropolitan Opera. Access the database through the USC Libraries homepage at www.usc.edu/libraries or directly at <https://libproxy.usc.edu/login?url=http://metoperafamily.org/ondemand>.

Through this database you can stream an HD telecast of the opera from February 24, 2007, plus the radio broadcasts from the 1989, 2002 and 2009 productions. This is really an outstanding database for operaphiles.

Besides the Metropolitan Opera's productions of Eugene Onegin, there are some interesting recordings in the Music Library to equally consider. There is the live performance from the Bolshoi with Galina Vishnevskaja as Titania [**Music Library: 16000mus**] and the 1993 Philips recording with Dmitri Hvorostovsky as Onegin [**Music Library: 6184mus**]. The score of the opera is also available from Dover Publications [**Music Library: M1500.C435E9 1997**].

Recommended Books

The following four books are recommended for greater insight into Tchaikovsky and the state of opera in Russia before and after his time:

***Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture* (2005)**

By Boris Gasparov

Music Library: M L 3 0 0 . G 3 8 2 0 0 5

***Tchaikovsky and His World* (1998)**

By Leslie Kearney

Music Library: M L 4 1 0 . C 4 T 3 6 1 9 9 8

***Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement* (2002)**

By Simon Alexander Morrison

Music Library: M L 1 7 3 7 . 5 . M 6 7 2 0 0 2

***Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait* (1990)**

By Alekandra Anato'evna Orlova

Music Library: M L 4 1 0 . C 4 0 7 5 1 9 9 0