



EUGENE ONEGIN

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Opera in 3 acts
Sung in Russian

Recorded August 2007 at the Salzburg Festival

Act 1: 73 minutes, Act 2: 42 minutes, Act 3: 42 minutes.
TOTAL: 157 minutes.

Conductor | Daniel Barenboim
Director | Andrea Breth
Sets | Martin Zehetgruber
Costumes | Silke Willrett & Marc Weeger
Lights | Friedrich Rom
Orchestra Wiener Philharmoniker

Starring

Eugene Onegin | Peter Mattei
Tatyana | Anna Samuil
Olga | Ekaterina Gubanova
Lensky | Joseph Kaiser
Prince Gremin | Ferruccio Furlanetto
Larina, Lady of the Manor | René Morloc

Presentation

Tchaikovsky is best known for his symphonic scores and ballets such as the “Nutcracker,” “Swan Lake” and “Sleeping Beauty.” Yet his operas also occupy a place of honor in his oeuvre, and two of them, “Eugene Onegin” and “The Queen of Spades,” both based on novels by Pushkin, are among his very finest works. The plot of “Onegin” is quickly told: on a Russian country estate, awkward, inexperienced young Tatyana is seized by a sudden passion for the handsome, blasé new neighbor Eugene Onegin. She writes him a love letter, but he makes it clear to her that he is not interested. Later, Tatyana’s sister flirts with Onegin, her fiancé challenges him to a duel and is killed by Onegin. Years later, Onegin returns, finds that Tatyana has married an aged prince, and tries to win her back but fails...

Tchaikovsky called his opera a sequence of “lyric scenes.” Its structure prefigures narrative techniques that later came into use in cinema: abrupt cuts and chronological leaps, intimate close-ups, atmospheric interjections... Bearing this practically cinematic structure in mind, director Andrea Breth has produced an intimate chamber play that mines the depths of veracity, precision and charisma of her singer-actors. The

stage suggests both the concrete location of the action as well as the psychological condition of those driving the action forward. Breth's "phenomenal 'Onegin' interpretation" (F.A.Z.) even allows the integration of silent secondary episodes and miniature dramas.

The title role is a tour de force for any baritone, who must walk a tightrope between cynical, insufferable snob and sympathetic, broken-hearted lover. This is carried off superbly by Peter Mattei, who "has acquired a fabulous vocal profile and is a gifted actor blessed with debonair self-confidence." (Peter Hagmann, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*) But the true hero of the opera is Tatyana, a multi-layered, conflicted, driven, doubt-ridden heroine. As portrayed by the dazzling Russian soprano Anna Samuil, this Tatyana "is ready to start a revolution." (Julia Spinola, F.A.Z.) Since her 2003 debut in the West, and her appearance as Musetta ("La Bohème") at

the Met alongside Anna Netrebko, Anna Samuil – a protégée of Daniel Barenboim – has been acclaimed as a vibrant new voice on the operatic stage. Daniel Barenboim and the Vienna Philharmonic accompany these "scenes of a marriage that could have been" with beguilingly dark sonorities that allow for brilliant flashes of light from the winds and waves of passionate lyricism in the third act

Synopsis by act

ACT I

Scene 1: A garden outside the house of Larina, deep in the country

Tatyana and Olga can be heard singing inside the house while Larina and Filipyevna are working outside and reminiscing about the past, remembering how Larina changed from a foolish romantic girl to a sedate and contented wife.

The peasants of the estate sing as they return from harvesting, and Tatyana and Olga come out to listen. Tatyana's imagination is stirred by the song but Olga laughs at her, contrasting her own simple, light-hearted view of life with her sister's moody day-dreaming. The peasants go and Tatyana starts reading. Her mother is anxious because she is so pale but Tatyana answers that she is not ill, only deeply moved by the sufferings of the characters in her book.

The appearance on the scene of Lensky, Olga's fiancée, causes a flutter, particularly when it is discovered that he has brought a stranger. Lensky presents Onegin, a neighbor in the country. Tatyana falls in love with him on the spot and he, in an aside to Lensky, expresses surprise that his friend, as a poet, should have preferred the prosaic Olga to the more striking Tatyana.

The couples separate. Lensky and Olga leave Tatyana and Onegin to make polite conversation in which she explains that she does not find the country boring, as he supposes, because of her fondness for reading and day-dreaming. Then they wander off and Olga and Lensky return, the latter expressing his devotion to Olga, whom he has loved since childhood. As night falls they go inside.

As Tatyana and Onegin return, Onegin complains about the tedium of sitting by his dying uncle's bedside. Filipyevna notices Tatyana's emotion and wonders whether she might be falling in love with Onegin.

Scene 2: Tatyana's bedroom that night

Tatyana is restless and asks Filipyevna about her youth and marriage, but does not really listen to the nurse's story of her arranged marriage. Crying out that she is in love, she asks to be left alone. She writes a letter to Onegin in which she expresses her love, her fears and her doubts.

When Filipyevna returns in the morning, Tatyana asks her to have her grandson take

the letter to their neighbor. She is unwilling to speak Onegin's name but angry when the nurse does not immediately realise which neighbor.

Scene 3: Another part of the garden, the next morning

The servant girls are singing as they pick berries. Tatyana waits fearfully for Onegin. Politely he tells her that love is not for him. If he had been meant to have a wife he would have had none other than her, but as he is he would make her miserable. He offers her the love of a brother - perhaps even more - but warns her to be more cautious in future, as not everyone will be so forbearing as he.

ACT II

Scene 1: The reception room of Larina's house some months later

A party is taking place in honor of Tatyana's name day. As the guests dance and express their approval of the arrangements Onegin overhears some women criticising his character. Angrily he determines to be revenged on Lensky, whom he blames for dragging him to the party, by flirting with Olga. Lensky is at first bewildered and then angry, and reproaches both Olga and Onegin; and Olga refuses to dance with him as a punishment. An elderly guest, Monsieur Triquet, reads out some couplets to the embarrassed Tatyana.

Lensky resumes his attack on Onegin who tries to calm him, claiming that he has done nothing to upset anyone and pointing out that people are beginning to take notice of them. Larina begs them not to quarrel in her house and Lensky sadly recalls the happy times he has spent there while Onegin regrets the length to which the affair has gone and Tatyana gives vent to the jealousy which his attentions to Olga has aroused in her. Eventually Lensky flings out a definite challenge which Onegin is unable to refuse. As they leave the room Olga falls in a faint.

Scene 2: Near a water-mill early the next morning

Lensky and his second, Zaretsky, are waiting for Onegin. Lensky reflects with gentle melancholy on the passing of his youth, his possible impending death and his love for Olga.

When Onegin appears (with only his manservant Guillot as his second, to the disapproval of Zaretsky, a stickler for correct duelling procedure), he and Lensky muse separately on the possibility of making up their quarrel, but decide they have gone too far to retreat. Onegin fires first and Lensky falls dead. Onegin is appalled.

ACT III

Scene 1: The ballroom of a nobleman's house in St Petersburg some years later

A ball has just begun and Onegin, who is standing apart, muses on his life since the duel. He had fled his country estate and travelled but now, bored, he has returned, only to find himself at a ball. Among the guests is an elegant lady whom he recognises with astonishment as Tatyana. She notices him and tries to control her emotion. When he asks an old friend, Prince Gremin, who she is, he finds that she is Gremin's wife. Gremin bursts into a eulogy on Tatyana and his love for her.

Onegin and Tatyana meet, both apparently calm, and they exchange a few civilities before she tells her husband she is tired and they leave. Onegin realises with astonishment that he is in love with her.

Scene 2: A drawing room in Prince Gremin's house

Tatyana holds a letter which Onegin has written to her declaring his love. She is upset that he has returned to disturb her peace of mind. Onegin enters to find her in tears and falls at her feet. She collects herself and reminds him of his rejection of her in the garden. When he exclaims that he now realises his mistake she asks if he finds the

society woman a more suitable prize to add to his conquests than the simple country girl and he tries to convince her that his feelings are genuine. They both reflect on the happiness that has passed them by, and Tatyana tells Onegin that fate has decided otherwise: she is married and he must leave her.

Passionately he tries to persuade her, but she reminds him that he is an honorable man. She admits that she does still love him but tells him that now she is married she will remain faithful to her husband. In vain he protests. She bids him farewell forever, and leaves him overcome by despair.

Logos to use for marketing material:

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