

## April 25, 2019 – Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*

A rebroadcast of North Carolina Opera's January 24, 2016 performance of Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's best-known opera, *Eugene Onegin* (*Evgeny Onegin*) is featured on this week's WCPE Opera House. The idea of setting Alexander Pushkin's classic "novel in verse" was suggested to Tchaikovsky in 1877, and the opera had its premiere on January 23, 1881 at Moscow's Imperial College of Music. While working on *Onegin*, Tchaikovsky received a passionate avowal of love from a young woman he'd met while teaching at the Moscow Conservatory. Despite his *sub rosa* homosexuality, Tchaikovsky was determined not to emulate the caddishness of the literary character Onegin, so he entered into a loveless marriage. The results were disastrous: a nervous breakdown led to a permanent separation after less than three months of marriage.

As the opera opens in the garden of the Larin country estate, Tatiana (soprano **Joyce El-Khoury**) and her sister Olga (mezzo-soprano **Zanda Švėde**) are singing duets while their mother, Madame Larina (mezzo-soprano **Robynne Redmon**), reminisces about her youth. The peasants have gathered the harvest, and now dance to amuse their mistress. Olga's suitor, Vladimir Lenski (tenor **Eric Barry**), brings his friend Evgeny Onegin (baritone **Joo Won Kang**). Tatiana asks the nanny, Filipyevna (mezzo-soprano **Victoria Livengood**), about her marriage. Unable to sleep, she writes an impassioned love letter to Onegin, which Filipyevna agrees to deliver. After receiving the letter, Onegin returns to the estate and coldly tells Tatiana he's just not the marrying kind.

At Lenski's insistence, Onegin attends Tatiana's name day ball. When people gossip about him, Onegin takes revenge on Lenski by flirting with Olga. Lenski is enraged and picks a fight with his friend. Reluctantly, Onegin agrees to a duel with pistols. The next morning, before the duel, Lenski wonders if Olga will shed a tear if he's killed. Onegin proceeds to fatally wound Lenski.

Several years later, Onegin--still bored with life--attends a ball in St. Petersburg, where he once again encounters Tatiana, who's now married to his cousin Prince Gremin (bass **Kenneth Kellog**). Her transformation from a naive country girl to a dazzlingly beautiful princess captivates him. Alone with Onegin, Tatiana accuses him of loving her now only because she is rich and famous. Admitting she still loves him, she nevertheless wishes to remain faithful to her husband. As the opera ends, the caddish Onegin is left wondering what might have been.

**Timothy Myers** conducts the North Carolina Opera Orchestra and Chorus in this January 24, 2016 performance at Meymandi Concert Hall in Raleigh, North Carolina.

From the Sept. 19, 2013 dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera, **Anna Netrebko** sings an excerpt from Tatiana's Letter Scene ("Puskai pogibnu ya"):  
<https://youtu.be/d56MMagyMXs>.

Between acts I and II, I'll interview NCO general manager **Eric Mitchko**. Following the opera, I'll present highlights from Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame* (*The Queen of Spades*).

This Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, at 11:00 a.m., join us for the conclusion of Richard Wagner's monumental *Ring* cycle with a performance of *Die Götterdämmerung* (*The Twilight of the Gods*). **Christine Goerke** plays Brünnhilde, whose heroic self-sacrifice paves the way for humankind's redemption and rebirth. **Andreas Schager** sings the role of the hero Siegfried, and **Eric Owens** is Hagen. **Philippe Jordan** conducts.

Please join me next Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, for Otto Nicolai's *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*), with **Gottlob Frick** as Sir John Falstaff. Heard in other principal roles are **Ernst Gutstein** (Herr Fluth), **Ruth-Marget Pütz** (Frau Fluth), **Kieth Engen** (Herr Reich), **Gisela Litz** (Frau Reich), **Edith Mathis** (Jungfer Anna Reich), **Fritz Wunderlich** (Fenton), **Friedrich Lenz** (Junker Spärlich), and **Carl Hoppe** (Dr. Cajus). **Robert Heger** conducts the Bavarian State Opera Orchestra and Chorus in this 1963 EMI recording.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

*Bob Chapman*

**W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House**