



EUGENE ONEGIN

by
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Libretto
by
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Konstantin Shilovsky

after a novel by
Alexander Pushkin

Sung in Russian with English Supertitles.

STUDY GUIDE

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Premiere

First performance on March 29, 1879, at the Moscow Conservatoire in Moscow, Russia.

Cast of Characters

Madame Larina , a landowner.....	Mezzo-Soprano
Tatiana , her daughter.....	Soprano
Olga , her daughter.....	Contralto
Eugene Onegin	Baritone
Vladimir Lenski , a poet, Onegin's friend.....	Tenor
Prince Gremin , a retired general.....	Bass
Filippievna , Tatiana's nurse.....	Soprano
Zaretski , a gentleman.....	Baritone
Triquet , a French tutor.....	Tenor

Brief Summary

Setting: In St. Petersburg, Russia, and a country estate nearby, in the 1820s.

Eugene Onegin visits the Larin estate in the country with his friend Lenski who is in love with Olga. The two men spend time with the two sisters, Lenski with Olga and Onegin with Tatiana. Tatiana is smitten with the sophisticated Onegin and spends that night writing a lengthy letter to the young man expressing her feelings of love. The next day she is crushed to hear that he does not return her passion, feeling only brotherly love for her. Furthermore he advises her to be more restrained and exhibit better self-control. Tatiana is humiliated.

Tatiana's birthday ball occurs several months later. Onegin, who is bored and irritated with the provincial scene, decides to irritate Lenski for insisting they attend. Onegin flirts with Olga, taking her attention away from Lenski who reacts angrily. The two men quarrel and Lenski challenges Onegin to a duel. The morning of the duel both men regret their actions but feel as though they have no choice but to continue. When the guns are fired, Lenski falls dead. Onegin reacts to what has happened with horror and disbelief.

Several years pass before Onegin returns to Russia after extensive travels. He attends a ball at the home of Prince Gremin. He is amazed to see Tatiana. She looks nothing like the country girl he remembered. He asks Gremin about her and finds that Tatiana has been his wife for two years. Prince Gremin introduces them and Tatiana exchanges a few words with Onegin before excusing herself. Onegin realizes he loves her and wants desperately to meet with her.

Onegin sends Tatiana a passionate letter and wants to see her privately. She is distraught. When he arrives he confesses his love and passion for her. Tatiana admits she still loves him. When Onegin implores Tatiana to come away with him, she rebuffs him. She is a married woman and is resolved to honor her vows. Ignoring Onegin's entreaties, Tatiana rushes away, leaving Onegin alone and despairing.

Full Plot Synopsis and Musical Highlights

The opera begins with a two-minute orchestral passage called the Introduction. A musical motif representing Tatiana establishes her as the central character of the drama. Also heard is a descending scale motif the composer associated with fate.

ACT I

Act I begins with the sounds of a duet drifting from inside the house. The sisters, Olga and Tatiana, are singing a verse by Pushkin, “ ‘Slikhalil’ vī...vdokhnulil’ vī” (Have you not heard...have you not sighed), accompanied by the harp. Outside, their mother Larina, who is sitting with her old nursemaid, Filippievna, is inspired to think of her youth and marriage and the importance of literature in her life. A chorus ensues, singing in traditional folk polyphony, “ ‘Bolyat moi skorī nozhen’ ki so pokhodushki” (My nimble feet are sore from walking), as Madame Larina’s serfs return from the fields. A single voice heard from afar begins the choral number. In response the chorus sings a modal melody with parallel and contrary motion. They perform the Dance of the Peasants singing, “ Uzh kak po mostu-mostochku’ (Across the little bridge). The first folk song was composed by Tchaikovsky, but the second was obtained from oral tradition. The peasants take their leave as Olga begins a scena and aria, “Ya ne sposobna k grusti tomnoy,” (I am no good at languid melancholy). Olga is contrasting herself with her sister Tatiana who is occupied with deep thoughts. Larina frets over Tatiana’s introversion. Filippievna announces the arrival of guests.

Lensky and his sophisticated friend Onegin are presented to Olga and Tatiana. The four embark on a quartet, the two men and the sisters in respective pairs. Simultaneously, the men discuss the girls and Tatiana is sure that Onegin is the special someone for whom she has been secretly yearning. They begin to walk together, Onegin with Tatiana and Lensky with Olga. In an arioso Lensky declares his love for Olga, “Ya lyublyu vas, Olga,” (I love you, Olga). The descending scale motif is heard at the beginning of Lensky’s scene and arioso. Onegin and Tatiana stroll back into view, Tatiana hanging on Onegin’s every word. He finds rural life very boring. In a cynical fashion Onegin relates the story of the unexpected death of his uncle that resulted in his inheritance of the estate nearby. As they walk Filippievna speculates about Tatiana’s feelings toward this new man.

Tatiana has retired to her bedroom in a restless mood. The scene’s introduction is based on Tatiana’s motif. Tatiana asks Filippievna about love and her own experience with love and marriage. Tatiana is unsatisfied with her nurse’s answers, finding them very unromantic. Tatiana asks for writing paper and pens and then sends the old nurse away. Tatiana spends the night composing a letter to Onegin in a lengthy twelve-minute aria, called the Letter Scene, “Puskay pogibnu ya,” (Even if it means I perish). She pours her very soul into declaring her love for Onegin. Additional musical motifs are introduced that recur in the opera, including the “fate” descending scale motif. As the early dawn breaks, an oboe melody is heard, representing a shepherd’s pipe. The melody is an authentic shepherd’s tune. Filippievna enters and finds Tatiana awake. She is asked to send the letter to Onegin.

An anxious Tatiana waits for Onegin's response as she listens to some peasant girls singing a folksong. Onegin arrives and tells her he was touched by her letter and that if he wished to marry he would certainly choose her. Then he admonishes Tatiana for her lack of self-control. He is gentle but cold in his demeanor. He also tells her that he cannot feel anything for her but brotherly love. Tatiana is stunned by his reaction and does not speak. Onegin proffers his arm and leads her away, humiliated. The earlier music of the peasant girls concludes and frames the scene.

ACT II

The act begins with an entr'acte based on the central theme of the Letter Scene. Guests have assembled at the Larin Estate to celebrate Tatiana's birthday. A waltz is heard and the guests chatter and gossip. Onegin hears the gossip and is annoyed that Lensky insisted they attend the ball. Onegin makes mischief, asking Olga to dance. Olga flirts with Onegin, upsetting Lensky. She has promised the cotillion to Onegin. Onegin makes goading comments to Lensky who is so offended that he renounces his friendship with Onegin. The men quarrel and Lensky challenges Onegin to a duel. The descending scale motif is heard. The largest ensemble in the opera, a quintet with chorus, ensues. Tatiana, Olga, Larina, Lensky and Onegin and assembled guests all express their shock, dismay and regret over this unexpected event. Lensky rushes out of the ballroom followed closely by Onegin.

The introduction to the duel scene is based on Lensky's aria from the first act. Lensky and his second await the arrival of Onegin at the place designated for the duel. Lensky sings a farewell to Olga, "Kuda, kuda, vi udalilis," (Whither, ah, whither are ye fled). Some consider this the finest aria written for tenor in Russian opera. Onegin arrives late in a somewhat insulting manner. The two men stand back-to-back awaiting the signal to advance. They sing a duet in the form of a canon which is set apart by half a bar. They sing the same words, which are filled with regret, but the distance between them is stated musically by the uneven canon. At the end of the duet they question whether they should call off the duel. The response, "Nyet, nyet, nyet, nyet," (No, no, no, no), seals their fate. The duel commences. When Onegin fires his pistol, he realizes with sorrow and dismay that he has killed his friend.

ACT III

Onegin has returned to St. Petersburg after a lengthy trip abroad. Several years have passed. Onegin is attending a grand ball at the home of Prince Gremin. A polonaise is being danced. He is now twenty-six years old and he bitterly states that he has done nothing with his life, "I zdyes mnye skuchno!" (I'm bored here too). His ennui combined with his guilt over the death of Lensky has never left him. Another dance, an ecossaise (Scottish-style contredance) begins. Prince and Princess Gremin enter and greet their guests. Onegin recognizes Tatiana and cannot believe his eyes. She bears herself like a queen and is so at ease. He asks Prince Gremin about her and is told that she is his wife and they have been married two years. Gremin shares his love for Tatiana in the aria, "Lyubvi vsye vozrasti pokorni'," (Love is no respecter of age). Onegin and Tatiana meet with calm demeanor though both are affected by this unexpected encounter.

Tatiana asks to be excused and leaves the ball. Onegin realizes he loves her and sings the aria, “‘Uvi, somnen´ya net” (Alas, there is no doubt). Tchaikovsky establishes the irony of the situation by recapitulating the blissful opening music of Tatiana’s Letter Scene.

Tatiana has received a letter from Onegin confessing his love. She is distressed, tremulous and feels a rising passion. She begins to weep. Onegin bursts in. They begin their final duet though it must be noted that it is not a conventional duet. Their two voices are heard singing together only briefly. There are no love duets in EUGENE ONEGIN. Tatiana reminds Onegin of his attitude years earlier. He begs forgiveness. She admits she stills loves him, which he seizes upon to entreat her to leave her marriage. Even though her heart is with him, she refuses to dishonor her husband. When Tatiana declares she will leave the room, Onegin cries out the same words that separated him from Lensky, “Nyet, nyet, nyet, nyet!” (No, no, no, no). After a tumultuous confrontation, Tatiana leaves Onegin to his fate and bids him farewell forever.

Historical Background

In May 1877, Tchaikovsky attended a party where the opera singer Elizaveta Lavrovskaya mentioned Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* as a possible subject for an opera. At first he rejected the notion out of hand, but soon was unable to get the idea out of his mind. He sat up one night selecting scenes and outlining his thoughts in much the same way as the character Tatiana when she poured her soul into a love letter to Onegin. Tchaikovsky's initial concerns of the novel's suitability as opera material were well founded because of the stature and beloved nature of the source material. The novel *Eugene Onegin* was written by the man who was considered Russia's greatest poet and father of modern Russian literature. The novel was in actuality a lengthy narrative poem containing verse that resonated with the Russian people because it touched on most aspects of Russian life and experience. As such, there was concern that literate Russians would not accept Pushkin's masterpiece adapted to fit the customary operatic conventions one might expect. This concern actually made the project more attractive to Tchaikovsky. He wanted to create an opera that did not conform to traditional practices he felt were silly or unrealistic. Tchaikovsky wanted to create operatic realism. He intended to use Pushkin's own verses to the greatest extent possible and select specific scenes from the novel that would illustrate the emotional world of his characters. Tchaikovsky called the opera "lyrical scenes" because it covers selected episodes from the original and is not a continuous story.

Tchaikovsky wrote Tatiana's "Letter Scene" first. This scene, which is the second scene of Act I, contains the musical heart of the opera. The emphasis on the character of Tatiana is borne out by the musical theme associated with her that first appears in the Letter Scene and returns throughout the opera to remind us of Tatiana's gentle but passionate nature. Other musical phrases connected with Tatiana are also heard first in the Letter Scene, such as the melody that accompanies her confession of love to her nurse, "Oh, nurse, nurse, I'm consumed with longing." This melody also contains a descending scale that Tchaikovsky used in many of his works to represent fate and sometimes death.

In a quirk of fate, it was during Tchaikovsky's early work with this opera that he, himself, received a letter from a young woman who declared her love for him. He was so caught up in his disdain for Onegin, who rejects Tatiana only to regret his actions forever, that Tchaikovsky made the disastrous decision to marry the young woman and not repeat Onegin's mistake. He bitterly regretted his hasty decision. It rapidly degenerated into his suicide attempt, a nervous breakdown and separation from his wife. His personal situation delayed completion of the opera but did not end it. He took an extended European trip, regained his equilibrium, and completed the opera in late January 1878, some eight months after it was begun.

The first performance was given by students at the Moscow Conservatory. Not trusting the conventional stage, Tchaikovsky wanted young voices, a chorus that would take direction and act, and simple staging true to its setting. It did not take long for the opera to be presented professionally. There was some grumbling about the libretto, the

word “blasphemy” was even heard from some audience members. But in time there was realization that Tchaikovsky had accomplished something unique in transforming the narrative quality of the Pushkin poem into music and had used both the vocal and instrumental language of opera to convey the innermost feelings of the characters of EUGENE ONEGIN.

Opera in Russia

The first opera performed in Russia was an Italian work called *Calandro* by Giovanni Ristori. Tommaso Ristori and his son Giovanni brought their opera troupe to Moscow in 1731 to take part in the coronation festivities for the Russian Empress Anna Ivanovna. They had been sent from the court of August II the Strong in Dresden to entertain the new empress and her court. The success of this first opera troupe paved the way for more. In 1735, composer Francesco Araja and his opera troupe were invited to St. Petersburg to establish a resident opera company. Araja spent about twenty-five years in Russia and wrote at least 14 operas for the Imperial Russian Court. In 1755 Araja wrote the first opera written with a Russian text. Three years later, the second opera written with a Russian libretto was composed by Hermann Raupach, a German who spent eighteen years serving the Russian Court. It should be noted, however, that their words may have been Russian, but the operas were still Italian in musical style and form.

The influence of Italian composers persisted through most of the eighteenth century and flourished during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-96). Among the famous names in opera history who spent considerable time in Russia, composing and performing their works, were Giovanni Paisiello, Giuseppe Sardi, Domenico Cimarosa, Antonio Salieri and the Spaniard Vicente Martin y Soler. In many cases operas were written with Russian librettos, with some texts even prepared by Catherine herself. Catherine also advanced Russian operatic development by sending promising individuals to Italy to learn musical composition at the source. One of the most successful Italian-trained Russian composers was Yevstigney Fomin who wrote thirty operas, many with Russian texts. One of his comic operas was entitled *Amerikantsy* (*The Americans*)! Even though foreign influences remained significant in Russian opera (and Russian music in general) native-born composers like Fomin were beginning to incorporate some folk song melodies and choruses with authentic folk song polyphony.

The turn of the nineteenth century brought greater emphasis on Russian subjects, Russian texts and Russian composers. This trend was sustained by a swelling of national spirit during the reign of Tsar Alexander I (1801-25). An extensive four-year operatic project (1803-07) called *Rusalka* (*The Mermaid*), originally based on a German opera by Ferdinand Kauer, was transformed with additional music and Russian text into the original work and three sequels (a tetralogy) by Stepan Davydov and a Russianized Italian named Catterino Albertovich Cavos. Cavos next turned to Russian history with his opera *Ivan Susanin* in 1815, and Alexey Verstovsky established himself as a gifted native-born composer with his immensely popular works including *Askoldoya Mogila* (*The Tomb of Askold*), which remained in the Russian operatic repertory into the 20th century.

The most significant milestones in the development of Russian national opera were two works written by Mikhail Glinka, *Zhizn za tzarya* (*A Life for the Tsar*), written in 1836, and *Ruslan i Lyudmila* (*Ruslan and Ludmila*), based on a tale by Pushkin, written in 1842. These works galvanized the desire of composers to focus on a sound and form that truly reflected their Russian heritage. Glinka is considered by many to be the father of Russian music. Of his two works, Glinka's second opera contained important musical features that impacted the future of Russian music: broad, declamatory, heroic style with modal touches; lyrical, expressive melody with subtle harmonies and

chromatically moving inner voices; fantastic or magical happenings represented by unique harmonies and use of whole-tone sections; an oriental sensibility with genuine eastern themes; vibrant choruses and dances with bright instrumentation. Glinka's style of composition and his characteristic use of folk music, chromaticism, dissonance, the whole tone scale, and striking orchestrations laid the foundation for later composers to build upon.

By the middle of the nineteenth century Russian musicians were generally aligned with one of two groups. One group wanted to see Russian musical development following the path of Europe, particularly Germany. They believed in conservatory training and following a generally Western ideal in their musical lives. The head of this school was Anton Rubinstein, the pianist and composer who founded the Imperial Conservatory in St. Petersburg. The leading composer of this group was Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. His gift for lyricism and melody and the strength of his orchestrations made his music very popular. His style was international and he was very knowledgeable about Italian opera as well as French ballet. He did not scorn nationalism in music, but did not make it the centerpiece of his musical style.

The other group, who were primarily interested in musical nationalism, looked to the works of Glinka and his successor, Alexander Dargomyzhsky, for their inspiration. The group began to form in 1856, and by 1862 the group of five composers was complete. They were called the Russian Five, the Five, the Mighty Five, or the Mighty Handful, although the men themselves never identified themselves in this manner. These composers were Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Borodin and Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov. They scorned conventional conservatory training and other evidence of Western musical influence and looked to their national traditions, folk music and dance to shape their subject matter and musical idiom. They were for truth in music and nationalism, and were against academism and Wagnerism. The group stayed together about ten years. Mussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov were the most successful and influential in the composition of Russian national opera.

Modest Mussorgsky, who was considered the most original of the group, was in love with the Russian people, their folk music and their language. His goal was to write musical prose, a kind of sung speech that represented the musical realism he was seeking. He suffused his masterpiece, *Boris Godounov* (1874), with a sweeping, elemental power and a declamatory style that expressed the emotion of the text in the most direct manner possible. It is a style of melody that is derived directly from the cadences and modalities of Russian folk songs. The big choral numbers are massive crowd scenes with colorful harmonies using unconventional combinations of chords, some of which pivot around a common tone.

Mussorgsky depicted a side of the Russian character that was mystical, dark and melancholy. His colleague Alexander Borodin focused more on the cheerful and hearty side of the equation. Borodin was the illegitimate son of a Caucasian prince and spent years studying the music and history of Central Asia. His opera *Prince Igor* (1890) is noted for its use of Russian orientalism and repeated rhythmic patterns, chromaticism and flowing, sinuous melodies. Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov focused more on the fantasy of fairy-tale opera and legend. He made great use of the melodies and unusual modalities of Russian folk music, probably inspired by his extensive personal collection. He considered opera to be more a musical work than a dramatic or literary one. His

melodies were elegant and he favored the technique of recurring motifs. Rimsky-Korsakov was masterful in his use of orchestral effects and color, an area in which he is considered among the greatest of composers. The most famous of his fifteen operas is *Sadko*, written in 1898. His last opera, *The Golden Cockerel*, was completed in 1907 but not performed until 1909 after his death.

The Russian Revolution in 1917 created a division of Russian opera composers into those who fled to the West and those who remained, or grew up, in the controlling atmosphere of the Soviet Union. One of the most famous composers who left Russia in 1914 was Igor Stravinsky who is also considered by many to be the most important composer of the twentieth century. He enjoyed a vigorous life of composition that included many operas, including *The Nightingale* in 1914, *Oedipus Rex* in 1927, and *The Rake's Progress* in 1951. One composer who returned to the Soviet Union in 1936 was Sergei Prokofiev whose most famous opera was *The Love of Three Oranges* (1921). He ran afoul of the authorities on many occasions and life for him and his family was difficult during the Stalinist purges after the Second World War. Born in 1906, Dmitri Shostakovich grew up in the Soviet system. His best-known work was the hugely successful *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, written in 1934. Both men composed in a difficult environment subject to ideological decrees by the state. Soviet composers and other artists had to conform to party directives or face persecution. Shostakovich faced severe criticism in 1936 and both he and Prokofiev faced serious denunciation in 1948. Prokofiev died in 1953. Shostakovich was not considered "rehabilitated" for about ten years. An additional problem for composers was the control of innovation and creativity within the state bureaucracy of the Union of Composers. Hundreds of operas were written but no work could be published or performed without official sanction. In 1979 seven composers were denounced at the Sixth Congress of the Composer's Union. Four of them were opera composers. In response a new "genre" was privately created, the "underground" opera. There is great hope that the grim situation of the past, tempered by the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the later part of the twentieth century, will allow a revitalized and flourishing operatic tradition to reemerge in the Russia of the twenty-first century.

The Life of Tchaikovsky

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was not the child prodigy that epitomizes the musical background of many great composers. His musical prowess did not emerge until he was an adult. Tchaikovsky was clearly a gifted child who could speak French and German by the age of six and who wrote poetry in French at age seven. At this young age he also took piano lessons and his family discovered he had a fine ear for music. His musical sensitivity was so great, however, that he wanted the sounds of the music taken away because they resounded in his mind for so long afterwards. His delicate nature was such that his governess referred to him as “the porcelain child.” Tchaikovsky was very close to his mother and siblings, and was devastated when his mother died when he was fourteen years old.

Born in Kamsko-Votinsk on May 7, 1840, to a prosperous middle-class family, Tchaikovsky was educated in St. Petersburg after his family moved there in 1850. In school he did not study music, but law. He was employed by the Ministry of Justice in 1859 but at the age of twenty-one he decided to study music seriously. Tchaikovsky had a private teacher until the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music opened in 1862. The Director of the Conservatory, Anton Rubinstein, recognized Tchaikovsky’s talent and became his mentor. In 1866, Anton recommended him to his brother, Nicholas Rubinstein, who needed a harmony instructor at the Moscow Conservatory. Tchaikovsky took the job and lived with Nicholas in Moscow for six years. He led a quiet life teaching and composing. Within three years of his arrival he had written his *First Symphony*, the opera, *The Voyevode*, and other pieces for orchestra.

As Tchaikovsky’s reputation grew, he met with a group of composers who were dedicated to the development of Russian national music. This group was called The Five (or The Mighty Five, the Russian Five, or The Mighty Handful). The individual composers were Mily Balakirov, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Borodine and Nickolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Tchaikovsky played his symphony for them on the piano and they found elements of it to their liking. However, they also found his Conservatory education too “European” and his musical style too international for their whole-hearted endorsement of his compositions. Tchaikovsky privately referred to the group as “The Jacobin Club.” The member of the group with whom he had the most contact was Balakirov.

The next few years were very productive. Tchaikovsky composed the overture *Romeo and Juliet*, the *Second Symphony*, called the *Little Russian*, the symphonic poem, *Fatum*, three operas, the *Third Symphony*, called the *Polish*, and the *Piano Concerto in B-Flat Minor*. He also had a romance with Belgian soprano, Désirée Artôt and wished to marry her, but the proposal did not result in marriage. Ultimately there were two other women in Tchaikovsky’s life who had a serious impact on his life and well-being.

In 1877, while Tchaikovsky was writing his opera EUGENE ONEGIN, he received a letter from a conservatory student who had attended one of his lectures. She expressed great love for him in a way that paralleled the story of ONEGIN’s heroine, Tatiana, in the love letter written to Onegin in the first act of the opera. This occurrence set off a series of events that were both bizarre and pitiable. The young woman, who was probably mentally unbalanced, was forceful in her declarations and Tchaikovsky was sensitive to the similarity of the situation with the characters in his opera. Very much in sympathy

with the character of Tatiana who writes a passionate love letter to Onegin and not wanting to replicate the cold response of Onegin, Tchaikovsky agreed to marry the young letter-writer, Antonina Milyukova. This decision rapidly proved disastrous. The homosexual Tchaikovsky was looking for a platonic relationship with a wife who would provide a stable and nurturing home life. Antonina was not only considered unstable but was a nymphomaniac. Within a short time Tchaikovsky attempted suicide by jumping into the icy cold Moscow River and ultimately ran from his new bride with the help of his brother, Modest. After their arrival in St. Petersburg, the thirty-seven-year-old Tchaikovsky had a nervous breakdown.

The other woman who came into Tchaikovsky's life in 1877 was Nadezhda von Meck, a wealthy widow committed to the arts who supported Tchaikovsky financially. In addition to a generous yearly stipend, the two engaged in a wide-ranging personal correspondence that lasted almost fifteen years. Her one requirement was that they never meet. As his benefactress, Madame von Meck provided not only money, but a reservoir of emotional support sorely needed by the neurotic, easily-depressed Tchaikovsky who was experiencing one of the darkest periods of his life. Just before and after this fateful year he composed some of his best known works including the ballet *Swan Lake*, the orchestral pieces *Marche Slav*, *Francesca da Rimini* and *Capriccio Italien*, the *Symphony No. 4 in F Minor*, the opera *EUGENE ONEGIN* and the *1812 Overture*.

The latter period of Tchaikovsky's life was filled with travel, conducting and more composition. His later works include the ballets *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*, *Symphony No. 5*, the opera *The Queen of Spades*, and *Symphony No. 6 in B Minor*, called the *Pathetique*. The one episode in this period most upsetting to Tchaikovsky was the ending of his relationship with Madame von Meck. She abruptly ended his stipend and refused to answer any of his letters in 1890. Tchaikovsky felt betrayed and bitter for the rest of his life. After a trip to America to celebrate the dedication of the Music Hall that would later be named after Andrew Carnegie, Tchaikovsky began work on what would be his final musical composition. Nine days after the premiere of his *Sixth Symphony*, Tchaikovsky died of cholera on November 6, 1893. His funeral was attended by 8,000 people and he was buried in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St. Petersburg.

Discussion Questions

1. Tchaikovsky made it clear that he did not like the character of Eugene Onegin, yet he chose this subject for one of his operas. What was his motivation to write an opera about a character he disliked?
2. Some have theorized that Onegin symbolized the landed aristocracy of Russia. What factors support this belief?
3. In Tchaikovsky's time, the verse written by Pushkin in Tatiana's letter scene would have been memorized by most educated Russians. Discuss the nature of Tatiana's words and why they had such impact.
4. The figure of Tatiana has been characterized as representing the ideal of Russian womanhood. What personal characteristics does this embody?
5. Many people feel that this opera could have been titled with another character's name. Which other character could this opera be named after? Why?
6. The Letter Scene was the first music of the opera written by Tchaikovsky. How did this affect the music of the rest of the opera?
7. How does Tchaikovsky use music to contrast the social worlds of St. Petersburg and the Larin's country house?
(The dances – stately polonaise verses the country stomp and waltz)
8. The word *ennui* is used to describe Onegin's demeanor, and, by extension, his social class. Discuss the word *ennui* with its meaning and synonyms and apply it to the opera.
9. Tatiana and Olga have very different personalities. How does Tchaikovsky contrast the two sisters musically?
10. What social convention requires Onegin and Lensky to continue with an act they don't truly want to perform? (The convention of the duel and the requirements of their honor) What does this say about the society they are apart of?
11. There is much irony in the story of EUGENE ONEGIN. Discuss some examples of irony found in the opera.
(i.e. the changes in the emotional demeanor of the characters Onegin and Tatiana; the letters written by each one; the outcomes of the letter writing)
12. Tchaikovsky used the musical motif of a descending scale to symbolize fate. It is heard prominently in the Introduction to the opera. How many other instances can you identify of Tchaikovsky's use of the descending scale motif?

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country's folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.



The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<i>Soprano</i>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<i>Tenor</i>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<i>Baritone</i>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	Verdi Baritone Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<i>Bass</i>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	Buffo Bass Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	Basso Cantate Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

