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**Renowned Russian Tenor Oleg Balashov joins the cast of
Vancouver Opera's *Eugene Onegin***

Vancouver, BC ~ Russian tenor Oleg Balashov, whose credits include leading roles with the legendary Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, will sing the role of the passionate poet Lensky in Vancouver Opera's upcoming production of *Eugene Onegin*, November 22-29, 2008 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Balashov has been a stage soloist with the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg since 1999 and has performed in the world's leading theatres including the Metropolitan Opera and La Scala. With the Mariinsky, Balashov has toured to Germany, China, Japan, and the United States. In 2007, Balashov sang the leading role of Anatole Kuragin in *War and Peace* at The Metropolitan Opera, conducted by Valery Gergiev – a role he repeated recently at Canadian Opera Company. He appears on a live recording of the work, from the Spoleto Festival. Mr. Balashov replaces tenor John Tessier, who has withdrawn from the production for personal reasons.

In announcing Mr. Balashov's engagement, Vancouver Opera's General Director, James W. Wright, said, "Mr. Balashov will be a wonderful addition to a very strong cast of singers. I heard him sing last spring in St. Petersburg and I was impressed by the beauty and emotional force of his voice. Since then, other members of our staff have heard him in performance and were equally impressed. We are pleased to welcome Oleg Balashov to Vancouver Opera for his company début."

Eugene Onegin (pronounced 'oh-NYAY-ghin') tells the achingly beautiful story of a charismatic man in 19th century Russia whose boredom with his rich existence causes him to reject the love of a heartfelt young woman and regret it for the rest of his life. Featuring a stellar cast of Canadian and international singers, led by baritone **Brett Polegato** in the title role and soprano **Rhoslyn Jones** as Tatyana, this opera has not been seen in Vancouver since 1985. VO Music Director **Jonathan Darlington** will conduct the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and the Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Chorus Director).

Opening night is Saturday, November 22, 2008 with subsequent performances **Tuesday, November 25, Thursday, November 27, and Saturday November 29, 2008.** All performances take place at the **Queen Elizabeth Theatre**, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver B.C. and begin at **7:30 p.m.** Tickets starting at \$29 are available exclusively at the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by telephone (**604-683-0222**). See complete ticket information below.

Eugene Onegin is presented in Russian with English translations projected above the stage. The new production highlights the story's two contrasting worlds in Czarist Russia: the warm and passionate rural world of farms, harvests and dusty country dances; and the cool, glittering, affluent city life of St. Petersburg. The opera will be directed by esteemed New York stage and opera director **Pamela Berlin** (Broadway, Off Broadway), who conceived the production with set designer **Neil Patel**.

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Vancouver Opera's *Eugene Onegin* / page 2

Together with lighting designer **Rui Rita**, they have created a visually magnificent physical production of this profoundly emotional Russian drama that will touch the hearts of everyone who has ever loved.

THE STORY, IN BRIEF

In early 19th century Russia, Tatyana is a shy young country woman who immerses herself in romantic novels. Her sister Olga, by contrast, is bold and unafraid; she is in love with Lensky, a poet. Tatyana soars when the man of her fiction-inspired dreams appears in the person of Lensky's friend Eugene Onegin, an elegant but bored and cynical St. Petersburg dandy. In the opera's famous soliloquy, Tatyana pours her heart out to Onegin in a letter, but later, in person, Onegin coolly rejects her. Onegin's callousness twists on him, though, eventually leaving him filled with regret and despair. His decline into bitterness begins when he flirts with Olga and is drawn into a fatal duel with Lensky. Years later, she and Onegin meet again, in the palace of Onegin's cousin, Prince Gremin, and this time it is she who rejects him. She has married Gremin and moved on in life, and although she wavers, Onegin's pleading is powerless in the face of her sense of honour.

SPECIAL COMMUNITY SERIES

Opera Speaks @ VPL – part of the Vancouver Opera's award-winning series of public forums

An Evening in Czarist Russia

Music, drama, poetry, history and politics, featuring VO Music Director Jonathan Darlington, stage director Pamela Berlin, UBC Russian literature expert Peter Petro, and political scientist Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom.

Tuesday, November 4, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Alice MacKay Room, Vancouver Public Library

Admission is free.

FULL TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets starting at \$29 (plus handling fees) are available from the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, 835 Cambie Street (9-5 pm, Monday–Friday), online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. **GROUPS:** For special pricing for groups of ten or more, call 604-683-0222.

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THIS PRODUCTION IS GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY MISSION HILL FAMILY ESTATE WINERY.

With advance notice, cameras are invited to the November 20, 7:00 p.m. dress rehearsal. Production video and photography will be available on November 21.