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Vancouver Opera presents a new production of  
Tchaikovsky's magnificent  
*Eugene Onegin*

Vancouver, BC ~ Soul-searing romance, a deadly duel, glittering ballroom opulence and gorgeous music married to beautiful poetry kick off Vancouver Opera's 2008-2009 season, in a dazzling new production of Tchaikovsky's magnificent *Eugene Onegin*. Featuring a stellar cast of Canadian and international singers, led by baritone **Brett Polegato** in the title role, soprano **Rhoslyn Jones** as Tatyana, and tenor **John Tessier** as Lensky, this opera has not been seen in Vancouver since 1985. This will be only the second presentation in VO's 49-year history.

*Eugene Onegin* (pronounced 'oh-NYAY-ghin') tells the achingly beautiful story of a charismatic man in 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

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](http://www.vancouveropera.ca) or by telephone (604-683-0222). See complete ticket information below.

VO Music Director **Jonathan Darlington** will conduct the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and the Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Chorus Director).

*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**. 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.

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## PRINCIPAL SINGERS

Canadian baritone **Brett Polegato** (Onegin) has appeared in 19 countries on distinguished stages including those of Opéra National de Paris, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Carnegie Hall, Seattle Opera, Canadian Opera Company and La Scala. He returns to VO for the first time since his compelling 2006 performances as Don Giovanni.

Canadian soprano **Rhoslyn Jones** (Tatyana) is one of North America's rising singers. She has won the Mario Lanza Competition, the CBC Début Competition and was a semi-finalist at The Metropolitan Opera auditions. An alumna of the prestigious Merola Program at San Francisco Opera, she has performed with that company and with Arizona Opera and Chicago Opera Theater. A participant in VO's inaugural Young Artist Coaching Intensive, in 2003, this is Ms. Jones' first leading role with VO. Later this season, she makes her début with Pittsburgh Opera as Musetta in *La Bohème*.

Canadian tenor **John Tessier** (Lensky) has delighted Vancouver audiences in many memorable appearances, most recently in last season's *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. His enviable international career includes débuts this season with English National Opera (Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*) and Royal Opera, Covent Garden (as the Steersman in *The Flying Dutchman*).

Canadian mezzo-soprano **Allyson McHardy** (Olga, Tatyana's sister) is another alumna of the Merola Program at San Francisco Opera, where she debuted as Olga in *Eugene Onegin* in 2004. She has appeared with the Canadian Opera Company, New York City Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, San Francisco Opera, and Boston Symphony.

**Peter Volpe** (Prince Gremin, Tatyana's eventual husband) possesses a vast and ever-expanding repertoire of over 80 roles in six languages. He has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Spoleto Festival U.S.A., Hawaii Opera and European opera companies of Stuttgart, Strasbourg, Dusseldorf, Colmar and Prague. He returns to VO for the first time since his devilish appearances as Méphistophélès in 2006's *Faust*.

**Norine Burgess** (Madame Larina, Tatyana's mother) is a seasoned Canadian mezzo-soprano who has graced the stages of major international opera houses and leading orchestras. She has appeared with the Vienna Volksoper, Opera Ontario, Vancouver Opera (most recently as Siébel, in *Faust*), Salzburg Festival, Montreal Symphony Orchestra, and the Canadian Opera Company.

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**Marcia Swanston** (Flippyevna, Tatyana's nurse) has sung most of the major mezzo-soprano roles with leading opera companies across Canada and the United States. Her most recent VO appearance was as Mamma Lucia in last season's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Ms. Swanston teaches voice at Dalhousie University.

Also in the cast are tenor **James McLennan** as Monsieur Triquet, and bass **Chad Louwerse** as Zaretski and Captain Petrovich.

### THE STORY, IN BRIEF

In early 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

### BACKGROUND

*Eugene Onegin* is a classic of Russian literature, written in verse by Aleksandr Pushkin. Published in serial form between 1825 and 1832, the first complete edition was published in 1833. Remarkably, the poem mirrored Tchaikovsky's life when, in 1877, he received an impassioned letter from a former student. Shortly thereafter, the opera singer Lavrovskaya recommended creating an opera based on the plot of *Eugene Onegin* to Tchaikovsky who grew excited by the idea and created the scenarios in one night before beginning the composition of the music. Later, determined not to repeat Onegin's mistake, he met the student and proposed marriage. It was a disastrous union and drove Tchaikovsky to attempt suicide. Nevertheless, he completed the opera. Using the original verses from Pushkin's novel, Tchaikovsky chose scenes that involved the emotional world and fortunes of his heroes, calling the opera "lyrical scenes." Created as an episodic work with no continuous story, Tchaikovsky focused on the highlights of Onegin's life. The opera was completed in January 1878 and was performed for the first time in Moscow in March, 1879 by students of the Moscow Conservatoire. Opening to mixed reviews, *Eugene Onegin* began to gain popularity after its début at the Imperial Opera, in St. Petersburg. International success followed.

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**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, and UBC Russian literature expert Peter Petro.

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](http://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.