

EUGENE ONEGIN

By Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky

Virginia Opera Company

Feb. 8-Feb.17

For tickets call: (757)623 1223; (757)877-2550

Hello. I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

Stage Director Julia Pevzner, Set Designer Alexander Lisiyansky and a stellar cast have stream lined this romantic opera into a tragic valentine that moves with the speed of Cupid's arrow. This accomplishment is remarkable. The plot is very simple with little physical action. A young girl, Tatiana falls in love with the diffident Eugene Onegin who rejects her. Years later they meet again but she is by then happily married and rejects him. The same man kills his best friend in a duel for no reason except to save face. The action of the piece is psychological, not physical.

Because of the brilliant creative minds of Julia Pevzner and Alexander Lisiyansky one is always involved in the story with emotional force and interest. How do they do it? First they place the opera in two acts. They eliminate happy peasants bringing in the sheaves in Act I (they pass by off stage) and they use mirrors. No smoke, just mirrors. Behind a lot of fanciful birch trees designer Lisiyansky has placed a huge mirror.

This device is sheer genius. It is like a third chorus. The mirror casts images of the story from various points of view or it can expand or confine the action. The characters see themselves as others. see them. At other times the images reflect the inner turmoil and shattered lives of the action. The long interludes where seemingly little happens are dealt with as a result in a highly theatrical manner.

Tatiana, sung by Veronica Mitina, partnered with her real life love, Patrick Miller as the poet Lensky are two beautiful people with soaring vocal abilities who sing to the heart and soul. Jason Detwiler is an imposing Onegin and captures the intriguing mystery of this world weary aristocrat. Olga is sung by the pert and charming Osaka Sitnitska. Barbara Dever and Susan Shafer as nanny and mother respectively are warm and winning. Omar Salam as the old French tutor Triquet is a Moliere prototype and highly amusing. Prince Gremin is regal presence and vocally impressive.

Choreographer Jessica Page has staged a lively and festive dance for Tatiana's name day celebration. It's noteworthy because the performers look like real people dancing and having fun.

There is a giant wind mill that I suppose is typical of 1820's Russia. It's giant blades are like the hands of fate that keep turning through time observing the follies of the people who live around it. Like the noble Onegin, we often don't realize life's rich offerings until it's too late. Be sure not to let this superb production pass you by.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.