



Allison Pohl as Tatyana and Mysha Myznikov as Onegin in the Tacoma Opera production of “Eugene Onegin” by Tchaikovsky. PETER SERKO Courtesy

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Review: Tacoma Opera’s ‘Eugene Onegin’ throbs with operatic passion

By Rosemary Ponnekanti

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Three hours of tragic Russian opera is not everyone’s cup of tea, but for the audience in Theatre on the Square on Saturday night, Tacoma Opera’s “Eugene Onegin” was deeply moving. Heartfelt acting, solid singing and luscious jewel-tone visuals kept this Tchaikovsky favorite throbbing with Russian passion through its entire length, inspiring whistles and appreciative calls during the show and intense discussions in Russian and English afterward. Only the orchestra was a disappointment.

Spearheading the drama — and stealing the scene from Onegin himself — was Allison Pohl. As Tatyana, the country girl who falls in love with Onegin and deals with the soul-crushing fallout, Pohl poured heart, soul and a silvery butterfly soprano into the role, morphing both physically

and vocally from naïve teen to sorrowful adult. Using the entire stage to draw us in, her “letter scene” was a brilliant exploration of character, from pensive penning at the desk to flouncing on the bed to kneeling prayerfully in a pool of light.

The rest of the cast shone almost as brightly. As the callous-then-regretful Onegin, Misha Myznikov brought an expressive, though slightly raw, baritone and a stiff aloofness that turned to almost-scary physical power in the final scene. Timothy Janecke (Lensky) warmed up his tenor into a heartfelt final aria on lost innocence. Faina Morozov, with a fresh-voiced mezzo, was perfect as the fun-yet-flirty sister Olga. Michael Drumheller sang Tatyana’s Prince Gremin with a soulful gravity. Stephen Rumph got the opera comedy award for his pricelessly pretentious French fop, Monsieur Triquet, complete with faux-ballet steps.

What helps this opera through three hours are the onstage relationships, and those were a delight to see and hear: Larina (a rich-toned Christina Kowalski-Holien) and the nanny (Regina Thomas) confiding and reminiscing; Olga and Tatyana supporting and teasing as sisters; Onegin and Lensky diving from friendship to distrust and death.

Throughout, Mark Thomason’s set and lighting added a jewel-like backdrop: pale European birch trunks offset by pink dawn or blue night, floral bedrooms, a gilt-edged ballroom wall with keyhole windows. Frances Rankos’ costumes contrasted the pastel opulence of 1800s society Russia with bright, folksy peasants.

The only disappointment — and it was a big one — was with the orchestra strings. Violins, violas and cellos repeatedly hit some disastrous intonation spots to create an experience that was, in Tatyana’s own words, “humiliating and painful.” The woodwinds and bass gave a solid, musical presence, but it wasn’t enough in this exposed Tchaikovsky score. Conductor Enrique Carreon-Robledo only added to the problem, failing to address ensemble messiness within the orchestra and huge timing discrepancies with the chorus that threatened to fall apart completely.

Hopefully these issues will be addressed before next weekend’s shows. Because this “Onegin” — Tacoma Opera’s first ever — is a glorious vocal experience, highlighted by dramatic intensity and lovely visuals in the kind of theater that Tchaikovsky clearly intended it for.

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