

ARTS

Storks, Sno-Cones and sun lovers

by Suzanne Kennedy

Eugene Onegin

by Pyotr Tchaikovsky
based on a poem by A. Pushkin
performed at The O'Keefe Centre

If your vision of opera is a screaming soprano with lip palsy stuffed into a tight, satin-ball gown, then *Eugene Onegin* is not the opera for you.

Written by Tchaikovsky, and based on a Pushkin poem of the same name, this low-key opera tells the tragic story of a young girl, Tatiana, who falls in love with an arrogant, aristocrat, Eugene Onegin.

The Canadian Opera Company performed this deeply stirring work in Russian, with English subtitles. The cast was good, but unfortunately, their lack of enthusiasm shone through. Russian baritone, Sergei Leiferkus,

sang the lead with wonderful clarity, but, unfortunately, he lacked the stage presence needed for such an arrogant, aristocratic character. In any ballroom or crowd scene, he completely became lost among the other members of the cast. There was not enough spark in his performance to hold my attention.

Carol Varness' Tatiana was another story. Against the rustic sets of Act I and II, she shone like a candle, her presence completely mesmerizing the entire audience. In the letter writing scene, her voice permeated the theatre with a magic that suspended the moment in time, and sent shivers up my back.

Tenor John Graham-Hall gave an equally riveting performance



Tenor John Graham-Hall as Lenski and baritone Sergei Leiferkus as Eugene Onegin in Tchaikovsky's *EUGENE ONEGIN*

as the romantic and jealous Lenski. He performed an aria that transcended the subtitles, rendering them unnecessary.

Unfortunately, the costumes of Michael Stennets, and the choreography of Terry Gilbert verged on the comic. I initially looked forward to settings replete with fancy gowns and flowing dance numbers.

Instead, I got Tatiana looking like a Russian Sno-Cone, who had forgotten to put her arms in the sleeves of her costume. Equally as ridiculous were a bunch of women wearing hats that made them look like a sun-worshipping cult, and a group of men who performed a stork mating dance.

If you are new to opera, I would

recommend this as a starting point, regardless of the storks, because the music is simple yet stirring, while the vocals are subtly compelling.

Eugene Onegin is playing at the O'Keefe Centre October 4, 7, 10 and 12. Tickets range from \$18.50 to \$82.00, and are available at TicketMaster or the O'Keefe.



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