

PACIFIC *Opera* VICTORIA

# Eugene Onegin

Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
Libretto by the composer and K.S. Shilovsky  
based on the poem by Alexander Pushkin



## STUDY GUIDE

presented by



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## ***Welcome to Pacific Opera!***

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This Study Guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that you will be able to add this to your existing curriculum in order to expand your students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts. Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is insufficient time to discuss in class. Make the opera experience more meaningful and enjoyable by sharing with them knowledge and background on opera and *EUGENE ONEGIN* before they attend.

*Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their vocal chords and avoid unnecessary strain.*



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# **Opera at a Glance: Introduction**

## **What is opera?**

An **opera** is a dramatic form which consists of many dimensions that combine to make it a unique whole: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance. The melding of these elements can make you laugh or cry and can transport you to a magical land of music and song.

Operas are divided into scenes and **acts** that contain different types of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An **aria** is a vocal solo that focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A **recitative** is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and **ensembles**. **Composers** write the **score** or the music for the opera. The story of the opera is written as a **libretto**, a text that is easily set to music.

### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

Today many opera companies in North America project supertitles on screens above or beside the stage. They are English translations of the opera designed specifically for the convenience of patrons unfamiliar with the language in which the opera was composed.

## **How did opera get started?**

Opera originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of a Camerata (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a **chorus** to comment on the action.

The first major composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera *Dafne* premiered in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera.

## **Opera or Musical Theatre?**

What's the difference between an opera and a musical like *Les Miserables*? There are many! The musical style is different in each; opera is usually **classical** and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes jazz. Singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices, whereas the voices of opera singers are so strong that no amplification is needed – even in a large venue. Operas are almost completely sung, while the use of spoken words is more common to musicals. It is interesting to note that there are some operas with spoken words; these are called **singspiels** (German) and **opera-comique** (French). Examples are Mozart's THE MAGIC FLUTE and Bizet's CARMEN, respectively.

All terms in **bold** are defined in the Glossary on page 17

## ***Audience Etiquette***

The following list of **Dos** and **Do Nots** will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- **Do** dress in whatever you are comfortable in. However, going to the opera can be an opportunity to get dressed in formal attire.
- **Do** be on time. Latecomers disturb the rest of the audience and the singers. They will only be seated at suitable breaks – often not until **intermission**.
- **Do** find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher. It is also customary to remove your hat in respect to the artists and to the person sitting behind you.
- **Do** turn off cell phones, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- **Do Not** take photos. The flash can be very disturbing to the artists.
- **Do Not** chew gum, eat, drink, or talk. Let the action on stage surround you. As an audience member, you are a very important part of the process taking place. Without you there is no show.
- **Do** get settled and comfortable prior to the performance beginning. Check your program before the performance; rustling through the program during the show can disrupt everyone.
- **Do** CLAP as the lights are dimmed and the **conductor** appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the **conductor** then turns to the **orchestra** and takes up his or her **baton** to signal the beginning of the opera.
- **Do** listen to the **prelude** or **overture** before the curtain rises. This is part of the performance and an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- **Do** sit still; whisper only when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- **Do** applaud (or shout **Bravo!**) at the end of an **aria** or **chorus** piece to signify your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- **Do** laugh when something is funny.
- **Do** read the English **surtitles** projected above the stage. Most operas are not sung in English (EUGENE ONEGIN is sung in Russian). Use the surtitles to understand the story.
- **Do** listen for subtleties in the music. The **tempo**, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the “feeling” or “sense” of the action or character. Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.

**Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!!!!**

PACIFIC *Opera* VICTORIA

presents

# Eugene Onegin

October 4, 2005, 7:30 pm

Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC

Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Libretto by the composer and K.S. Shilovsky

based on the poem by Alexander Pushkin

First performance March 29, 1879, Moscow

Approximately 2 hours 40 minutes, including one intermission

Sung in **Russian** with English surtitles

## CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

LARINA, a widow	REBECCA HASS
TATIANA, Larina's daughter	FRÉDÉRIQUE VÉZINA
OLGA, Larina's daughter	VILMA INDRA VITOLS
FILIPYEVNA, a servant	ERIN CUNES
LENSKI, a poet, Olga's fiancé	KURT LEHMANN
EUGENE ONEGIN, Lenski's friend	JASON HOWARD
A CAPTAIN	GABRIEL CHENIER-DEMERS
TRIQUET, a French tutor	ERIC OLSEN
ZARETSKY, Lenski's second	STEVEN DEVRIES
GUILLOT, Onegin's valet	MARK MARQUETTE
PRINCE GREMIN, Tatiana's husband	GARY RELYEA
Conductor	TIMOTHY VERNON
Director	GLYNIS LEYSHON
Set Designer	LESLIE FRANKISH
Lighting Designer	GERALD KING
Choreographer	JACQUES LEMAY
Resident Stage Manager	JACKIE ADAMTHWAITE
Assistant Stage Managers	NICOLE HANNAH
	STEVE BARKER
Chorus Master and Répétiteur	ROBERT HOLLISTON
Language Coach	ANNA CAL

With the Victoria Symphony and the Pacific Opera Chorus

## ***Who's Who in EUGENE ONEGIN***

### **LARINA, a widow. Mezzo Soprano.**

Tatiana and Olga's mother. Like Tatiana, she used to lose herself in girlish romantic daydreams, but eventually became a dutiful and contented wife and mother.

### **TATIANA, Larina's daughter. Soprano.**

A quiet, moody teenager who enjoys daydreaming and reading romantic novels.

### **OLGA, Larina's daughter. Contralto.**

Tatiana's sister and Lenski's girlfriend. A simple, light-hearted girl who likes parties and fun. She flirts with Onegin at Tatiana's party.

### **FILIPYEVNA. Mezzo Soprano.**

A servant who has been with the family since Madame Larina was young.

### **LENSKI, a poet, Olga's fiancé. Tenor.**

A poet who has loved Olga since childhood. He is also Onegin's best friend.

### **EUGENE ONEGIN, Lenski's friend. Baritone.**

A handsome, spoiled, aristocratic young man who has just inherited his uncle's land near Madame Larina's estate.

### **A CAPTAIN, Bass.**

One of the people attending the party in honour of Tatiana's name day.

### **TRIQUET. Tenor.**

An elderly French tutor. During the party for Tatiana's name day, he sings a song that he has written in her honor to pay tribute to her charm and beauty.

### **ZARETSKY. Bass.**

Lenski's second for the duel with Onegin, Zaretsky is very concerned that the proper rules of dueling be followed.

### **GUILLOT (silent role).**

Onegin's valet, Guillot is also Onegin's second in the duel with Lenski.

### **PRINCE GREMIN. Bass Baritone.**

Tatiana's husband, an older man who is deeply in love with his young wife.

## ***What's Going On? (Synopsis)***

EUGENE ONEGIN is set in the Russian countryside and St. Petersburg during the 1820s.

### **Act I, Scene 1**

In her courtyard Madame Larina reminisces with her servant Filipyevna while Larina's daughters Tatiana and Olga sing a love song. The older women recall the romantic novels Larina used to read before her arranged marriage. Peasants come in from the fields, celebrating the harvest with songs and dances. Olga is eager to join in, but Tatiana prefers to daydream and bury herself in a novel.

The poet Vladimir Lenski, Olga's fiancé, arrives with a new neighbour, Eugene Onegin. Larina bustles off to the house, leaving Olga and Tatiana to entertain the men. Onegin tells Lenski that he would have expected a poet to prefer the melancholy Tatiana to Olga, whose face is "as round and rosy as that stupid moon on that dull horizon!" Lenski is overjoyed to see Olga (it's been an entire day since they saw each other) and tells her he adores her. Tatiana is immediately smitten with Onegin. As they stroll through the birch trees, Onegin asks Tatiana if she is tired of her dull country life. As evening falls, the couples go in for dinner.

### **Act I, Scene 2**

Unable to sleep, Tatiana asks Filipyevna if she was ever in love. Filipyevna tells of her arranged marriage, but sees that Tatiana isn't listening. Tatiana confesses that she is in love and asks to be left alone. Tatiana starts writing a letter, tears it up, starts again, and sits up all night, pouring out her feelings in an ardent letter to Onegin.

When day breaks, Tatiana begs Filipyevna to have her grandson deliver the letter to their neighbour. Filipyevna doesn't understand which neighbour she means until Tatiana brings herself to say "Onegin."

### **Act I, Scene 3**

In the garden a group of servant girls sing about flirting. When they leave, Tatiana hurries in, bemoaning her recklessness in writing the letter. Onegin arrives and tells Tatiana that although her candour has touched him, he is not the marrying type. He suggests that she learn to control her feelings as another man might be less understanding. Tatiana is heartbroken and humiliated.

### **Intermission**

### **Act II, Scene 1**

Some months later, at a party in honour of Tatiana's name day, the guests dance and gossip. Bored and irritated, Onegin resolves to spite Lenski for dragging him to the party. He dances and flirts ostentatiously with Olga. When Lenski reproaches her, Olga insists he has nothing to be jealous about and continues to dance with Onegin. After Monsieur Triquet, a French tutor, sings a song in honor of Tatiana, Lenski confronts Onegin and challenges him to a duel. Onegin realizes he has gone too far, but the hot-headed Lenski cannot be calmed down.

### **Act II, Scene 2**

The next morning Lenski and his second, Zaretsky, wait for Onegin on the banks of a stream. Lenski reflects on death and wonders if his beloved Olga will mourn him. Onegin arrives with his second, his valet, Guillot. The former friends, now enemies, stand with their backs to one another. Although each admits privately that he would rather laugh with his friend than destroy him, pride prevails. The duel is fought and Lenski is shot dead.

### **Act III, Scene 1**

Several years later, in a palace in St. Petersburg, Onegin is a guest at a magnificent ball. He has just returned from self-imposed exile, having traveled widely, seeking in vain to alleviate his boredom and give his life meaning. When Prince Gremin and his wife enter, Onegin recognizes the elegant princess as Tatiana. Gremin tells Onegin of the joy and love Tatiana has brought into his life and presents Onegin to her. After a brief, polite conversation, Tatiana excuses herself. Onegin realizes he is in love.

### **Act III, Scene 2**

On the terrace of the palace, Tatiana awaits Onegin. Onegin arrives and throws himself at her feet. Tatiana reminds him of his past coldness and asks if his interest in her now is due to her wealth and position. He begs forgiveness, declares his love, and entreats her to come away with him. Although she admits she still loves him, Tatiana is determined to keep her marriage vows. She finds the strength to bid him goodbye and rushes inside, leaving behind the distraught Onegin.

## ***About the Composer – Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky***

Described by conductor Michael Tilson Thomas as *one of the great melody writers of all time*, Tchaikovsky is renowned for his tuneful music. Some of the most famous pieces he wrote include ballets such as THE NUTCRACKER (traditionally performed at Christmas), SWAN LAKE, and SLEEPING BEAUTY.

He also wrote many orchestral works, the best known of which is the 1812 OVERTURE. This work commemorated the victory of Russia in the Napoleonic Wars in 1812 and uses cannon blasts as part of the instrumentation. As it's usually difficult to shoot off a live cannon blast during a concert performance, many performances use recordings or a bass drum for the sound of the cannons. However, Victoria's annual Symphony Splash, held every August, traditionally closes with a performance of this great showpiece, complete with bells, cannons, and fireworks.

Tchaikovsky wrote ten operas, of which EUGENE ONEGIN is by far the best known. In the west, Tchaikovsky's operas are not as famous as his ballets and orchestral works, in part because of the language barrier. While western audiences are familiar with operas in Italian, French, and German, they are less comfortable with works in the Russian language. In addition, until the recent dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian culture was little appreciated in the west.

The son of a mine inspector, Tchaikovsky was born in 1840 in Votkinsk in Russia. He went to law school in St. Petersburg and toured Europe as a translator before deciding in his early twenties to turn to music. From 1862 to 1865 he studied music at the St Petersburg Conservatory with Anton

Rubenstein, a Russian pianist and composer. After he graduated, he went on to teach for twelve years at the newly formed Moscow Conservatory.

He was a very shy, emotional, and neurotic person. It is said that he was convinced that if he conducted an orchestra, his head would fall off. When he had to conduct, he held his chin with his left hand throughout the performance. Despite this unusual fear, he made his name as both a conductor and a composer.

In 1876, a wealthy widow named Nadejda von Meck heard Tchaikovsky's music and offered to sponsor him by sending him a regular allowance. However, she insisted that they never meet in person. For fourteen years, they exchanged letters, and Tchaikovsky had the freedom to resign from his teaching job and devote himself fully to composing. In 1890, Madame von Meck abruptly broke off the relationship; it is not known why. However, by that time, Tchaikovsky was well established.

In 1885, he had become director of the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society. He gained increasing fame and recognition in the following years as a composer, conductor, and great musical figure. These successes made Tchaikovsky famous throughout Europe and the world. In 1888, he made an international conducting tour, and in 1891 he conducted his own works at the opening ceremonies of Carnegie Hall in New York City, one of the most famous concert halls in the world. In 1893 he received an honorary doctorate of music from Cambridge University. That same year, he died; the cause of his death is uncertain. By some accounts he contracted cholera; other theories suggest he committed suicide.

One of the most popular of composers among concert audiences, Tchaikovsky successfully combined the Western classical music traditions of Beethoven and Schumann with his Russian heritage. He was the first Russian composer to have his music accepted as part of the standard concert repertoire in Western Europe, and he was the first Russian composer to tour the United States.

Tchaikovsky was a Romantic composer; his music is deeply personal, expressing strong emotions of joy, longing, grief or despair. It is full of lush orchestration and passionate, stirring melodies and is among the most beautiful music ever written.

## ***About EUGENE ONEGIN***

Tchaikovsky's opera EUGENE ONEGIN was based on a long poem or "verse novel" by the most revered of Russian writers, Alexander Pushkin. Written between 1823 and 1831 and published in 1833, Pushkin's masterpiece has remained one of the most popular stories in Russian literature.

The idea of writing an opera about Eugene Onegin was first suggested to Tchaikovsky in 1877 by Elizaveta Andreyevna Lavrovskaya, a friend and singer. At first Tchaikovsky rejected the idea, particularly as Pushkin was as revered in Russia as Shakespeare is in the English speaking world. Although he was at first reluctant to commit the sacrilege of messing with a classic like the Pushkin work, Tchaikovsky was soon enthralled. As he started working on the opera, he wrote, *I am in love with the heroine Tatiana, I am enchanted by the poetry of Pushkin and I am composing music to it because it is alluring me ....*

Tchaikovsky kept much of the story line from Pushkin's work, and his librettist kept many of Pushkin's verses. But the novel and opera do differ. Pushkin's work satirizes Russian upper class society and focuses on the bored, spoiled socialite Onegin. Tchaikovsky's approach is that of the Romantic. He cares more about the feelings of the characters. In particular he developed a deep affection for his heroine Tatiana, who plays a far more prominent role in the opera than in the original verse novel.

In 1877 as he was writing the opera, Tchaikovsky received love letters from a former student. Struck by the resemblance to the story of Onegin and Tatiana and determined not to be as callous as Onegin, Tchaikovsky plunged into a disastrous marriage that was rapidly followed by a nervous breakdown, a suicide attempt, and the couple's separation on doctor's orders.

Nevertheless Tchaikovsky completed the opera and affectionately entrusted its 1879 premiere to students of the Moscow Conservatory.

*Where the heart is not touched, there can't be any music,* Tchaikovsky once said. His music allows us to identify with the thoughts and feelings of several of the greatest literary characters of all time. It's clear that he cared deeply about this opera. He wrote of it: *If ever music has been composed with true passion, with love of the plot and the characters, then it is music to ONEGIN. I was melting and vibrating from inexpressible delight when composing it. And if even a tiny part of what I experienced when composing this opera echoes in the listener I would be gratified and I don't need anything else.*

## **Alexander Pushkin**

Alexander Pushkin is considered his country's greatest poet and the founder of modern Russian literature. He revolutionized Russian literature with narrative poems, love poems, political poems, short stories, novels, plays, histories, and fairy tales. Pushkin blended Old Slavonic with vernacular Russian into a rich, melodic language. He was the first to use everyday speech in his poetry.

His writing style has distinctive rhythmic patterns that are nearly impossible to translate, so non-Russian speakers have not always been able to appreciate the true power and beauty of his work.

Alexander Pushkin was born May 26, 1799 in Moscow. His nobleman father was active in politics, and Pushkin himself was outspoken in his political views, frequently getting into trouble with the authorities.

His first major work, RUSLAN AND LUDMILA (1820), was based on Russian folk-tales which his grandmother had told him in French. Russian composer Mikhail Glinka later adapted this work as an opera. Many of Pushkin's other works were made into operas, including BORIS GODUNOV by Modest Mussorgsky, THE QUEEN OF SPADES (PIQUE DAME) and MAZEPPA by Tchaikovsky, THE GOLDEN COCKEREL by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and, of course, Tchaikovsky's opera EUGENE ONEGIN. Pushkin's play MOZART AND SALIERI was the inspiration for Peter Shaffer's hit play AMADEUS and the academy-award-winning film adaptation of the same name.

Pushkin, the husband of a beautiful and flirtatious wife, died in 1837 as the result of a duel.

## ***Fun with Translations***

Natalia Dementieva, the Russian Minister of Culture, once said, *The perfection and beauty of the Russian language reflected in Pushkin's poetry are so high, that it is hard to achieve adequate translations into other languages; that is why Pushkin is little known abroad. It's unfair that many readers in other countries are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy Pushkin's poetry.*

Pushkin's verse poem EUGENE ONEGIN consists of some 400 14-line sonnet-like stanzas written in iambic tetrameter, with a rhyme scheme of ABAB; CCDD; EFFEGG. To translate this and keep the meaning, the rhythm, and the rhyme of the original is indeed very difficult. In 1964 the famous Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov wrote a literal translation that dropped all rhyme and meter in an attempt to capture the full meaning of the novel. Other translators have tried to keep at least some of the metre and rhyme in order to capture the lively wit and musical feeling of Pushkin's poetry.

One translator, G. R. Ledger, wrote, *Pushkin's rhyme scheme ... is impossible to copy in English with any accuracy or fidelity to the sense.*

Of his own translation of EUGENE ONEGIN, Ledger wrote, *The main aim has been to convey as much as possible of Pushkin's liveliness, the sheer abundance of his invention, and the daring unexpectedness of his wit. There is nothing like it in English literature, and non-Russian readers are depriving themselves of a great treasure by ignoring it.*

Below are four different versions of a section of EUGENE ONEGIN in which Eugene talks about his uncle, who has recently died, leaving his estate to Onegin. The first selection is from the libretto of Tchaikovsky's opera EUGENE ONEGIN. The next three are translations of the first chapter of Pushkin's verse novel. Finally, you can look at the same verse in Russian. Have fun trying to decipher it!

What can you learn about Onegin's character from reading these translations?

What differences do you notice among the translations (choice of words, rhyme, rhythm, etc.)?

Which version is your favourite? Why?

### **1. From the libretto of the opera. Translator not named.**

My uncle was a man of the highest principles;  
when he finally took to his bed  
he forced the respect of all  
and it was the best thing he could do.  
May others profit from his example!  
But, my God, what a bore it was,  
sitting by an invalid day and night,  
never daring to move a step away!

Read more at [http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libtcheug\\_e.htm](http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libtcheug_e.htm)

**2. From Pushkin's novel EUGENE ONEGIN (also written Yevgeny Onegin and Евгений Онегин). Translation by Charles H. Johnston.**

My uncle -- high ideals inspire him;  
but when past joking he fell sick,  
he really forced one to admire him --  
and never played a shrewder trick.  
Let others learn from his example!  
But God, how deadly dull to sample  
sickroom attendance night and day  
and never stir a foot away!  
And the sly baseness, fit to throttle,  
of entertaining the half-dead:  
one smoothes the pillows down in bed,  
and glumly serves the medicine bottle,  
and sighs, and asks oneself all through:  
"When will the devil come for you?"

*Read more at [http://www.lib.ru/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/onegin\\_j.txt](http://www.lib.ru/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/onegin_j.txt)*

**3. From Pushkin's novel EUGENE ONEGIN (also written Yevgeny Onegin and Евгений Онегин). Translation by Dennis Litoshick.**

My uncle was a man of virtue,  
When he became quite old and sick,  
He sought respect and tried to teach me,  
His only heir, verte and weak.  
He had the fun, I had the sore,  
But gracious goodness! what a bore!  
To sit by bedplace day and night,  
Not doing even step aside,  
And what a cheap and cunning thing  
To entertain the sad,  
To serve around, make his bed,  
To fetch the pills, to mourn and grim,  
To sigh out loud, think along:  
'God damn old man, why ain't you gone?'

*Read more at <http://www.lib.ru/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/litoshik.txt>*

**4. From Pushkin's novel EUGENE ONEGIN (also written Yevgeny Onegin and Евгений Онегин). Translation by G. R. Ledger.**

My uncle, a most worthy gentleman,  
When he fell seriously ill,  
By snuffing it made us all respect him,  
Couldn't have done better if he tried.  
His behaviour was a lesson to us all.  
But, God above, what crushing boredom  
To sit with the malingerer night and day  
Not moving even one footstep away.  
What demeaning hypocrisy  
To amuse the half-dead codger,  
To fluff up his pillows, and then,  
Mournfully to bring him his medicine;  
To think to oneself, and to sigh:  
When the devil will the old rascal die?"

*Read more at <http://www.pushkins-poems.com/Yev001.htm>*

**5. From Pushkin's novel Евгений Онегин (the Russian text of the same chapter.)**

Мой дядя самых честных правил,  
Когда не в шутку занемог,  
Он уважать себя заставил  
И лучше выдумать не мог.  
Его пример другим наука;  
Но, боже мой, какая скука  
С больным сидеть и день и ночь  
Не отходя ни шагу прочь!  
Какое низкое коварство  
Полуживого забавлять,  
Ему подушки поправлять,  
Печально подносить лекарство,  
Вздыхать и думать про себя:  
Когда же черт возьмет тебя!

*Read more at <http://www.pushkins-poems.com/Yev001.htm>*

## ***Useful Internet Links***

### **The Opera EUGENE ONEGIN**

[http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libtcheug\\_e.htm](http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libtcheug_e.htm)

The Libretto of EUGENE ONEGIN (in English). Read the actual words of the opera.

[http://www.lmuza.lv/opera/Onegin/default\\_E.htm](http://www.lmuza.lv/opera/Onegin/default_E.htm)

Latvian National Opera. Notes about the opera and its history, a synopsis, and comments by Tchaikovsky and others about the opera.

<http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=showEvent&event=MEKKG>

Links to a review of the Kirov Opera's 2003 production at the Kennedy Center, as well as to information about Tchaikovsky

### **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

<http://www.classicalarchives.com/bios/codm/tchaikovsky.html>

Biography of Tchaikovsky, list of works, links to downloadable music files.

[http://www.artsalive.ca/pdf/mus/tchaikovsky\\_all\\_e.pdf](http://www.artsalive.ca/pdf/mus/tchaikovsky_all_e.pdf)

An excellent guide to Tchaikovsky's life, times and music, by the National Arts Centre.

### **Alexander Pushkin**

[http://www.vor.ru/culture/pushk200\\_eng.html](http://www.vor.ru/culture/pushk200_eng.html)

Articles about Alexander Pushkin in celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth.

<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/puskin.htm>

A detailed biography of Pushkin

### **Alexander Pushkin's Verse Novel EUGENE ONEGIN**

<http://www.pushkins-poems.com/Yev001.htm>

The complete text of Pushkin's novel in both Russian and English. This is a fascinating chance to see the Russian script and also to read the lively English translation.

<http://www.lib.ru/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/>

Additional English translations of Pushkin's novel.

## ***Who Wants to be an Opera Singer?***

Operatic singing developed in Europe during the 17th century. The vocal demands are far greater on an opera singer than on any other singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and be heard throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. By tightening the diaphragm, the singer exhales the right amount of air to make the vocal cords vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As sound passes through the mouth, it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. The shape of the mouth and placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to tone and sound of the words.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often study at least one foreign language. After university, singers begin to work in the professional world. Their first roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well-established singer will have a vocal coach for specific roles.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles a singer performs depend mostly upon his or her vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that further determine which roles he or she can sing safely. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

After a role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, he or she arrives at the opera company for the rehearsals. Time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound; therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief, not all opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice; however, in recent years people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. In addition, the health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

## ***The Six Basic Vocal Categories***

**Soprano:** The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

**Mezzo-Soprano:** The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

**Contralto:** The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually play unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. Not very common.

**Tenor:** The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone colour and acoustical “ring.” Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

**Baritone:** The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone colour. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

**Bass:** The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone colour. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for a baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano’s role or a low range baritone singing a bass’ role.

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

**Coloratura:** a light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

**Lyric:** A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies; for example, Fiordiligi in COSI FAN TUTTE is a role for a lyric soprano.

**Dramatic:** A dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.

## ***Glossary: Important Words in Opera***

**Act-** a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

**Aria-** “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

**Aside-** a secret comment by an actor directly to the audience that other characters can't hear.

**Baritone-** the middle singing range of the male voice.

**Bass-** the lowest singing range of the male voice.

**Basso buffo** (Italian) - a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

**Basso profundo** (Italian) - the most serious bass voice.

**Baton-** short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

**Bel Canto-** Italian phrase literally meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

**Blocking-** directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

**Bravo** (Italian) - a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

**Cadenza-** a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off vocal ability.

**Castrato** (Italian) - a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

**Choreographer-** the person who designs the steps of a dance.

**Chorus-** a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

**Classical-** the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

**Coloratura-** elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes.

**Composer-** the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

**Comprimario** (Italian)- a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

**Contralto-** the lowest female voice range.

**Conductor-** the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers.

**Countertenor-** a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo soprano range.

**Crescendo-** a build in the volume or dynamic of the music

**Cue-** a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.

**Curtain Call-** the moment at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

**Designer-** a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. They work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

**Diva-** literally, “goddess” in Italian. A female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

**Dress Rehearsal-** the final rehearsal before opening night includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

**Duet-** music that is written for two people to sing together.

**Encore-** a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is performed when the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

**Ensemble-** a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

**Falsetto-** the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

**Finale-** the last musical number of an opera or an act.

**Grand Opera-** spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically-based plot, a huge cast, an unusually large orchestra, and ballet. The term also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

**Helden-** German prefix meaning “heroic”. Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

**House-** the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

**Interlude-** a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

**Intermission-** a break between acts of an opera. The lights come up and the audience is free to move around.

**Librettist-** the writer of the opera's text.

**Libretto-** Italian for "little book." It is the text or story of the opera.

**Lyric-** used to describe a light to medium weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

**Maestro-** means "master" in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor.

**Mark-** to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the Dress Rehearsal, singers try to sing at full voice for part if not all of the rehearsal.

**Mezzo-soprano-** the middle singing range for a female voice.

**Motif or Leitmotif-** a recurring musical theme that identifies an emotion, person, place or object.

**Opera-** a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which means "work."

**Opera buffa** (Italian) - an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

**Opera seria** (Italian) - a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

**Opera-comique** (French) or **Singspiel** (German) - a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

**Operetta-** lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

**Orchestra-** an ensemble comprising string, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments, and led by a conductor.

**Orchestra pit-** sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

**Overture-** an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude; can be played as a separate piece.

**Pitch-** how high or low a note sounds.

**Prelude-** a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

**Prima Donna-** literally, “first lady” in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, the term often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is **primo uomo**.

**Principal-** a major singing role or the singer who performs such a role.

**Production-** the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights etc.

**Props-** objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

**Proscenium-** the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

**Quartet-** four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc.

**Raked Stage-** a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

**Recitative-** lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. It is used to advance the plot.

**Rehearsal-** a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

**Score-** the written music of an opera or other musical work.

**Serenade-** a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

**Soprano-** the highest range of the female singing voice.

**Soubrette** (French) - pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

**Spinto** (Italian) - a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

**Stage Areas-** refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage. See diagram in Workshop #2.

**Stage Director-** the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality.

**Stage Manager-** the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

**Supernumeraries (Supers) -** appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

**Supertitles-** the English translations of the opera's language, in this production Russian, that are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story.

**Synopsis-** a short summary of the story of the opera.

**Tableau-** a moment at the end of a scene or act, when all singers on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It's as if that moment has been captured in a photograph.

**Tempo-** speed of the music.

**Tenor-** the highest natural adult male voice.

**Trill-** very quick alternation between two adjacent notes. See **coloratura**.

**Trio-** an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

**Trouser role-**the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzo-soprano. Also known as a **pants role**.

**Verismo-** a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century.

# ***Workshop #1 - What is this Thing called Opera?***

## **Objectives:**

- Students will be able to express their understanding and interpretation of opera through both oral and written opportunities.
- Students will investigate opera through listening, experiencing, and researching.

## **Introduction:**

As students are entering the classroom, play opera music of any kind and/or have a video recording of an opera playing. Invite the students to listen and/or watch.

## **Activity #1: Word Splash**

- Use a large piece of paper and have several markers on the floor or large table.
- Have the word *Opera* written in the middle of the paper.
- Ask that **ALL** students put at least one word that they associate with opera on the paper. Encourage students to put more words on the paper if they wish. These words can include how they feel about opera, as well as what they think about opera.
- If students are having a difficult time getting started, ask probing questions to help to elicit responses, e.g.; How is an opera different than a play or other forms of entertainment? Who is involved in making an opera? What stereotypes have you heard about opera?

## **Activity # 2: Research in the Library**

- In the Library, have students work in pairs researching one of the topics that arose from the Word Splash.
- Students should record the information that they find, while citing the resources they used.
- Students should be expected to record the following information: title of book (article, web page, etc.), author, publishing house, year of publication, and where the source was published.

## **Activity # 3: Sharing information**

Call the class together and get everyone to share one new piece of information that they learned about opera. Students can write a short or long paragraph about the information that they have found. Assess this paragraph accordingly.

## ***Workshop #2 – Stage Business***

### **Objectives:**

- Students will be able to express and apply their knowledge of the areas of the stage through writing and movement.
- Students will investigate the historical background of stage positioning.

### **Pre-class:**

Tape a massive grid to the floor of the space you are working in. This can be used to physically see the areas of the stage as well as be used for the game “Director Says”.

### **Activity #1: Group Discussion**

Have a group discussion with your class regarding why individuals might need to assign names for the different areas of the theatre, questioning the purpose that it serves.

### **Activity #2: Historical Significance of the Stage**

- Explain briefly the historical significance for the set-up of the theatre. Include such points as how the stage was originally raked so that the back portion of the stage was higher than the front portion. This was done because the audience’s seats were not raised as they usually are today and enabled those sitting in the back row of the theatre to see the players clearly. As a result the back of the stage is called *upstage* and the front of the stage is called *downstage*.
- You may also choose to discuss which areas of the stage are most important. For example, the strongest entrance is from stage left.
- Distribute the “Stage Facts” handout that has been enclosed, so that students can refer to it as you physically go to the taped area that you are explaining.
- You may choose to have them draw and copy the areas of the stage for themselves.

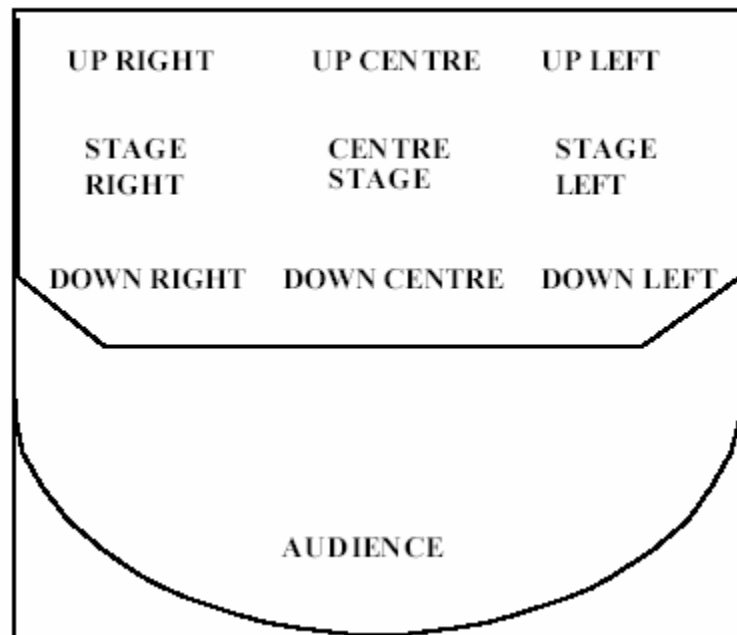
### **Activity #3: “Director Says” Game**

- Designate one of the students as the director, or for the first round you can be the director.
- The remaining students are the performers.

- The director gives out the directions: “Move upstage”, “Move stage right,” “Move to up centre,” etc. The director may give out directions to the entire group at once, small groups, or individuals, for example, “Everyone with red socks go to stage left.”
- Students are out if they move in any direction other than the one the director gives. The director gives out directions more rapidly, and any performer who moves in the wrong direction or hesitates is out.
- You may need to have a judge.

## Stage Facts

As opera singers are required to act as well as sing, they must understand the stage set-up. In rehearsals, the director will indicate to the singers what they should be doing and where they should do it. To do this they use a special vocabulary. Take a look at the diagram below in order to understand the different areas of the stage.



## ***Workshop #3 – Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky***

### **Objective:**

- Students will be able to identify and express their knowledge about **Tchaikovsky** and his life.
- Students will be able to make connections and comparisons between opera and contemporary music.

### **Introduction:**

Play Tchaikovsky's music as students are entering and getting settled in. It is a good idea to choose music from EUGENE ONEGIN, in order to set the mood.

### **Activity #1: Using the Internet**

Have students find information on Tchaikovsky on the Internet. Get each student to write down three sites that they visited and record five interesting facts.

### **Activity #2: Graphic Organizer**

Write Tchaikovsky's name in the middle of the board/overhead/poster paper and have the students write down the information that they found on him. As the class discusses the findings, add any information that you feel is pertinent. You can also provide your students with the information on Tchaikovsky found in the Study Guide.

At the end of class ask the students to bring in a copy of one of their favourite songs. Make sure that it is clear that the style of music is not important; however, the language and content should be appropriate for the classroom.

### **Activity #3: Connecting Tchaikovsky with Contemporary Music**

Students will choose a contemporary musician and compare her or him with a piece composed by Tchaikovsky. Have various Tchaikovsky CDs available, including his operatic works. Students will be asked to compare and contrast the similarities and differences of the two musicians in a brief 5-10 minute oral presentation. Students should compare biographical information learned about Tchaikovsky with that of the contemporary musician.

Students should also make a decision on who they prefer and why. You may also want to have the students write a page describing the important information in their presentation.

### **Activity #4: Presentations**

Students will present their oral presentation, comparing and contrasting the two choices in music. Students will play a portion of each song, classical and contemporary.

## ***Workshop #4– Exploring Plot and Character***

### **Objectives:**

- Students will be able to express their knowledge of character through writing a character sketch.
- Student will be able to express their knowledge of the storyline of *EUGENE ONEGIN* through verbal and written expression.

### **Activity #1: Story of EUGENE ONEGIN**

- Have students read a version of *EUGENE ONEGIN*. You can use the synopsis found in the Study Guide. You can choose to read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Stop to discuss.
- For a more dramatic approach, read the libretto as a reader’s theatre, having students take turns speaking the different roles. If done in this manner, ask the students to put emotion into their voices and encourage exaggeration. You might have to start them off, but this will provide an interesting way of reading the story.

### **Activity #2: Sharing with a group**

After viewing the Dress Rehearsal, have the students discuss what they saw. To help focus conversations, students can create a list of qualities that they feel are key to understanding the story and its characters.

### **Activity #3: Character sketch**

- Students will create (on their own or in a group) a character sketch for one of the main characters (for example, Eugene Onegin, Tatiana).
- Have students fill out the “Character Profile” sheet in detail, asking these questions:

What can be assumed about this person?

What is the character’s relationship with the other characters?

Why does the character make the choices he or she does?

- Remind students to include evidence from the opera to support their claim.
- Remind students of the arias sung by their character. Do the emotions conveyed through the music fit the character sketches?

### **Activity #4: Creating a journal from point of view of a character**

- Students will pick a point of conflict for the character they have chosen in the last activity and write a journal of those events from the character’s point of view.
- Explain that they are to take on the persona of that character and should refer to the character in the first person. Students are to express only information that their character would know; they may use the character profile for assistance.

# Character Profile

Character Name

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Physical Characteristics (style and physical attributes)

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Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how does he/she think?)

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Emotional Characteristics (is he/she generally cheerful, sad, snobbish, “off-balance” etc.?)

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Family

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Career/Income (if applicable)

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Interests and Hobbies

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Other interesting facts

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## ***Workshop #5– Write a review of EUGENE ONEGIN***

### **Objectives:**

- Students will be able to write clear and well-supported expository essays.
- Students will use observation and critical thinking skills based on real-life, real-time experiences.
- Students can submit their writing for publication (school newspaper) or you can send the reviews to Pacific Opera. We would love to hear what the students thought!

### **Activity #1- Think-Group-Share**

Individually students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?

What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?

Would you have done something differently? Why?

What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?

What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed. Place their posters on the walls.

### **Activity #2- Gallery Walk**

Have the groups travel around the room to examine the discussion poster papers. During the walk, students must write down one thing that surprised them, one thing that they didn't think of and one thing that they would like explained. Once this is done, have a large group discussion about the different ideas that they encountered on their walk.

### **Activity #3– Outlining your review**

Go over the essential aspects of a review including:

a clearly stated purpose

a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern

a summary paragraph

capturing the interest of the reader

precise nouns

revision for consistency of ideas

You might give your students a few examples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper.

Have the students fill out the “Review Outline” worksheet. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

### **Activity #4- Peer Conferencing**

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

### **Activity #5- Creating the final draft**

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

## ***Review Outline***

Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

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Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

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Paragraph #1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

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Paragraph #2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

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Paragraph #3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

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Summary/Closing Paragraph

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## ***Teacher's Evaluation***

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Subjects: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you attended other arts events with your students in the past year? Yes No

If yes, what were they? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you able to use the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities before attending the opera?  
Yes No

If not, please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would you add/delete?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?  
 Yes No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals? Yes No

How would you like to receive information?  Fax  Email  Letters  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Further comments and suggestions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to:

**Pacific Opera, 1815 Blanshard Street, Suite 500, Victoria, BC V8T 5A4 Fax: 250.382.4944**