

## OPERAS FOR JANUARY 2023

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### Stories of the Operas

#### **Eugene Onegin**

#### **Tchaikovsky**

Eugene Onegin (Russian: Евгений Онегин, *Yevgény Onégin*, IPA: [jɪv'gʲenʲɪj ɐ'nʲeɡʲɪn]), Op. 24, is an opera ("lyrical scenes") in 3 acts (7 scenes), composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. The libretto, organised by the composer himself, very closely follows certain passages in Alexander Pushkin's novel in verse, retaining much of his poetry. Tchaikovsky's friend Konstantin Shilovsky contributed M. Triquet's verses in Act 2, Scene 1, while Tchaikovsky himself arranged the text for Lensky's arioso in Act 1, Scene 1, and almost all of Prince Gremin's aria in Act 3, Scene 1.

Eugene Onegin is a well-known example of lyric opera, to which Tchaikovsky added music of a dramatic nature. The story concerns a selfish hero who lives to regret his blasé rejection of a young woman's love and his careless incitement of a fatal duel with his best friend.

The opera was first performed in Moscow in 1879.

#### **Synopsis**

Time: The 1820s: Place: St Petersburg and surrounding countryside

#### **Act 1: Scene 1:** The garden of the Larin country estate

Madame Larina and the nurse Filippyevna are sitting outside in the garden. They can hear Madame Larina's two daughters, Tatyana and her younger sister Olga, singing a love song. Madame Larina begins to reminisce about her own courtship and marriage. A group of peasants enter, and celebrate the harvest with songs and dances. Tatyana and Olga watch. Tatyana has been reading a romantic novel and is absorbed by the story; her carefree sister, on the other hand, wants to join in the celebrations. Madame Larina tells Tatyana that real life is very different from her novels. Filippyevna announces that visitors have arrived: Olga's fiancé Lensky, a young poet, and his friend Eugene Onegin, visiting the area from St Petersburg. The pair are shown in and Lensky introduces Onegin to the Larin family. Onegin is initially surprised that Lensky has chosen the extrovert Olga rather than her more subtle elder sister as his fiancée. Tatyana for her part is immediately and strongly attracted to Onegin. Lensky expresses his delight at seeing Olga and she responds flirtatiously. Onegin tells Tatyana of his boredom in the country and describes the death of his uncle and his subsequent inheritance of a nearby estate. Filippyevna recognizes that Onegin has had a profound effect on Tatyana.

#### **Scene 2:** Tatyana's room

Tatyana is dressed for bed. Restless and unable to sleep, she asks her nurse Filippyevna to tell her about her youth and early marriage. Tatyana confesses that she is in love. Left alone, Tatyana pours out her feelings in a letter to Onegin. She tells him that she loves him and believes that she will never feel this way about anyone else, and begs him to understand and help her. She finishes writing the letter at dawn. A shepherd's pipe is heard in the distance.

Filippjevna enters the room to wake Tatyana. Tatyana persuades her to send her grandson to deliver the letter to Onegin.

**Scene 3:** Another part of the estate

Servant girls pick fruit and sing as they work. Tatyana waits anxiously for Onegin's arrival. Onegin enters to see Tatyana and give her his answer to her letter. He explains, not unkindly, that he is not a man who loves easily and is unsuited to marriage. He is unworthy of her love and can only offer her brotherly affection. He warns Tatyana to be less emotionally open in the future. The voices of the servant girls singing are heard again. Tatyana is crushed and unable to reply.

**Act 2: Scene 1:** The ballroom of the Larin house

A ball is being given in honour of Tatyana, whose name day it is. Onegin is dancing with her. He grows irritated with a group of neighbours who gossip about him and Tatyana, and with Lensky for persuading him to come to the ball. He decides to avenge himself by dancing and flirting with Olga. Lensky is astounded and becomes extremely jealous. He confronts Olga but she cannot see that she has done anything wrong and tells Lensky not to be ridiculous. Onegin asks Olga to dance with him again and she agrees, as "punishment" for Lensky's jealousy. The elderly French tutor Monsieur Triquet sings some couplets in honour of Tatyana, after which the quarrel between Lensky and Onegin becomes more intense. Lensky renounces his friendship with Onegin in front of all the guests, and challenges Onegin to a duel, which the latter is forced, with many misgivings, to accept. Tatyana collapses and the ball ends in confusion.

**Scene 2:** On the banks of a wooded stream, early morning

Lensky is waiting for Onegin with his second Zaretsky. Lensky reflects on his life, his fear of death and his love for Olga. Onegin arrives with his manservant Guillot. Both Lensky and Onegin are reluctant to go ahead with the duel, reflecting on the senselessness of their sudden enmity. But it is too late; neither man has the courage to stop the duel. Zaretsky gives them the signal and Onegin shoots Lensky dead.

**Act 3: Scene 1:** The house of a rich nobleman in St Petersburg

Five years have passed, during which Onegin has travelled extensively around Europe. Standing alone at a ball, he reflects on the emptiness of his life and his remorse over the death of Lensky. Prince Gremin enters with Tatyana, his wife, now a grand, aristocratic beauty. She is greeted by many of the guests with great deference. Onegin is taken aback when he sees Tatyana, and deeply impressed by her beauty and noble bearing. Tatyana, in turn, is overwhelmed with emotion when she recognizes him, but tries to suppress it. Gremin tells Onegin about his great happiness and love for Tatyana, and re-introduces Onegin to his wife. Onegin, suddenly injected with new life, realizes that he is in love with Tatyana. He determines to write to her and arrange a meeting.

**Scene 2:** A room in Prince Gremin's house

Tatyana has received Onegin's letter, which has stirred up the passion she felt for him as a young girl and disturbed her. Onegin enters. Tatyana recalls her earlier feelings and asks why Onegin is pursuing her now. Is it because of her social position? Onegin denies any cynical motivation: his passion is real and overwhelming. Tatyana, moved to tears, reflects how near they once were to happiness but nevertheless asks him to leave. He asks her to have pity. Tatyana admits she still loves Onegin, but asserts that their union can never be realized, as

she is now married, and determined to remain faithful to her husband despite her true feelings. Onegin implores her to relent, but she bids him farewell forever, leaving him alone and in despair.

## **Ernani**                      **Verdi**

Ernani is an operatic *dramma lirico* in four acts by Giuseppe Verdi to an Italian libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, based on the 1830 play *Hernani* by Victor Hugo.

Verdi was commissioned by the Teatro La Fenice in Venice to write an opera, but finding the right subject took some time, and the composer worked with the inexperienced Piave in shaping first one and then another drama by Hugo into an acceptable libretto. As musicologist Roger Parker notes, the composer "intervened on several important points, insisting for example that the role of Ernani be sung by a tenor (rather than by a contralto as had originally been planned).

Ernani was first performed on 9 March 1844 and it was "immensely popular, and was revived countless times during its early years". It became Verdi's most popular opera until it was superseded by *Il Trovatore* after 1853. In 1904 it became the first opera to be recorded completely.

There is a detailed article and performance guide here <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernani>

### **Roles**

#### Role

Ernani, the bandit	tenor
Don Carlo, later Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor	baritone
Don Ruy Gomez de Silva	bass
Elvira, his niece and fiancée	soprano
Giovanna, her nurse	soprano
Don Riccardo, Don Carlo's equerry	tenor
Jago, Don Ruy's equerry	bass
Rebels, brigands, attendants, knights, servant, nobles, ladies - Chorus	

### **Synopsis**

Time: 1519. Place: Aragon, Aachen, and Zaragoza.

#### **Act 1: Mountains of Aragón**

The bandits demand the reason for Ernani's gloom. Ernani replies that he loves Elvira who is about to be married against her will to old Gomez de Silva. He asks the bandits to abduct her.

#### **In Elvira's chamber**

Elvira worries about her upcoming marriage as servants deliver Silva's wedding presents to her. She reaffirms her love for Ernani. King Carlo, disguised as a peasant, enters, but Elvira recognizes him and rejects the love that he offers her. As he attempts to use force, she grasps a dagger, but Ernani suddenly arrives and stops Carlo. Carlo recognizes Ernani as the leader of the bandits. Ernani replies that Carlo robbed him of his lands and forced him into a life of banditry. As he invites Carlo to fight, Silva appears and sees Ernani.

Ernani offers to fight them both when Riccardo approaches and recognises the king. Silva is horrified and apologizes to the king, while Ernani whispers to Elvira to prepare to flee.

### **Act 2: A hall in Silva's palace**

Ernani enters disguised as a pilgrim. He asks for shelter, which Silva grants him, and then learns from Silva that he is about to marry Elvira, who believes Ernani to be dead. Ernani reveals his true identity to Elvira and she tells him that she plans to kill herself at the altar. Silva walks in at that moment, discovers the pair, but agrees to keep his word to Ernani and protect him from the king, for which Ernani will owe him a perpetual debt. Carlo arrives and wishes to know why the castle is barred. Silva refuses to surrender Ernani and Don Carlo's men cannot find Ernani's hiding place. Silva keeps his word, even when the king secures Elvira as a hostage. Silva releases Ernani, and then challenges him to a duel. Ernani refuses to fight, but unites with Silva in his plans to free Elvira from the king. Ernani swears to appear at the summons of Silva, wherever he may be at that time.

### **Act 3: In the burial vault of Charles the Great at Aachen**

Carlo visits the grave of the emperor Charlemagne (Carlo Magno), whose successor, the new Holy Roman Emperor, is being elected by delegates from the relevant countries. Carlo resolves to change his life if he is crowned. Hiding behind the vault, he overhears a gathering of conspirators including Silva and Ernani. Ernani swears to murder Carlo. The conspiracy is foiled when Carlo's attendants enter and surprise the conspirators. The king commands that all the traitorous noblemen be executed. Ernani steps forward, declaring that thus he must die too; he is not the bandit Ernani, but Don Juan of Aragon, whose lands were taken from him. Elvira, who had been brought to Carlo as his intended empress, begs mercy for her lover, and Carlo, whose mood has changed, forgives them both and places Elvira's hand in that of Ernani.

### **Act 4: Ernani's Castle**

Elvira and Ernani have just been married, when, in consternation, Ernani hears a bugle call. Silva arrives and silently hands Ernani a dagger. Ernani asks for time to "sip from the cup of love" but, cursed by Silva as a coward, Ernani keeps his oath and stabs himself in the heart. He dies in Elvira's arms, telling her to live.

## **La Battaglia di Legnano                      Giuseppe Verdi**

In 1848, there was revolution in the air in much of Europe. There was a sense that liberal reform was wanted but this took different guises in different countries.

In Italy, the public wanted freedom from both Austrian and Papal rule and in February, 1848, the citizens of Milan rose up and threw out the Austrian soldiers. Other cities followed and in November 1848, the Pope fled and took refuge in the Kingdom of the two Sicilies.

The Austrians regrouped and gradually re-established their rule and ironically, the Pope was restored to power in Rome by troops of the French second Republic.

Verdi, although living in Paris by then, was a great supporter of a republican Italy and this led to the composition of tonight's opera, 'The Battle of Legnano'.

When the uprising occurred in Milan, Verdi quickly travelled there because he was a great believer in Italian unity. His operas and their stirring melodies had been used by the Italian Nationalists in various ways before then but he wanted to write a complete opera that would form the heart of nationalism. He despaired that librettists were incapable to providing them until Salvatore Cammarano (who supplied the libretto for the 1845 *Alzira*) came up with the idea of adapting Joseph Méry's 1828 play *La Bataille de Toulouse*, a well-known and well-

liked play in Italy at that time. "A story like that should stir every man with an Italian soul in his breast" was how the librettist described it. The opera was a great success when it premiered in Rome in January 1849. It was a great success with Act 4 being encored for every performance for many years to come. Later it fell from the popular repertoire having been surpassed by Verdi's later works but it has been successfully revived in recent years

<b>Role</b>	<b>Voice type</b>
Federico Barbarossa, German emperor	bass
First Consul of Milan	bass
Second Consul of Milan	bass
Mayor of Como	bass
Rolando, Milanese leader	baritone
Lida, his wife	soprano
Arrigo, Veronese Warrior	tenor
Marcovaldo, German prisoner	baritone
Imelda, Lida's servant	mezzo-soprano
Arrigo's squire	tenor
A herald	tenor

Knights of Death, Magistrates and leaders of Como, Milanese people and Senators, Warriors of Verona, Brescia, Novara, Piacenza and Milan, and the German Army

### **Synopsis**

Time: 1176 Place: Milan and Como

**Act 1: Scene 1**– "He is Alive!" Scene 1: Milan, not far from the city walls

Outside the city walls, people have gathered in support of the Lombard League whose troops are about to go into battle against the occupying German Emperor Federico Barbarossa. Among them is Arrigo, a young soldier whom all had thought dead, but he has now re-joined the army and he recounts how his mother had nursed his wounds after he was left for dead. Having recovered and before leaving again, he wants to see Lida, his sweetheart. Rolando, Arrigo's friend and leader of the troops from Milan, arrives and he is amazed to see Arrigo alive. Joyously, he embraces his friend. The gathered troops and the consuls of Milan all swear to defend the city against tyranny.

**Scene 2:** Beside the ramparts of the city

Rolando's wife Lida, who has lost her parents and brothers and who is downcast at the prospect of further war, also mourns the loss of her former love, Arrigo. She is unable to share in the general excitement of the upcoming battles. A German prisoner, Marcovaldo, who has been given some degree of freedom by Rolando, declares his love for Lida, but she is outraged and refuses him.

As Rolando returns home, bringing with him Arrigo, Lida is angry. When Arrigo arrives, he is clearly upset to see Lida married to his best friend. But with Rolando suddenly called away to the Senate by the news that Barbarossa's troops are on the move, Arrigo and Lida are left alone. She tries to explain that her father encouraged her to marry Rolando after all believed that Arrigo had been killed in battle. But Arrigo will not listen and does not believe her. He declares her a "faithless one", and hurries away, wishing only to die in the forthcoming battle.

**Act 2:** – "Barbarossa!" The town hall of Como

The city fathers of Como have gathered to await the arrival of Rolando and Arrigo as ambassadors of the League from Milan. Como has been forced to come to terms with the invaders, and when the two men arrive, they announce that a new army has invaded from the north, that Barbarossa is having problems in Padua, and they seek Como's help, pointing out that the city lies between Milan and the invaders. They hope that Como will intervene to help the Italian cause. Suddenly, Barbarossa himself appears, proclaiming that "I am Italy's great destiny". His troops have surrounded Como and now further threaten Milan. He demands that Arrigo and Rolando return to Milan and seek its submission.

**Act 3:** – "Infamy!" **Scene 1: The Basilica of Sant' Ambrogio**

In the subterranean vaults of the Basilica, Arrigo is inducted into the Knights of Death, warriors who have pledged to fight to the death rather than suffer defeat or imprisonment. All unite to swear an oath to support the cause of Italy and to drive the foreign forces back across the Alps.

Lida has heard that Arrigo has joined the Knights of Death, and desperately tries to contact him via a note to be conveyed by her maid, Imelda. As Imelda is about to leave, Rolando suddenly enters to say farewell to Lida and to their son, whom he has brought to him. Imelda hides the note, then quickly leaves. Rolando tells Lida to convey his love of country to their son, and to bring the boy up to love the fatherland.

Arrigo enters, summoned by Rolando, who does not know that his friend has joined the Knights of Death. Thinking that Arrigo has been ordered to remain to guard Milan, Rolando begs him to take care of his wife and son in the event of his death. The two men part company, Rolando moved by grief, Arrigo with embarrassment. Just as Rolando is about to leave, Marcovaldo delays him, telling him that his honour has been betrayed and presents him with Lida's note to Arrigo, which he has intercepted. Rolando is enraged and proclaims that he will obtain double vengeance on his wife and his friend

**Scene 3: A room in the tower**

Having received no response to her note, Lida goes to see Arrigo in his room in the tower, where he is writing a farewell letter to his mother. Although they declare their love for each other, he tells her that he has not received any note. Lida tries to persuade him to abandon his suicidal quest while he distraughtly recounts his dismay at finding her married. Finally, Lida says that they must separate for the sake of her husband and child. Then Rolando is heard at the door and, before he enters, Lida hides on the balcony.

Rolando confronts Arrigo, telling him that he now knows about his vow to the Knights of Death and encourages him to depart. Then he opens the balcony door and discovers Lida. Rolando is in a rage while Arrigo confesses his love for Lida but asks for death. Lida then declares that she is the guilty one. Still raging, Rolando storms out to lead the Milanese troops into battle, but as he leaves, he locks the tower door on Arrigo and Lida, declaring that Arrigo will suffer a fate worse than death: the infamy of being absent from the battle in which he had promised to fight, and so will lose his honour. As trumpets signal the beginning of the battle, Arrigo, in desperation, leaps from the tower into the moat, shouting "Long Live Italy!". Lida remains in anguish.

#### **Act 4 – "To Die For the Fatherland!" A square in Milan**

The assembled people sing a prayer for victory. Imelda assures Lida that Arrigo survived his leap from the tower and Lida prays for the safety of both Arrigo and her husband. As the people begin a hymn of victory, city officials enter the church to confirm the defeat of Barbarossa's troops by the Lombard League, declaring that Barbarossa was wounded by Arrigo. But, in the middle of the victory celebrations, a group of Knights of Death enter bearing the mortally wounded Arrigo. Rolando receives Arrigo's assurance that Lida is innocent and that she had always acted honourably. Reconciling with Lida, he forgives Arrigo, who with his last breath, proclaims that "Italy is saved".

#### **L'elisir d'amore (The Elixir of Love) Gaetano Donizetti**

L'elisir d'amore (The Elixir of Love) is a "melodramma giocoso" (opera buffa) in two acts by the Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti. Felice Romani wrote the Italian libretto, after Eugène Scribe's libretto for Daniel Auber's *Le philtre* (1831). The opera premiered on 12 May 1832 at the Teatro della Canobbiana in Milan.

##### **Roles**

Nemorino, a simple peasant, in love with Adina	tenor
Adina, a wealthy landowner	soprano
Belcore, a sergeant	baritone
Dr Dulcamara, an itinerant medicine man	bass
Giannetta, Adina's friend	soprano
Peasants, soldiers of Belcore's platoon	

##### **Synopsis**

Place: A small village in the Basque Country, Spain. Time: The end of the 18th century

##### **Act 1:**

Nemorino, a poor peasant, is in love with Adina, a beautiful landowner, who torments him with her indifference. When Nemorino hears Adina reading to her workers the story of Tristan and Isolde, he is convinced that a magic potion will help him to gain Adina's love. The self-important Sergeant Belcore appears with his regiment and immediately sets about courting Adina in front of everyone. Nemorino becomes anxious (although Adina meanwhile secretly derides Belcore's complacency) and, alone with Adina, reveals his love for her. Adina rebuffs him, saying that she wants a different lover every day and that Nemorino would do well to follow her example. Nemorino declares that his feelings will never change. The traveling quack doctor, Dulcamara (the self-proclaimed Dr. Encyclopedia), arrives, selling his bottled cure-all to the townspeople. Nemorino innocently asks Dulcamara if he has any of Isolde's love potion. Despite failing to recognize the name "Isolde", Dulcamara's commercial talents nevertheless enable him to sell a bottle of the "elixir" – in reality only cheap red wine – to Nemorino, who pays for it with all the cash at his disposal.

To make a safe escape, Dulcamara tells Nemorino the potion needs 24 hours to take effect – by which time, the doctor will be long gone. Nemorino drinks the potion in haste in order to watch the effect the following day. Emboldened by the "elixir" (in fact, drunk), Nemorino feigns indifference when he encounters Adina, as he expects that the elixir will facilitate his conquest of Adina the next day. She becomes increasingly annoyed; perhaps she has feelings for Nemorino after all? Belcore returns and proposes marriage to Adina. Still riled by

Nemorino and wishing to give him a lesson, Adina falsely promises to marry Belcore in six days' time. Yet, Nemorino only laughs in response: such confidence is sustained in the belief in the magic potion. However, when Belcore learns that his regiment must leave the next morning, Adina promises to marry him before his departure. This panics Nemorino, who cries out for Dr. Dulcamara to come to his aid. Adina, meanwhile, invites everyone to the wedding.

## **Act 2**

Adina and Belcore's wedding party is in full swing. Dr. Dulcamara encourages Adina to sing a duet with him to entertain the guests. The notary arrives to make the marriage official. Adina is annoyed to see that Nemorino has not appeared, for the whole deal has been intended only to punish him. While everyone goes to witness the signing of the wedding contract, Dulcamara stays behind, helping himself to food and drink. Having seen the notary, Nemorino appears, depressed, as he believes that he has lost Adina. He sees Dulcamara and frantically begs him for a more powerful, faster-acting elixir. Although Dulcamara is proud to boast of his philanthropy, upon discovering that Nemorino now has no money he changes his tune and marches off, refusing to supply him anything. Belcore emerges, musing about why Adina has suddenly put off the wedding and signing of the contract. He spots Nemorino and asks his rival why he is depressed. When Nemorino says he needs cash, Belcore suggests joining the army, as he'll receive funds on the spot. Belcore tries to excite Nemorino with tales of military life, while Nemorino only thinks of getting the potion and thus winning Adina, if only for a day before departure. Belcore produces a contract, which Nemorino signs in return for the money. Nemorino privately vows to rush and buy more potion, while Belcore muses about how sending Nemorino off to war has so easily dispatched his rival.

After the two men have left, Giannetta gossips with the women of the village. Swearing them all to secrecy, she reveals that Nemorino's uncle has just died and left his nephew a large fortune. However, neither Nemorino nor Adina is yet aware of this. Nemorino enters, having spent his military signing bonus on – and consumed – a large amount of the fake elixir from Dr. Dulcamara. Hoping to share his fortune, the women approach Nemorino with overly friendly greetings. So out of character is this that Nemorino takes it as proof of the elixir's efficacy. Adina sees Nemorino with the women, is rattled by his newfound popularity, and asks Dr. Dulcamara for an explanation. Unaware that Adina is the object of Nemorino's affection, Dulcamara explains that Nemorino spent his last penny on the elixir and joined the army for money to get more, so desperate was he to win the love of some unnamed cruel beauty. Adina immediately recognises Nemorino's sincerity, regrets her behaviour and realises that she has loved Nemorino all along. Although Dulcamara seizes the opportunity to try to sell her some of his potion to win back Nemorino, Adina declares that she has full confidence in her own powers of attraction.

Nemorino appears alone, pensive, reflecting on a tear he saw in Adina's eye when he was ignoring her earlier. Solely based on that, he convinces himself that Adina loves him. She enters and asks why he has chosen to join the army and leave the village. When Nemorino explains that he was seeking a better life, Adina responds that he is loved and that she has purchased back his military contract from Sergeant Belcore. She offers the cancelled contract to Nemorino and reassures him that, if he stays, he will be happy. As he takes the contract, Adina turns to leave. Nemorino believes she is abandoning him and flies into a desperate fit,



vowing that if he is not loved he might as well go off and die a soldier. Deeply moved by his fidelity, Adina finally declares that she will love Nemorino forever. Nemorino is ecstatic. Adina begs him to forgive her, which he does with a kiss. Belcore returns to see Nemorino and Adina in an embrace. When Adina explains that she loves Nemorino, the Sergeant takes the news in stride, noting that there are plenty of other women in the world. Adina and Nemorino learn about the inheritance from his uncle. Dulcamara returns and boasts of the success of his elixir: Nemorino is now not only loved but also rich. Dulcamara exults in the boost this will bring to the sales of his product. As Dulcamara prepares to leave, everyone queues up to buy the elixir and to hail Dulcamara as a great physician.