

# Greater Boston Stage Company's 'ONEGIN' a lavish production

By Sheila Barth

In 2005, Boston Lyric Opera presented a magnificent, lush, three-act production of the opera, "Onegin," performed in Russian; so the Shubert Theatre provided a monitor on both sides of the stage, translating the lyrics.

Making its U.S. premiere at Greater Boston Stage Company through March 31, the Greater Boston Stage Company's elegant production of the musical adaptation of "Onegin" - based on Aleksandr Pushkin's tragic novel of unrequited love and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's dramatic, operatic music - is less complicated and more fun-loving. The play is a sometimes-anachronistic, sometimes comical, contemporary operatic spoof, delighting nearby theatergoers with the cast's frequent interaction and direct eye contact.

Did I mention the play is a tragedy?

Regardless, several people liken "Onegin" on a smaller scale, to eye-popping, multi-nominated, highly interactive Broadway musical, "Pierre, Natasha, and the Great Comet of 1812". Both plays are based in 19th century Rus-



sia, both have lively, energetic casts, marvelous musicians, luxurious sets and costumes, and tragic romances.

The cast kicks up its heels in lively Russian folk tunes (kudos, associate assistant director-choreographer Ilyse Robbins), accompanied by visibly onstage Music Director-pianist Steve Bass and his melodic, upbeat four-person

band, (whom the actors refer to onstage as the Ungrateful Dead). So are four selected theatergoers, seated at small cabaret tables. At times, they're urged to dance with the actors, especially Boston longtime favorite, Christopher Chew.

But that's not all! Greater Boston Stage Company's lavish set by Katheryn Monthei

extends slightly into the first rows of the audience. Apparently, the theater spared no expense, with designer Deirdre Gerrard's handsome period costumes, Jeff Adelberg's, lighting, John Stone's sound effects, and, most especially, cast selection.

Besides Chew's portrayal of French aristocrat M. Triquet and lesser cameo roles, ever-popular Mark Linehan

## BOX OFFICE

U.S. premiere of Ariel Gladstone and Veda Hill's two-act, two hour contemporary musical, through March 31: Thursday, at 7:30 p.m.; Friday, 8 p.m.; Saturday, March 23, at 3,8p.m., March 30, 8 p.m. only; Sundays and Wednesday, March 27, 2 p.m. only; Greater Boston Stage Company, 395 Main St., Stoneham. \$50-60; seniors, \$45-55; students with ID, \$20. 781-279-2200, greaterbostonstage.org.

portrays bored, egotistical aristocrat/title character, Eugene Onegin, with gusto. Onegin's friend and foil, sensitive, young Vladimir Lensky, is portrayed by fresh-faced tenor Michael Jennings Mahoney. The romantic young poet is smitten with his childhood sweetheart, fair, flirt Olga Larin (Josephine Moshiri Elwood, who also plays the violin).

Sarah Pothier is charming as Olga's shy, innocent older sister, Tatyana, who instantly is mesmerized and in love with narcissistic Onegin, upon meeting him for the first time. Although Onegin prefers Tatyana to Olga, he is more attentive to Olga at a soiree, breaking Tatyana's heart. He tells Tatyana his heart is too cold to love anybody.

Kerry A. Dowling performs dual roles, as the girls' mother, Mme. Larin and mus-

tachioed gentleman Zaretsky; and Peter Adams portrays Prince Gremin, Tatyana's grateful, older husband.

Directed by Producing Artistic Director Weylin Symes, "Onegin's," tragic scenes are primarily uplifted by Chew's anachronistic antics, such as using a cell phone, and performing his solo number, "The Queen of Tonight," like today's rock stars. He also wears a contemporary leather jacket, black small-brimmed hat, etc. while acting as Onegin's secondary, or duel attendant, during the ill-fated duel.

"Onegin" has its flaws, but deserves a huge high-five for undertaking this challenging, eye-popping production.

Like me, you probably prefer less contemporary nuances and more relevance to the story and characters.

Or maybe not.