

UPSTAGE

A GREAT PLACE TO READ ABOUT GREAT THEATRE · OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2017

Belfry
Theatre

VOLUME 4 / ISSUE 2



Ami and
Veda Return

WITH THEIR NEW
AWARD-WINNING
MUSICAL,

Onegin

Hello!

Welcome to the Belfry and our production of *Oregon*.

"You're lucky to be alive right now because you get to see *Oregon*" is what the Georgia Straight said upon seeing this lush and passionate new musical.

The show went on to win ten Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards (Vancouver's version of Broadway's Tony Awards) including Outstanding Production and Outstanding Direction (Amiel Gladstone).

Meg Roe, Alessandro Juliani and Josh Epstein all took home Jessies for

Outstanding Performances, while the team of Drew Facey (Set), Jacqueline Firkins (Costumes) and John Webber (Lighting) swept the design awards.

Veda and Ami shared the award for Outstanding Original Composition; Veda and her band, the Ungrateful Dead (Barry Mirochnick and Marina Hasselberg), were given the award for Significant Artistic Achievement.

We're lucky to be bringing this show and this group of talented artists to our stage.

We hope you'll come and get lucky with *Oregon*. Thanks for being part of the Belfry.



UPSTAGE is produced four times per year and can be found at branches of the Greater Victoria Public Library, the Belfry and online at issuu.com/belfrytheatre. If you would like a digital copy please drop us a line at hello@belfry.bc.ca.

BELFRY THEATRE
1291 GLADSTONE AVENUE
VICTORIA, BC
V8T 1G5
WWW.BELFRY.BC.CA



B4Play

Gregor Craigie
Photo by Don Craig

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14 AT 11 AM

Belfry Theatre, Studio A,
1291 Gladstone Avenue

Free Event. Join us in Studio A for a live talk show hosted by CBC Radio's Gregor Craigie, featuring actor Meg Roe, co-creator and director Amiel Gladstone and Dr. Jennifer Wise.

If you can't make it to B4Play in person, don't worry: you can listen to these always-entertaining interviews on our website or listen to our podcasts at soundcloud.com/belfrytheatre.

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Cover Photo - Veda Hille and Amiel Gladstone by David Cooper

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**ONEGIN'S
FATHERS**

BY JENNIFER WISE

IT WAS WINTER IN ST. PETERSBURG, AND I WAS IN LOVE. Fur hats. Ornate palaces. The Neva River under fresh snow. Travelling with my parents and sister, I'd fallen in love at first sight with our tour-guide, Marat, a local university student. He was a literature major; I lived reclusively in books. Back at the hotel, on pretext of helping me out of the car, he pressed a note into my trembling, gloved hand: "Meet me at the Pushkin Monument. At Midnight." It was the most romantic moment of my life.

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) is Russia's Shakespeare: begetter of its language, creator of its best-known stories and characters, touchstone for its moral and romantic imagination. Like Shakespeare, he has also inspired countless adaptations by other artists—operas, ballets, symphonies, musicals, films. His works range from plays like *Boris Godunov* and *Mozart and Salieri* (source for *Amadeus*), to short stories like *The Queen of Spades*, to long poems like *The Gypsies* (inspiration, alone, for some 25 musical works including Bizet's *Carmen*). Like Rimski-Korsakov and Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky set Pushkin's words to music repeatedly. Most famously, in 1878, he wrote an opera based on Pushkin's 1833 novel *Evgeny Onegin*.

The great-grandson of a black African from (present-day) Cameroon, Pushkin was 24 when he began this "half-comic, half-tragic" novel in rhyming verse. In the title character, Onegin, Pushkin created both an imitation and a parody of the Byronic hero. He depicts his Russian Don Juan as a gloomy, cynical 18-year-old who's indifferent to life but so stylish about it that he takes three hours to get dressed (owing, in part, to his 30 different nail-, hair-, and tooth-brushes). That's the comedy. The tragedy is that this rich, absurdly jaded hipster succeeds in ruining everyone's life, including his own.

Through his friend Lensky—a long-haired, emotional, Schiller-worshipping poet, a "delightful fool" in every way his opposite—Onegin meets Tatiana, a naïve, bookish introvert. She falls for Onegin on contact, and writes him a passionate letter. He coolly crushes her hopes. In a fit of spleen he then provokes a fatal duel with Lensky, Tatiana's sister's fiancé. Having nicely destroyed everyone in Tatiana's household, Onegin goes abroad. When by chance years later he spots Tatiana in Petersburg, the tables are turned: she's now a dazzling woman, and he falls hard in love. She's married, and rejects him, narrowly dodging a bullet with her name on it.

Left: Tchaikovsky (Autumn 1865), aged 25. Photographed by Zakharin in Saint Petersburg
Right: Alexander Pushkin (1827), Portrait by Vasily Tropinin

But when Tchaikovsky, an unhappy gay man of 37, sat down to compose *Onegin*, his attitude to the story was less ambivalent, less ironic, less mocking than Pushkin's. Tchaikovsky was simply and purely "stirred to the depth of [his] heart." Completely identifying with Tatiana's love and longing for Onegin, he set the work to ravishingly melodic music, "driven," he says, "by an irresistible emotional need."

Evgeny Onegin left a curious mark on both creators' biographies. Like Lensky, Pushkin would himself be killed in a senseless duel involving jealousy at a name-day party, sisters, and the arcane rules of honour. Just before starting *Onegin*, Tchaikovsky had received a passionate love-letter from an innocent young woman admirer of his own; afraid

of behaving like a heartless Onegin, he took time out from composing the opera to marry her. (The marriage was a disaster.)

As for me, I did not go to the Pushkin Monument in St. Petersburg that night, on fire as I was. In my twenties at the time, I knew the level-headed novel only, not the opera, and suspected that, like Tatiana, I'd be disappointed. Had I first encountered *Onegin* through the Romantic music of Tchaikovsky—or through this thrilling version by Gladstone and Hille—I might have risked it. ▲

Jennifer Wise is an award-winning playwright, translator, and associate professor of theatre history at UVic.

LIVE EVENTS

Throughout *Onegin* we'll host a number of events that will deepen your theatre experience or just plain astound you.

B4PLAY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14 AT 11 AM

Free Event. Join us in Studio A for a live talk show hosted by CBC Radio's Gregor Craigie, featuring actor Meg Roe, co-creator and director Amiel Gladstone and Dr. Jennifer Wise.

AFTERPLAY

Facilitated discussions – audience member to audience member – will follow every evening Mainstage performance of *Onegin* (except Opening Night and Talkback Thursday). These are a great opportunity to share your thoughts and hear fellow patrons' reactions to the production and the ideas it presents.

TALKBACK THURSDAY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26

Meet some of the actors post-performance when they return to the stage to answer questions and provide insight into the play.

VOCAL EYE

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29 AT 2 PM

For our patrons with low or no vision, we offer this VocalEye performance during *Onegin*. Trained Audio Describers provide descriptions of the visual elements of the show, allowing people with low vision to enjoy the theatrical experience without missing any of the details.



Belfry Librarian

The wonderful librarians from the Greater Victoria Public Library have compiled a list of books to help you get even more out of our production of *Onegin*.



Across the Universe
[DVD] (2008)

Amadeus
by Peter Schaffer (1980)

Carmen by Georges Bizet
[CD] (1996)

The Best of Tchaikovsky by
Peter Tchaikovsky [CD] (1997)

The Collected Stories by
Aleksandr Pushkin (1999)

*The Collected Tales of Nikolai
Gogol* by Nikolai Gogol (2008)

Eugene Onegin [DVD] (2007)

The Forever Girl by Alexander
McCall Smith (2014)

*Here is a Picture: Songs
for E Carr* by Veda Hille
[CD] (1997)

*Hippies and Bolsheviks
and Other Plays* by Amiel
Gladstone (2007)

The Island of Books by
Dominique Fortier (2016)

Love in the Time of Cholera
by Gabriel Garcia Márquez
(1988)

*The Magic Gold Fish: A
Russian Folktale* by Demi
(1995)

Yevgeny Onegin by
Aleksandr Pushkin (1995)

Compiled by Kate Wood, Library Assistant,
Greater Victoria Public Library



I first encountered *Onegin* in a tiny upstairs rehearsal hall on Vancouver's Granville Island. Seven actor/singers, Veda on the piano, Ami, and a handful of observers, all crammed together to listen to this music and these lyrics for the very first time. Afterward, Ami and I had a couple of dramaturgical conversations about the trickier aspects of the Pushkin story. And then I attended the final preview performance of the premiere production at the Arts Club in Vancouver. With their perfect cast, and an immersive sensibility, it was clear that Veda and Ami had something very, very special on their hands!

Like Dave Malloy's acclaimed *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*, an adaptation of a small portion of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *Onegin* takes a masterpiece of Russian literature from the mid-19th Century, and retells the story with the music and irony of the early 21st Century. This mash-up of period costumes and electric guitars creates a unique and irresistible window into the world that Pushkin created with his novel in verse, and the opera that Tchaikovsky adapted from it 45 years later.

A big part of the draw for me was the cast, and when we talked about bringing *Onegin* to the Belfry, it was contingent on having the originals. Not only because Meg Roe is a UVic grad and we adore her, but also because they are all so damned good in the show! And lots of the cast will be familiar to our audiences: Josh Epstein (*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*), Alessandro Juliani (*The Violet Hour*), Andrew McNee (*My Chernobyl, Half Life*), Caitriona Murphy (*Billy Nothin'* reading), Meg Roe (*Trying, Urinetown*) and Andrew Wheeler (*Homechild*). Veda co-wrote *Do You Want What I Have Got?: A Craigslist Cantata*, which was part of the 2011 SPARK Festival, and was directed by Ami Gladstone.

Ami, of course, will always be part of the fabric of Victoria's theatre community. Another UVic grad, and a one-time Belfry Box Office clerk, he was one of the founders of Theatre SKAM and the artistic driving force behind that company's early successes. He appeared onstage at the Belfry in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, and directed *The Ends of the Earth* during our 2008-2009 Season. With his writing and direction, this production of *Onegin* is a long-overdue and happy return!

Michael Shamata, *Artistic Director*

Cast & Creatives

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | Josh Epstein
VLADIMIR LENSKY |  | Lauren Jackson
OLGA LARIN |
|  | Alessandro Juliani
EVGENI ONEGIN |  | Andrew McNee
MANY OTHERS |
|  | Caitriona Murphy
MADAME LARIN AND OTHERS |  | Meg Roe
TATYANA LARIN |
|  | Andrew Wheeler
PRINCE GREMIN AND OTHERS |  | Barry Mirochnick
PERCUSSIONIST / DOUBLE BASS |
|  | Jennifer Moersh
CELLO |  | Chris Tsujiuchi
PIANIST |
|  | Amiel Gladstone
CREATOR / DIRECTOR |  | Veda Hille
CREATOR / MUSICAL DIRECTOR |
|  | Tracey Power
CHOREOGRAPHER |  | Amanda Testini
ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHER |
|  | Rachel Ditor
DRAMATURG |  | Drew Facey
SET DESIGNER |
|  | Jacqueline Firkins
COSTUME DESIGNER |  | John Webber
LIGHTING DESIGNER |
|  | Bradley Danyluk
SOUND DESIGNER |  | Sara Smith
ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER |
|  | Allison Spearin
STAGE MANAGER |  | Sandra Drag
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER |

SPOTLIGHT ON SUPPORTERS

Belfry Legacy Society Member Ross Richardson

In his early theatre-going days, Ross favoured farces and mysteries, but his tastes have become much broader over the years.

Ross lived in Montreal and Mississauga, where he was a licensed Canadian Customs Broker for four decades, owning his own company for 15 years. During his time in Ontario, Ross took in a whopping 110 productions at the Shaw and Stratford Festivals alone.

Since moving to Victoria five years ago, Ross can be seen frequently at live theatres around town, striving to experience all that the city has to offer. Other interests include playing tournament chess for over 50 years (“I don’t play for fun in a tournament, I play for blood”), and collecting books and art. Military and dinosaur models are among the eclectic objects that can be found in his home.

Ross rates every play he sees according to a personal “one to three” rating system. Some of the productions he would rate as number ones at the Belfry include *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, *Spring Awakening*, *Venus in Fur*, *Chelsea Hotel* and *Iceland*. He tries not to read reviews until after he sees a show, as he doesn’t want to be influenced by the local theatre critics.

According to Ross,

“One reason I like coming to the Belfry is I’m never certain what I’m going to see. If a play keeps you thinking about it a couple of days later you know it made an impression.”



In addition to the Belfry’s programming and new play development, Ross keeps coming back for the social aspect. He says he also supports the Belfry because he finds the staff all very approachable and friendly.

As the venue has been upgraded in the recent renovation, Ross notes that he is able to benefit from his contributions, citing the new theatre seats as very comfortable compared to most.

After enjoying theatre for close to 40 years, Ross told us that he had generously named the Belfry as one of the beneficiaries in his will.

“Why not give to something you enjoy? If individuals such as myself do not support the arts, it leaves a cultural gap. Since we have a healthy, lively developing arts community, I’d like to keep it that way.”

Thank you, Ross!

For more information on joining the Belfry Legacy Society by making a planned gift, please contact Susan Stevenson at 250-385-6835 ext. 229 or at development@belfry.bc.ca

Calendar



Onegin

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

October 17 – November 12, 2017

Tuesdays – Thursdays at 7:30 pm

Wednesday Matinees at 1 pm
(October 25, November 1, 8)

Fridays + Saturdays at 8 pm

Saturday Matinees at 4 pm

Sunday Matinees at 2 pm

Free Childcare – Saturday, October 21
at 4pm / Sunday, October 29 at 2 pm

Audience Engagement Schedule

B4PLAY · Saturday, October 14 at 11 am

TALKBACK THURSDAY · October 26

AFTERPLAY · Following all
evening performances*

VOCAL EYE · Described performance
Sunday, October 29 at 2 pm

*Except opening night and Talkback Thursday

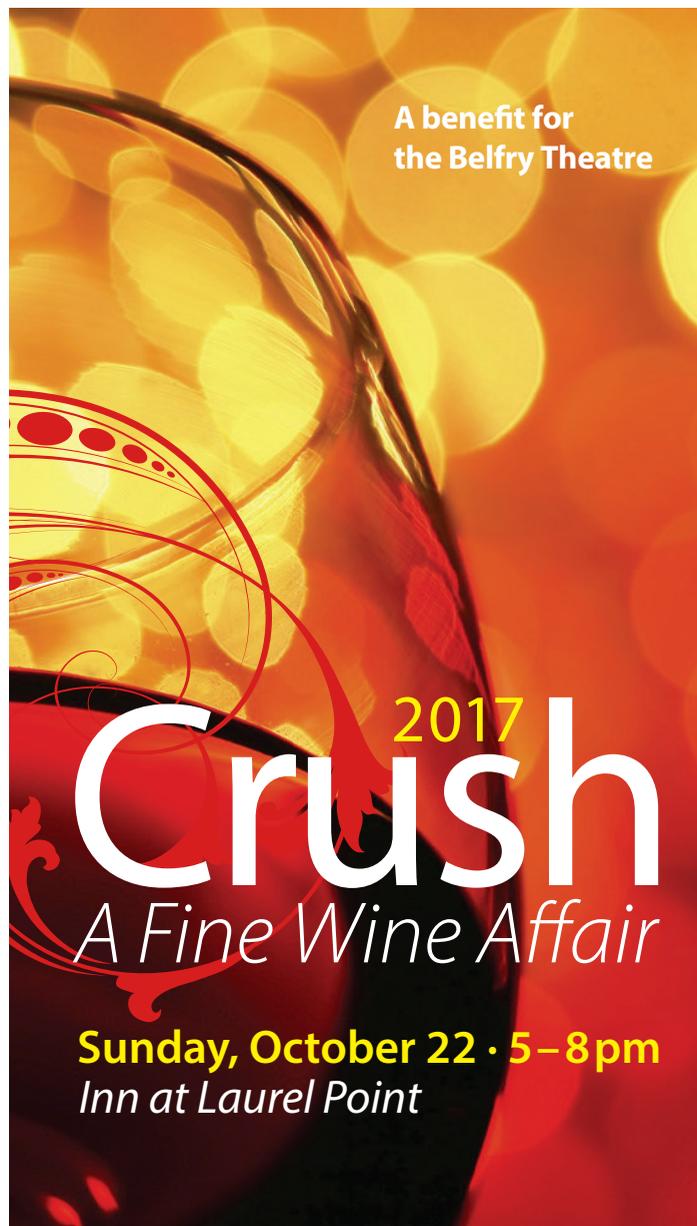
How to buy tickets

By telephone
250 385 6815

Please have your credit card ready, as well as the date and time of the performance you wish to attend.

Online
Visit belfry.bc.ca/tickets
and buy your tickets online, anytime.

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