



ROYAL  
OPERA  
HOUSE

# Onegin: The story





Onegin is based on the long poem *Eugene Onegin* by the Russian writer Alexander Pushkin. John Cranko's ballet, *Onegin*, is set to stirring music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Set in Russia in the 19th century, it tells the doomed love story between Eugene Onegin, elegant but aloof, and the young, idealistic Tatiana.

## ACT I

### Scene 1: Madame Larina's garden

Tatiana's mother, Madame Larina, and her sister, Olga, are putting the finishing touches to their party dresses, helped by the girls' nurse. They gossip excitedly about Tatiana's coming birthday party.

Tatiana sits nearby, absorbed in her book. Girls from the village arrive and play an old folk game: whoever looks into the mirror will see the face of the man she loves.

Olga's fiancé Lensky, a young poet, arrives. He has brought with him a friend from St Petersburg: Eugene Onegin. Onegin, bored of the big city, has come to see what life in the countryside can offer him. Tatiana, a bookish daydreamer, falls immediately in love with Onegin, so elegant and different from the country people she knows. Onegin, on the other hand, sees only a naive young girl who reads too many novels.



## Scene 2: Tatiana's bedroom

Tatiana, deeply in love, dreams of Onegin; she dances with her dream vision of him. Waking, she writes Onegin a love letter, which she gives to the nurse to deliver.

*Interval*

## ACT II

### Scene 1: Tatiana's birthday

All the local gentry have come to Tatiana's birthday party. The snooty Onegin is bored by their company and can barely stifle his yawns. He has received Tatiana's letter, which has annoyed him, as a naive outburst from a foolish young girl.

In a quiet moment Onegin finds Tatiana. Telling her that he cannot love her, he tears up the letter in front of her. Her tears only make him even more annoyed.

Prince Gremin, a distant relative of the Larinas, arrives at the party. He loves Tatiana and Madame Larina hopes the two might marry. But Tatiana, reeling from Onegin's rejection, hardly notices the Prince.

Onegin, looking for some entertainment, decides to start an argument with Lensky by flirting with Olga. Olga, fun-loving but thoughtless, joins in with the teasing. But Lensky takes the matter very seriously. Furious, he challenges Onegin to a duel.

### Scene 2: The duel

Tatiana and Olga try to calm Lensky down, but

he has been deeply hurt by Onegin and Olga's betrayal and insists the duel take place.

Onegin and Lensky each take pistols. They fire and Lensky dies.

*Interval*

## ACT III

### Scene 1: St Petersburg

Years have passed since the duel. Onegin has travelled the world, trying to forget what he did to his friend. Now he has returned to St Petersburg, more miserable and lonely than ever. He goes to a ball given by Prince Gremin, who has now married.

Onegin is astonished to recognize Gremin's wife: it is Tatiana, now a beautiful, elegant lady. Onegin is suddenly overwhelmed by how great a mistake he made in rejecting Tatiana's love all those years ago. His life seems even more aimless and empty.

### Scene 2: Tatiana's bedroom

Onegin has written a love letter to Tatiana. She desperately does not wish to see him, and begs her husband not to leave her alone that evening – but Prince Gremin has to leave.

Onegin enters and declares his love for Tatiana. Tatiana is torn between her old love for Onegin, still as strong as before, and her duty to her kind husband. Distraught, she tears up Onegin's letter in front of him, and orders him to leave her forever.

