

# ONEGIN

Captured Live on Stage at Novosibirsk's Red Torch Theatre



**Stage Russia Academic Advisor Michael Earley:**

Michael Earley is Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore. Previously he was Professor of Drama, Principal and Chief Executive Officer of the prestigious Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance in Sidcup, London, where he led the institution from 2009-17. In addition to his university teaching, Professor Earley has had an extensive career in UK and US publishing. He worked as Editorial and Publishing Director of Methuen Drama publishers in London and as Chief Producer of Plays for BBC Radio Drama, where he edited scripts and directed over 50 productions for broadcast. His book *How to Act Shakespeare*, written for Chinese performers, teachers and students, will be published in 2019 by Huazhong University of Science and Technology Press.

**THE NOVEL**

Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse by Alexander Pushkin, is one of the cornerstones of Russian literature. It was first published in serial form between 1825 and 1832 and then as a complete work in 1833. The novel holds a central place in Russian literature and arts in the same way that Shakespeare's Hamlet does for literature and arts in the English-speaking world.

Pushkin's novel has been widely adapted and has appeared in many different versions, most notably in Peter Illyich Tchaikovsky's 1879 opera of the same title. But Eugene Onegin has also been adapted into numerous other forms, including ballets, films, television series, radio plays, a Canadian rock musical in 2016 and, most significantly for the version you are about to see, as a work for the stage. A version of Eugene Onegin is frequently in the repertoires of many Russian theatres. But this production is exceptional for its modernity and the risks it takes.

Pushkin's novel is endlessly fascinating. The eponymous title character, Eugene Onegin, is a dashing dandy but inevitably a toxic human being. Thoughtlessly and cruelly, his action wreak havoc on society and the people he loves. And after appearing first in Pushkin's novel, the character Eugene Onegin became the mould for a type of anti-hero who would take centre stage in later Russian literature: a superfluous man who is both stagnant and active, fatally attractive and a dangerous roue, a slave to social convention but someone who is testing and breaking social barriers. The romantic triangle he forms with the compelling Tatyana and his friend Lensky leads to a fatal duel between the two men that becomes a climax in the novel and a touchpoint in all Russian literature to follow.

**THE PRODUCTION AND ITS DIRECTOR**

This stage production of Onegin is directed by the 34-year-old Timofey Kulyabin, one of the rising lights of contemporary Russian theatre. He has been directing for the Red Torch Theatre in the city of Novosibirsk since 2007 and became its artistic director in 2015. No stranger to the works of Pushkin, among Kulyabin's earlier productions was a 2007 stage version of Pushkin's short-story *Queen of Spades*. His productions have been nominated for several prestigious Golden Mask Theatre Awards, and this Onegin, first produced in 2012 and still in the repertoire of the Red Torch Theatre, received two such awards.



*Timofey Kulyabin*

In our last season of Stage Russia screenings, Kulyabin's version of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, was unique and daring for featuring a cast who performed the entire play using sign language rather than spoken dialogue. Kulyabin's directing style is a refreshing blend of the classical and the experimental. And you will see touches of both throughout this production along with an ensemble acting company who are compelling every moment they are onstage. For this production you have to look very carefully.

Like so many contemporary Russian directors, Timofey Kulyabin creates striking images on the stage through the use of scenography and light. While this production seems to be performed in a fairly tight and constricted stage space, it also has an epic quality. Garret-like bedrooms become ballrooms and dining rooms, that become entire estates as the narrative follows the course of Pushkin's plot. Simple pieces of furniture—tables and chairs—are stacked up to create different places, different worlds, often dangerous ones. The production delights in using materials that are both artfully elegant and just plain grubby. This is a world of loss and isolation and exposure



**PUSHKIN'S 21st CENTURY RELEVANCE**

One of the key features of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin is its celebrated verse. Here it is delivered as narration rather than dialogue while most of the acting is in the form of mime and physical theater. Kulyabin takes delight in using different stage languages. He wants, it would seem, to put the audience in the position of directing and translating its own version of Eugene Onegin. What the characters are thinking is not always clear but kept very private.

And as with all the films presented in the Stage Russia season it is always the acting you find so utterly compelling, so wonderfully executed. The famous duel scene between Onegin and Lensky, staged in the second half of the film, sets us on the edge of our seats. It is as dramatic as drama can be

This is a richly attractive production of Eugene Onegin that bares all takes us to the heart of modern tragedy. The final moments of abandonment and disintegration should stay with you for a long time. I hope you like what you see.

*Professor Michael Earley*