

Operas set to thrill in new season treat

NICOLA LISLE previews Garsington Opera's new season of entertainment

In just over a couple of weeks' time, Garsington Opera's shimmering, fairytale pavilion will be woken from its winter sleep as the company's 27th season – its sixth at Wormsley – swings into action with a trio of operatic masterpieces.

Opening the proceedings is Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, written in 1878 and based on Pushkin's verse novel of the same name. The production is directed by former RSC artistic director Michael Boyd and designed by Tom Piper, co-creator of the ceramic poppies displayed at the Tower of London in 2014.

Roderick Williams will be singing the title role, while making her debut in the role of Tatyana is Swansea-born soprano Natalya Romaniw.

"I love the role," she says. "I've always wanted to play Tatyana since I was at the Guildhall because we did some scenes from it on the opera course. Luckily I remembered quite a lot of the words!"

"I feel a very strong connection to the music. I don't know if that's because my grandfather was from the Ukraine, but I do feel very strongly for it."

Although Tatyana is traditionally seen as a quiet, dreamy girl, Natalya feels there is a lot more to her character.

"She's actually quite strong and formidable. She's not just this dreamy girl who's into her literature and isn't aware of anything. She's extremely clever and intelligent. Then you take into play her journey from the beginning as a young girl who is somewhat naïve to the



Natalya Romaniw

end when she sees Onegin and she's actually quite cold to him."

Another singer making a role debut with Garsington this season is former New College choral scholar Toby Spence, who will be singing the title role in Mozart's *Idomeneo*, a harrowing tale of a father who is faced with the prospect of sacrificing his own son to Neptune. Like Natalya, Toby is excited by the prospect of taking on such a demanding role.

"I made my debut in 1995 singing the

role of Idamante, Idomeneo's son," he says. "It is a peculiar experience to rehearse the music of one's father with the son's part still being so familiar!"

"I relish playing out Idomeneo's horrific predicament and singing his beautiful arias and accompanato recitatives."

By coincidence, the director for *Idomeneo* is Tim Albery, who unwittingly helped set Toby on his path to becoming an opera singer.

"In 1989, while still at university, I was watching Philip Langridge sing *Peter Grimes* at ENO. As I left the theatre, I thought, 'I want to do that'. I had been persuaded by the visceral story-telling and Britten's extraordinary music.

That was a production by Tim Albery."

Toby has fond memories of his time at Oxford. "I was very lucky to be a student of Edward Higginbottom, who taught me that scholarship and performance can go hand in hand. Close observation of what the composer wrote and an understanding of why he wrote it can only reinforce one's interpretation."

"I owe an enduring fascination in my chosen art form to Edward and the intense experience of music making at a very high level while at New College."

Garsington's other operatic offering is Rossini's enduringly popular *L'Italiana in Algeri*. Later in the season, the company will present Haydn's *The Creation* in collaboration with Rambert.

WHERE&WHEN

Garsington Opera
June 3 to July 17
Wormsley Estate
Tickets & information
garsingtonopera.org



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