

Newly Designed *Onegin* Takes Centre Stage in June

By Bridget Cauthery



*O*negin, one of the most significant works of the 20th century, was created by choreographer John Cranko for Stuttgart Ballet. Cranko's ballet premiered on April 13, 1965 with sets and costumes by the great German theatre designer Jürgen Rose. The National Ballet acquired the choreography for *Onegin* along with Rose's designs in 1984.

"Sadly," says John Borg, Resident Scenic Artist with the National Ballet, "Over 25 years, [*Onegin*'s] sets have deteriorated. The stagehands at the theatre were uncomfortable hanging the drops because they had become so fragile." The costumes, many made of delicate silk taffeta, were also showing signs of wear and tear.

With this in mind, the National Ballet invited renowned American designer Santo Loquasto to revise *Onegin* for the 2009/10 season. Loquasto is well known to National Ballet



audiences, having designed many of James Kudelka's ballets including *The Actress*, *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and *An Italian Straw Hat*. "I have created many Russian period designs and am familiar with the look and feel of the era," says Loquasto. "For *Onegin*, I drew on paintings and architecture of the period but essentially, I was inspired by Cranko's choreography and Pushkin's story to create a romantic, ghost-like space that has a diffused, ephemeral feel about it."

Spatially, the design of the sets needed to be the same in order to maintain the integrity of the choreography. Loquasto, however, wanted to dispense with some of the original production's more elaborate details in order to scale it back and make it simpler. The opposite is true of the costumes. The fabric the designer has chosen is bewitching for its combination of pattern and texture. Lustrous, iridescent skirts promise flashes

Maquettes of Santo Loquasto's new set designs for *Onegin*.

ONEGIN

TATIANA - WHITE GOWN
ACT I SC 2
DOB MICHELE GIEL



ONEGIN

ONEGIN - ACT III - ST PETERSBURG BALL



ONEGIN

PENJOE GREENIN - LAST SCENE ACT III



ONEGIN

TATIANA - ACT III ST PETERSBURG BALL



Costume sketches by Santo Loquasto.

of jewel tones beneath layers of shimmering gauze while distinct hourglass silhouettes evoke romance and mannerly courting.

Loquasto kept the palette similar to the original design but wanted the look to be more authentic and evocative. "The production's original costumes were more fanciful," he explains. "I wanted them to be more historically accurate." There is Onegin's black frock coat and starched collar and Tatiana's fiery ball gown for the St. Petersburg ball scene but also a range of rusts and apricot for Lensky and Olga, dark inky blues and burgundies for the duel, shades of cream and gold for the peasants in Act I and pale green and silver for the Corps de Ballet in Act II.

Loquasto's sets retain the sense of openness of Rose's originals and he has also maintained a front scrim. The newly-designed scrim includes excerpts from Pushkin's letters in Russian with Onegin's signature scrawled across them. He has designed an elegant domed conservatory and a series of columned archways that indoors are grand and palatial, but out of doors suggest ivy-covered follies. 144 leafless silver birch trees, arranged in shaded copses or lit in stark relief, are sometimes within the room and at other times beyond it. Overall, Loquasto's new designs for *Onegin* cannot fail to impress, providing the perfect backdrop to the ballet's themes of unrequited love, longing and regret in 19th century Russia. *