

SNOW

a one-act opera in five scenes

music and libretto by Carol Barnett
based on the short story by Konstantin Paustovsky

winner of the 2003 Nancy Van de Vate International Prize for Opera

setting

a village in the Russian interior

cast

Tatiana - a singer, an evacuee from Moscow (30s)	soprano
Varya - Tatiana's young daughter	mezzo
Nicolai - a sailor (30s)	tenor
Elena - a village woman (50s)	mezzo
Arkady - the village station master, an older man	baritone
Piano Tuner - a Czech emigre (50s)	tenor

orchestra

flute/piccolo
Bb clarinet
bassoon
F horn
violin
cello
piano
percussion (one player)
bass drum, marimba, snare drum, suspended cymbal, triangle, tam-tam, orchestra
bells, high, medium and low wood blocks, temple blocks, castanets, vibraphone (+ 2
bows), anvil

duration

c. 68 minutes

synopsis

Scene I – Wedding

1946, after the war. The entire cast is celebrating the wedding of Tatiana and Nicolai.
Nicolai begins to tell how he met Tatiana.

Scene II – First Letter

Late 1941, during the war; early evening in the main room of a small house. Tatiana's young daughter Varya sings of her loneliness in the village to which they have recently come. Tatiana, Elena and Arkady return from the funeral of old Potapov, owner of the house in which Tatiana and Varya are living. Refusing Tatiana's invitation to tea, Elena and Arkady depart. Tatiana puts Varya to bed. She too regrets leaving Moscow and, after contemplating the snowy weather and a photograph of Potapov's son Nicolai, opens one of the letters that he has sent from the front. He has been wounded and looks forward to coming home for a short leave. His letter describes the house as he remembers it from childhood.

Scene III – Homecoming

The same room, some days later. Tatiana is restoring the house to Nicolai's description. The piano is tuned, Elena is helping with the cleaning, and Varya sweeps the garden paths. Nicolai arrives at the station, where Arkady tells him of his father's death. He wanders through the town, uncertain whether to go to the house where strangers are now living. Finally he steps into the garden, intending to stay just a few minutes. Tatiana, who has been watching for him, brings him into the house, which is seemingly unchanged from his memories.

Scene IV – Evening

The same day, after tea. Tatiana and Nicolai have just returned from visiting his father's grave. Tatiana relates how his father died, and he tells of the battle in which he was wounded. At his request, she sings for him. She says that he seems familiar to her; perhaps they met somewhere long ago. He considers, but appears not to remember. She makes his bed on the sofa, and stays up to make sure he catches the early morning train.

Scene V – Second Letter

The next morning. Tatiana sees Nicolai off at the station. On the train, Nicolai writes to Tatiana - of course he remembers where he met her. He describes the scene seventeen years ago in the Crimea, and proposes that they marry when the war is over. Tatiana, who has never been in the Crimea, decides to marry him nonetheless. The opera ends with the wedding celebration.