

Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812

by **Dave Malloy**

Adapted from *War and Peace* by **Leo Tolstoy**

Directed and choreographed by **Karen Azenberg**

May 10 - 25, 2024

SPOTLIGHT STUDY GUIDE
For Teachers and Students



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SETTING: Moscow, Russia. 1812

CHARACTERS...

“NATASHA is young; she loves Andrey with all her heart.”

NATASHA

Natasha is a charming young woman with a vivacious spirit. Loved by all, she becomes embroiled in a scandalous relationship which, when undone, wreaks havoc on her inner life.

“And what about PIERRE? Dear, bewildered, awkward PIERRE?”

PIERRE

Pierre is a philosopher to the core. He has a deep sense of humanity and morality, but it is confounded by his inability to connect to people socially.

“ANATOLE is hot; he spends his money on women and wine.”

ANATOLE

Anatole is a handsome, dashing, notorious rogue who delights in carousing. Although already married, he is infatuated with Natasha.

“There’s a war going on out there somewhere, and ANDREY isn’t here.”

ANDREY

Natasha’s fiancé who is away fighting the war. He is considered a good match for Natasha as he is the son of Prince Bolkonsky.

“SONYA is good; Natasha’s cousin and closest friend.”

SONYA

Natasha’s cousin, she is an incredibly dedicated friend, anticipating and worrying about Natasha’s troubles throughout the story.

“HELENE is Anatole’s sister, married to Pierre.”

HÉLÈNE

Anatole’s sister and Pierre’s not so loyal wife who enjoys romancing other men and manipulating others for pleasure.

“MARYA D. is old-school; a grande dame of Moscow. Natasha’s godmother, strict yet kind.”

MARYA D.

Natasha’s strict but kind godmother who guides her through Moscow society and tries to help her make the right decisions.

“DOLOKHOV is fierce (but not too important); Anatole’s friend, a crazy good shot.”

DOLOKHOV

An excellent marksman, Anatole’s friend has a combative personality, and a cozy relationship with Pierre’s wife Hélène.

“OLD PRINCE BOLKONSKY is crazy,

BOLKONSKY

Andrey’s infirm and demented father who disapproves of Natasha.

MARY is plain; Andrey’s family - totally messed up.”

MARY

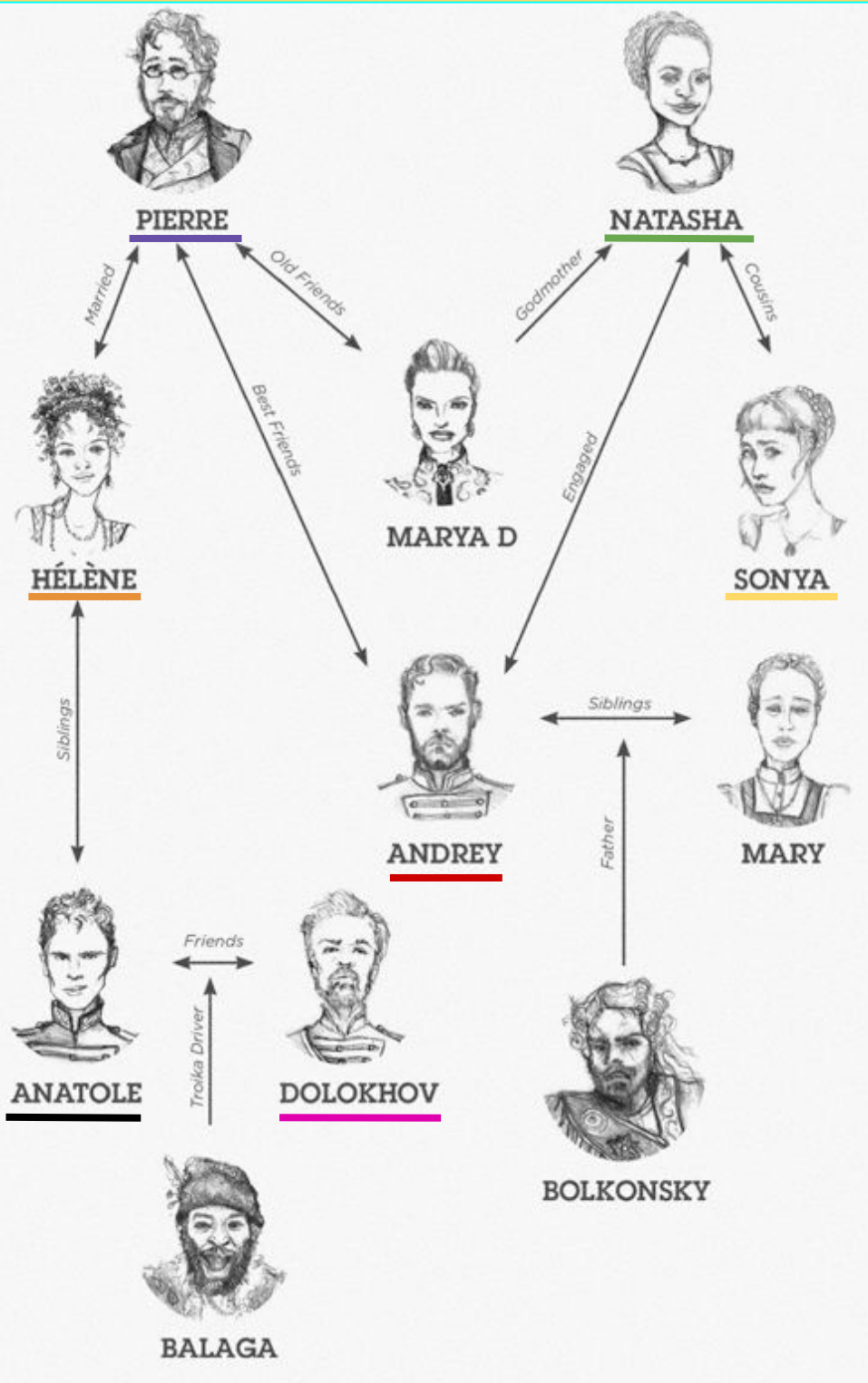
Andrey’s shy sister who feels suffocated and trapped caring for her ill and demanding father and thus envies Natasha.

“BALAGA is just for fun.”

BALAGA

Anatole’s trusted, wild, and reckless sleigh driver.

“This is all in your program / You are at the opera / Gonna have to study up a little bit if you wanna keep with the plot”



Synopsis:

The attention-grabbing beautiful **Natasha** is engaged to **Prince Andrey** - she is an innocent girl from the country and he is a Prince, breaking many social norms of the time.

While **Andrey** is off fighting in the war, **Natasha** travels to Moscow with her best friend, **Sonya**, to meet, and hopefully gain the approval of **Andrey's** family, but they do not welcome her, and she leaves dejected. When she shows up later at the opera, all beauty and bare shoulders and arms, the playboy **Anatole** falls in love, and **Natasha** is overcome with passion for him - he's so hot!

Meanwhile, **Natasha's** old friend, **Pierre**, one of Russia's richest men and married to the beautiful but unfaithful **Hélène**, laments the emptiness of his life and seeks a higher purpose.

Pierre and **Dolokhov**, who is Helene's lover and **Anatole's** friend, get into a drunken duel and **Anatole** begs **Pierre's** wife **Hélène** to invite **Natasha** to the ball. Later on at the ball, **Natasha** and **Anatole** dance. Just before she tells him that she is engaged, he kisses her and she falls in love.

Natasha breaks off her engagement so she can be with **Anatole**, and **Anatole** plans an elopement to be with her. **Pierre** finds out and angrily searches Moscow for **Anatole** - **Anatole** is already married! What is he thinking? An elopement would ruin him. **Natasha** finds out that **Anatole** is already married, and she poisons herself but doesn't die.

The next day **Andrey** returns from war, confused about **Natasha's** behavior and asks **Pierre** to explain. **Pierre** tells him about all the drama and implores **Andrey** to have compassion for **Natasha**, but **Andrey** is cold and tells **Pierre** that he will not be asking for **Natasha's** hand in marriage again. **Pierre** relays the message to **Natasha** but leaves her with hope. As he leaves, the Great Comet of 1812 flies across the sky, leaving **Pierre** with a sense of enlightenment.

War & 19th Century Russia

The action of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* takes place right before the Napoleonic Wars hit Moscow. The bloody, brutal, and long lasting Napoleonic Wars recorded by Tolstoy in his novel *War and Peace* locked the five great European powers of the era (France, Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia) in bloody combat from the years of 1803-1815.

Napoleon's Rise

The conflict was born out of the French Revolution of 1789, where France, once one of the most powerful nations in the world, had become ruined, leaderless, and in a power vacuum. Into this scene stepped Napoleon Bonaparte, whose plan to revive a dying France was through military conquest of other countries. Napoleon was an incredible tactical mind with an insatiable lust for conquest. He rarely relied purely on the strength of his troop numbers, looking instead for tactical advantages.

As Napoleon's desire to demonstrate dominance and control over Europe grew, European tensions continued to mount, though the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 created a brief illusion of peace in Europe. In 1803, the situation exploded when Britain, finally fed up with Napoleon threatening to invade England, declared war on France, instead.

Napoleon's Invasion of Russia



Alexander I (1777–1825) served as emperor of Russia from 1801 to 1825. Portrait by George Dawe

French Emperor Napoleon I fought many battles with Great Britain and even made enemies with the the superpower that was Russia.

In the aftermath of a Russian defeat in 1807, the victorious French Emperor Napoleon I met with the Russian Tsar Alexander I to negotiate peace. A treaty was signed which resulted in a Franco-Russian alliance, whereby Russia was forced to join the Continental System, which was a large-scale blocking of the

“There's a war going on out there somewhere, and ANDREY isn't here.”

shipment of goods against Napoleon's archrival, the United Kingdom. In return, Napoleon promised to support Russia in its ongoing wars. The two emperors parted ways on good terms, basically splitting Europe between them.

The blocking of British goods was ruining the Russian economy which relied heavily on exports and its ability to trade with Great Britain. Tensions between the two empires worsened and in December of 1810, Russian Tsar Alexander decided to break the agreement and leave the Continental System. Napoleon felt betrayed and sought to force Alexander to rejoin the blockade. By the spring of 1811, it was

clear that a new Franco-Russian war was inevitable.

Preparations

Napoleon prepared his Grande Armée, the largest invasion force Europe had yet seen. By June 1812, twelve army corps had been assembled totalling a staggering force of 615,000 men. This army also included approximately 200,000 horses and 1,372 guns. They would not live off the land, as was its custom, but would rely on a supply train of 7,848 vehicles that would keep it well-stocked from supply depots. Napoleon knew the dangers posed by the Russian winter and hoping to win the war within three weeks, he invaded in the summer.

Russia, meanwhile, had 650,000 soldiers in the field in 1812, but they were divided into three armies with only around 250,000 men and 900 guns in the western provinces available to oppose Napoleon.



“The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries” by Jacques-Louis David (1812)

War & 19th Century Russia (cont.)

Napoleon's intention was not to conquer Russian land, but rather to destroy the Russian armies, thereby forcing Tsar Alexander to submit to French will and rejoin the Continental System. It was not a war of conquest but a war of control. By punishing Russia, Napoleon would ensure that the rest of Europe remained subservient.

Scorched Earth

Barclay de Tolly, commander-in-chief of the Russian armies, guessed at Napoleon's intentions and decided to deny Napoleon the battle he desired by luring the French army deep into Russia. This strategic retreat would be combined with a scorched earth policy, whereby the Russians would deny the enemy anything of value as they retreated. Russians destroyed their own crops, windmills, bridges, livestock, and depots as a strategy.

Napoleon was disappointed that the Russians had abandoned the towns without a fight. The sweltering summer heat combined with torrential rains meant that many men fell sick and died. Combined with the deserters, Napoleon had already lost 100,000 men before the first major battle was even fought. The French couldn't move supplies fast enough because of the poor roads. And with the Russians' scorched earth tactics, soldiers as well as over 1,000 horses starved.

The Battle of Smolensk in August was the first large-scale battle of the war. The battle, though technically a French victory, was not the decisive fight that Napoleon needed and was too costly, resulting in 10,000 French losses and around 12,000 Russian deaths. Napoleon seriously considered staying in Smolensk for the winter, but he knew any pause would be thought of as a defeat. He had little choice but to push on toward Moscow.



Detail from "Raevsky Battery during the Battle of Borodino" (1812) by Franz Roubaud

Borodino & Moscow

Russia made a stand and fought Napoleon's Grande Armée in September at Borodino, 75 miles from Moscow. It was the bloodiest single day of the Napoleonic Wars, resulting in 35,000 French and 45,000 Russians killed or wounded. At the end of the day, Russia decided to withdraw and continue retreating which opened the road to Moscow. But the Russian army remained intact, destroying Napoleon's hopes of forcing a surrender. In the latter 19th century, Leo Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's music piece *1812 Overture* depicted the Battle at Borodino and celebrated the resistance and liberation of Russia.

That fall, Napoleon entered Moscow to find its streets deserted. Moscow had ordered the evacuation of the city's inhabitants and had set fire to the supply depots. Dry weather and strong winds ensured that the small fire blossomed into a blaze that soon engulfed the entire city. The city was burned to the ground. Napoleon's troops were thus deprived of provisions and shelter and were forced to resort to pillaging. (Keep in mind that **Great Comet** takes place in Moscow in 1812, right before this invasion and fire.)

Moscow was Russia's largest city and held much cultural and historic significance, leading Napoleon to believe its capture would force Tsar Alexander's hand. However, the resolve of the tsar and the Russian people was much firmer than Napoleon anticipated. On 18 October, Napoleon realized that no peace or sign of defeat was forthcoming and he ordered a retreat.

ACTIVITY: In *THE GREAT COMET*, the horrors of war and the rich lifestyle of peace in Moscow are kept separate. What relationship do you sense between "war" and "peace" in the world today?

War & 19th Century Russia (cont.)

The Fatal Retreat

By the time Napoleon made the decision to abandon Moscow, his army had dwindled to only 100,000 men. Autumnal rains turned the roads into muddy soup, gridlocking the Grande Armée. By early November, Russian winter hit the Grande Armée like a sledgehammer as temperatures dropped to -30°C . Soldiers suffered and died, meanwhile Russia took the opportunity to attack the retreating Napoleon army one last time on their way out.

Aftermath

The French invasion of Russia remains one of the most famous military disasters in history. Of the 615,000 French and allied troops who crossed into Russia in June 1812, it is reported that fewer than 20,000 would stagger back across half a year later. Of those survivors, thousands were suffering from frostbite or starvation. The combined total of military and civilian deaths, Russian included, likely surpassed one million. The invasion remains one of the deadliest military operations in history.



Napoleon's Grande Armée bivouacs during a nighttime blizzard during their retreat from Moscow, 1812. Painting by Vasily Vereshchagin, part of the series *Napoleon I in Russia*, c. 1896-97, Museum of the Patriotic War of 1812, Moscow.



Napoleon watches Moscow burn during his brief occupation of the city in 1812. By Albrecht Adam, 1841.

Napoleon never truly recovered from this catastrophe. Meanwhile, the Russian army did not stop but continued its advance into Europe; it was soon joined by the armies of Britain, Prussia, and Austria, beginning the War of the Sixth Coalition (1813-1814), that would topple Napoleon's empire.

U.S. Involvement

Napoleon's France of course had its own allies; the United States cheered them on from the other side of the pond, and even entered the fight when the British Navy attempted to blockade the trade routes between North America and France. This led to a two-year battle between the U.S. and Britain: which became the War of 1812.

War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy & His Novel

The book that inspired the musical

War and Peace, the historical novel by Leo Tolstoy, was originally published as *Voyna i mir* in 1865–69. This grand study of early 19th-century Russian society is generally thought of as a masterwork of Russian literature and one of the world's greatest novels. It is respected for its realistic detail and variety of psychological analysis.

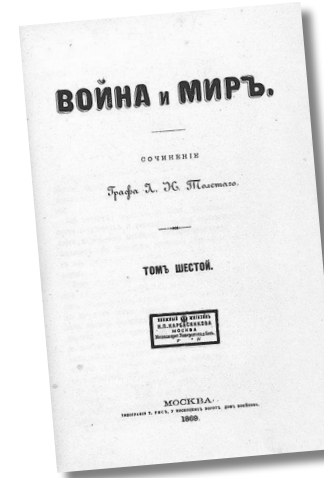
Historical context

War and Peace is known for its realism, something Tolstoy achieved through intensive research. He visited battlefields, read history books on the Napoleonic Wars, and drew on real historical events to create a novel of living history.

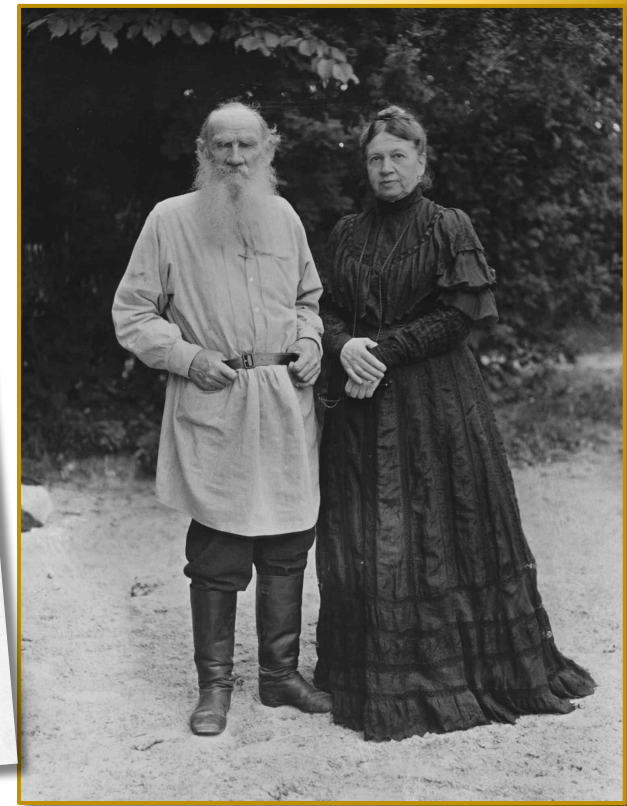
Tolstoy had originally planned to write a novel about the Decembrists, whose revolution in 1825 against the tsar attempted to end autocratic rule in Russia. The Decembrists failed, however, and those who were spared execution were sent to Siberia. Tolstoy tried to write about a Decembrist, now old, returning from exile. But as Tolstoy wrote and revised, the novel evolved into the *War and Peace* known today—a novel that takes place more than ten years before the Decembrist movement. The novel's primary historical setting is the French invasion of Russia in 1812, which became a turning point in the Napoleonic Wars and a period of patriotic significance to Russia. (Some historians argue that this invasion was the event that transitioned into the Decembrist movement years later.)

Writing War and Peace

Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* over seven years. The novel was originally published in installments by the Russian periodical *Russkiy Vestnik* under the title “1805” starting in 1865, but it was received indifferently by the public. And Tolstoy's compulsion to revise spurred him and his wife, Sonya, to decide to focus on publishing the novel in larger printed editions, instead. Tolstoy



War and Peace, first edition, 1869



Leo and Sonya Tolstoy, circa 1906.
Hulton-Deutsch Collection / Getty Images

continued to write, and he also hired the prominent artist Mikhail Bashilov to illustrate the novel. By 1868 three volumes had been released and were selling rapidly. Tolstoy finished three more volumes between 1868 and 1869. Sonya had copied several drafts, all by hand. *War and Peace* filled more than 1,200 pages when first published.

At the time, Tolstoy was heavily criticized for his opinions and theories about war and the people who wage it. Tolstoy objected to the way historians typically attach credit for great accomplishments to a single, heroic individual. He insisted that there are two types of people in the world; those who take action and those who do not. Any event or accomplishment is the result of the actions of many. Tolstoy was the champion of the unsung heroes of the world.

War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy & His Novel (cont.)

WAR AND PEACE - The Summary

War and Peace begins in the Russian city of St. Petersburg in 1805, as fear of Napoleon's ongoing war making begins to set in. Most of the characters are introduced at a party, including **Pierre Bezukhov**, **Andrey Bolkonsky**, and the Kuragin and Rostov families. Much of the novel focuses on the interactions between the Bezukhoffs, Bolkonskys, and the Rostovs.

After their introduction, the characters **Andrey Bolkonsky** and **Nikolay Rostov** go to the Austrian front to engage with Napoleon's troops. **Andrey** is injured at the Battle of Austerlitz and presumed dead, until he arrives home to his wife, **Lise**, who dies during childbirth soon after. Meanwhile, the character **Pierre** has married **Helene Kuragina**. She is unfaithful to him, and **Pierre** duels with the other man, almost killing him. He soon becomes overwhelmed by his marriage and leaves **Helene**. He joins the Freemasons, which influences his personal and business fortunes greatly.

Nikolay has racked up a large amount of gambling debt, which causes the Rostov family to lose most of their fortune. He is encouraged to marry a wealthy heiress, despite promising to marry **Sonya**, his cousin. **Nikolay** eventually witnesses the peace between Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon (Treaties of Tilsit, signed in 1807). **Andrey** soon becomes involved with **Natasha Rostov** only to be told by his father that he must wait a year before marrying her. After some time away, **Andrey** discovers that **Natasha** has been unfaithful. **Andrey** rejects her, and **Pierre** consoles her, eventually falling in love with her.

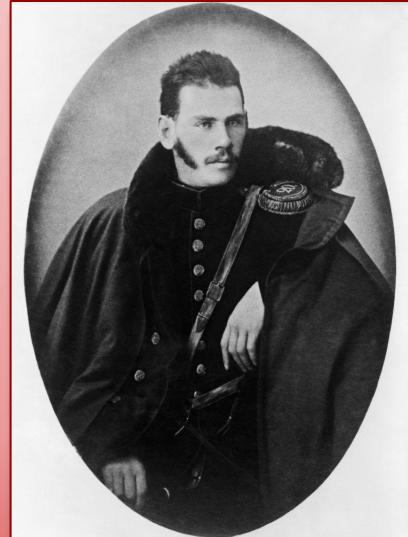
In 1812 Napoleon invades Russia, forcing Tsar Alexander I to declare war. **Andrey** returns to service, and **Pierre** is driven to believe he must personally assassinate Napoleon. As the French advance, **Andrey's** sister, **Mary** is forced to leave her house. **Nikolay** finds her in the streets, and the two reconnect. **Pierre**, still crazed by his imaginary duty, is apprehended by French forces and witnesses a number of executions, which deeply affect him. During his imprisonment, he befriends **Platon Karatev**, a wise peasant. He is later freed from the French and promptly falls ill. After recovering, he marries **Natasha**, and they have four children together. **Nikolay** weds **Mary**, and the two enjoy a happy married life.

Many of the family names used in *War and Peace* are slight alterations of real names Tolstoy had encountered in his life—a deliberate strategy intended to make the novel feel familiar to the Russians who read it. Bolkonsky, for example, is a play on Tolstoy's mother's family name, Volkonsky.

Tolstoy also created the majority of his characters with his own family members in mind; for example, his sister-in-law, Tanya, was the inspiration behind Natasha.

Tolstoy's firsthand knowledge of war likewise influenced *War and Peace*.

When he was 26 years old, he fought in the Crimean War, which he also wrote about in three sketches describing, graphically, his experiences.



Tolstoy served as an officer during the Crimean War. Bettmann / Getty Images

Meet Writer & Composer Dave Malloy

How did you decide to infuse music into Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*?

I first read *War & Peace* while playing piano on a cruise ship. I remember being so enthralled by the scope of Tolstoy's vision; the book was a trashy romance novel, a family drama, a hilarious farce, a military thriller, a philosophical scripture, a treatise on history, all wrapped into one giant, messy, nearly unmanageable tome. When I got to Volume 2, Book 5, I became obsessed, reading the whole 70-page slice in one sitting. At the end of that section, I had an epiphany: this would make a perfect musical. In particular, the way Tolstoy balanced Natasha's tumultuous love affair and downfall with Pierre's endless existential searching reminded me of the classic two-couple structure of many classic musicals. And of course there was so much music in the story, from the night at the opera to the folk music world of Balaga, and so many rich characters and set pieces... the whole thing seemed perfectly suited to the musical form.

What is it about classical literature that attracts you?

I get asked about adaptation a lot; I never really made a conscious decision to become such a devout adapter, but when I look back over my work, I can't help but notice that almost all of it is adaptations of classic works.

Much of this probably comes from being an English Literature major in college (doubling with Music Composition), that's where I was first exposed to the Russians and became obsessed, devouring Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekov and the rest. There is something startlingly contemporary in these works, in how these authors convey the endless complexity of simply being alive. Tolstoy's themes of existential searching and finding meaning in other people seem particularly relevant to our often fractured and impersonal modern world.

What do you mean when you call this show a "great experiment?"

The great experiment of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* specifically was to put a novel on stage; to not just tell the story, but to embrace the formal structure and language of the novel, melodizing Tolstoy's incredible narrative voice and rhetorical style. To that end, rhymes are few and far between (though they are employed, when the music seems to demand it), and the characters often narrate their actions, sometimes speaking about themselves in the third person. So much of the brilliance of Tolstoy comes from the vivid detailing of his characters' rich inner lives: every small social



Photo credit: Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

interaction is micro-processed, so that every glance, stare, kiss, blush, and whisper can encompass an entire world of human experience. Dramatizing these moments became a highly intuitive game of show vs. tell, of knowing when to delight in Tolstoy's text and when to let the music and staging do the work.

Also there is Tolstoy's deep love for and celebration of humanity, and the vast range of human experiences...By combining the melodrama of *Natasha* and *Anatole* with Pierre's spiritual search, the Bolkonskys' domestic nightmare, Balaga's supernatural exuberance and all the rest, a larger picture of what it is to be human is painted, with every outlook complementing and influencing the others, both directly and metaphorically. The music does this too, combining everything from Russian classical to Detroit techno to tell all of these disparate stories as evocatively as possible.

Characters 3 Ways

Tolstoy's novel, *War and Peace*, balances historical events with fiction. Real people that surrounded Tolstoy during his life were adapted into the characters of his most famous novel. In *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*, this adaptation of character is taken a step further; each character in the play is inspired by the historical, the literary, and the creators' own artistic inspiration, all at once.

NATASHA



Postcard by Elisabeth Bohm

In *War and Peace*: **Natasha** is one of the central characters of *War and Peace*. Natasha, at the start of the novel, is a charming young woman with a vivacious spirit and a beautiful singing voice. Loved by all, she becomes involved in a scandalous relationship which, when undone, wreaks havoc on her inner life. By the end of her story, Natasha learns to heal by dedicating herself to the care of others.

In *Great Comet*: As in *War and Peace*, **Natasha** is one of the central characters in *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*. She struggles with the clashing of her youthful passions with her moral convictions and duties as a member of the elite aristocracy.

In Real Life: Tolstoy's wife, **Sonya**, represented a mature version of Natasha, who grows up to become a mother and homemaker in *War and Peace*.

The younger Natasha seen in *War and Peace* and *Great Comet* is more like Sonya's sister, **Tatiana Behrs** (Tanya for short). Tanya had a lovely singing voice, was an excellent writer and could hold her own in any discourse. Moreover, like Natasha in *War and Peace* and *Great Comet*, Tanya underwent an ordeal with an inappropriate suitor with whom she fell in love. Interesting fact: Sonya actually wrote a novella titled *Natasha* about three siblings long before Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace*. The youngest sibling, Natasha, was based on Tanya. The novella did not survive, as Sonya burned it along with her diaries before her marriage to Tolstoy.



Sonya & Tatiana Behrs, 1861

PIERRE

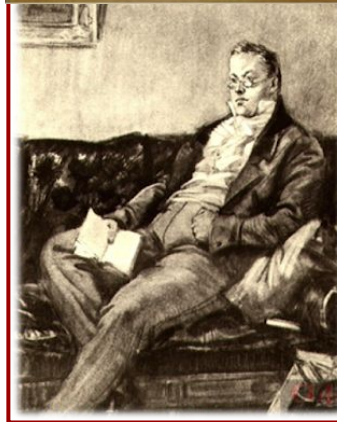
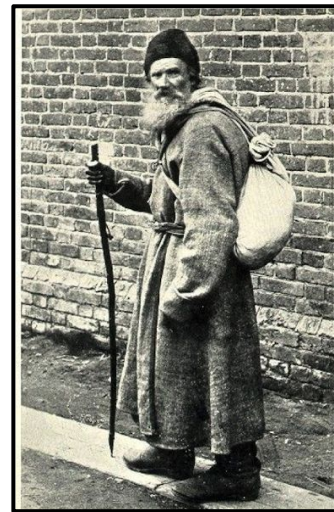


Illustration by D. Sharinova

In *War and Peace*: **Pierre** is a reckless youth with an affinity for drinking. When he suddenly comes into money, he realizes his responsibilities towards his fellow man. Pierre is on a constant quest to understand his place in the universe and the meaning of life - much like Tolstoy, himself.

In *Great Comet*: **Pierre** is a "warm-hearted Russian of the old-school." He describes himself as a joyless drunk, but those around him take pity on him and even find him charming. Just like in Tolstoy's novel, Pierre in *Great Comet* is searching for his place in life and desperately wishes to have an impact on his fellow man, though he spends most of his time reading and drinking alone in his house. What will it take for Pierre to get out of his rut and truly find happiness? Pierre was originally played by composer and lyricist Dave Malloy.

In Real Life: **Pierre's** thoughts and feelings closely reflect those of the book's author, Lev Tolstoy (Leo was his nickname). Through Pierre in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy is able to creatively communicate his existential quandaries, his views on love, and his personal feelings about war not only to the other characters, but also to the reader.



Photograph from Paul Birukoff's *The Life of Tolstoy*

Characters 3 Ways (cont.)

SONYA



AV Nikolaev's 1981
illustrated War and Peace

In War and Peace: **Sonya** is an orphan who lives with the Rostovs and her cousin, Natasha. At the age of fifteen, she falls in love with Natasha's brother, Nicolai. Despite her devotion, Nicolai marries someone else. Sonya ends up tending Nicolai and his wife's children, living in their house. Natasha explains that Sonya is a "sterile flower" and that it is simply her lot in life to be deeply devoted and self sacrificing.

In Great Comet: **Sonya** is just as shy and innocent as Tolstoy's character. She is an incredibly dedicated friend, anticipating and worrying about Natasha's troubles throughout the play. Instead of becoming jealous of Natasha's love affair (something she will likely never have for herself), she laments the loss of her best friend in a heartbreaking song.

In Real Life: **Sophia "Sonya" Tolstaya:** While she was also part of the inspiration for the character of Natasha, Tolstoy's wife shares her name with this character. While Tolstoy's wife certainly did not meet her end as a "sterile flower" (they had thirteen children together), Tolstoy captured a part of his wife's personality, both a prudishness and a tender self-sacrifice and innocence that Tolstoy loved about her.



Sofia Andreevna
Tolstaya, 1862

The Great Comet...of 1811?

"The Comet said to portend untold horrors and the end of the world."

Comets are cosmic snowballs of frozen gases, rock, and dust that orbit the Sun. When frozen, they are the size of a small town. When a comet's orbit brings it close to the Sun, it heats up and spews dust and gases into a giant glowing head larger than most planets.



"Looking at the comet till you get a crick in the neck,"
hand-coloured 1811 satirical print by Thomas Rowlandson

The understanding of comets took a step forward when the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe observed the Great Comet of 1577, using instruments of his own design, a few decades before the invention of the telescope.

Although it was never formally named for him, the **Great Comet of 1811** was discovered by a French astronomer, Honore Flaugergues, on the evening of March 25 of 1811.

In early January 1812, the comet was still as bright, with the last recorded observation being made on August 17. Overall, the comet's period of visibility of almost 17 months was a record for the time, and the 8½ months of naked-eye visibility was a record which stood until Comet Hale-Bopp came along almost 200 years later.

The bright and long-lasting appearance of the Great Comet of 1811 was associated with – perhaps even said to have "predicted" – some of the major historical events that occurred then, such as a series of earthquakes that occurred in what is now Missouri in the U.S. during late 1811 and early 1812. Others say the comet was influential in the creation of wars such as the U.S. War of 1812 and Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia that same year. In some places it was even referred to as "Napoleon's Comet."

Today, astronomers can predict when a comet will appear, but to the earliest stargazers, they came without warning, streaking across the night sky, their distinctive long "tails" seemingly omens of fortune or doom.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Comet_of_1811
<https://www.rocketstem.org/2020/10/10/ice-and-stone-comet-of-week-42/>

WORD SEARCH!

Anatole	Letters
Andrey	Moscow
Balaga	Natasha
Comet	Opera
Duel	Pierre
Helene	Sonya

A	T	D	H	P	N	S	S	R	A	W	Z	P	W	B
C	N	E	U	R	R	Q	Y	U	H	M	Z	V	A	N
M	M	A	M	E	U	T	S	K	S	N	Q	L	O	N
O	E	U	T	O	L	O	I	N	A	Z	A	B	S	K
B	G	T	X	O	C	C	Z	D	T	G	S	Z	Y	U
D	E	Q	L	I	L	H	V	T	A	O	P	E	R	A
L	W	Y	Y	T	U	E	J	I	N	K	K	B	W	M
S	O	N	Y	A	S	L	X	Z	D	U	X	J	B	B
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F	O	W	W	D	Y	E	F	L	R	T	Y	I	R	Y
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X	T	J	H	T	S	Y	R	G	K	X	E	V	H	Z
Q	M	T	Y	P	W	B	Y	N	V	I	E	Y	N	K
D	M	X	D	U	S	L	T	V	P	Y	O	M	W	P



Writer & Composer, Dave Malloy, played Pierre in initial productions at Ars Nova and Kazino. Photo: Ben Arons

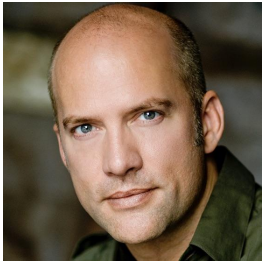
ACTIVITY: All of the characters in *THE GREAT COMET* have to negotiate a variety of social interactions as the story goes on. What kinds of social interactions do people have to navigate today?

Meet the AEA Cast

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States



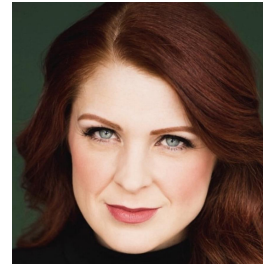
LUCY ANDERS* (Princess Mary, Opera Singer) Excited to be back for her sixth production at Pioneer Theatre Company! First National Tour: *Something Rotten!* (Ensemble, /u/s Portia). New York Theatre: *The Bachelor Girls*, *Hip Hop Cinderella*, *Goodman*, and *Baby!* (Lizzie). Regional credits include: *Ragtime*, *Newsies!* (Katherine), *The Prom*, *Hello Dolly!*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *Grease*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Love Story: The Musical*, *Richard III*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Little Night Music* (Anne), *Starmites*, *The Sound of Music*, *Oliver!*, *A Chorus Line* (Maggie), *Follies* (Young Heidi) and Humperdink's *Hansel and Gretel* (Gretel). BWMT. Instagram: @lusqueal. Thanks to BRS/GAGE.



LENNY DANIEL* (Ensemble, Dance Captain, Associate Director) Choreographed *Mary Poppins* (Utah Shakespeare Festival) and *Spamalot* (Geva Theatre Center and Arkansas Repertory Theatre). Directed and choreographed *Mid-Life! The Crisis Musical* (TexARTS); choreographed *The Little Mermaid* (Forestburgh Playhouse); assistant directed *The Wizard of Oz* National Tour starring Mickey Rooney and Eartha Kitt; assistant choreographed *Gigi* (Papermill Playhouse), assisted Ann Reinking and performed in *Here Lies Jenny* starring Bebe Neuwirth (NYC & SF). Performing credits include Broadway: *Cats* (final original company) and *The Wizard of Oz*. NYC: *Sinatra* (Radio City Music Hall), *Wonderful Town* (NYC Opera). Tours: *Spamalot*, *Chicago*, *South Pacific*, *Camelot*, *Jekyll & Hyde*. Favorite Regional: *Something Rotten!*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Newsies*, *Chess*, *Oliver!*, *The Last Ship* (PTC), *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Baltimore Center Stage), *Mary Poppins*, *Peter Pan* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival), *Gigi*, and *Evita* (Paper Mill Playhouse).



KEVIN EARLEY* (Pierre) Delighted to return to Pioneer after playing Sweeney in *Sweeney Todd*. His latest leading roles were in: *Equus*, *The Play That Goes Wrong*, *Titanic*, *Something Rotten*, *9 to 5 & World Goes Round*. Broadway credits: *Les Miserables*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie & A Tale Of Two Cities*. Off-Broadway Way: *Death in Death Takes a Holiday* (NY Drama Desk Nomination). Directing Credits: *The Fantastics*, *The Wonder*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Changing Channels & The Glass Menagerie*. Acting Awards include: Joseph Jeff Award for *Assassins*, L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award for *1776* and 4 Ovation Nominations for leading roles in *Can-Can*, *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*, *It Came From Beyond & Side Show*. Thank you to Karen and the whole Pioneer team here in Salt Lake City. kevinearley.com



GINGER BESS* (Helene) was last seen on the PTC stage as Magenta in *The Rocky Horror Show*. Thanks to Karen and Phil for bringing her back to perform another dream role. Ginger has recently been touring the country with her vintage jazz band. She received national recognition as the mezzo-soprano soloist in Bernstein's *Mass* with Utah Symphony. She was featured in record breaking runs of *Les Miserables* at PTC as well as in *Rent* and *Sunset Blvd*. Favorite regional theatre roles include: Svetlana (*Chess*), Magenta (*The Rocky Horror Show*), Baker's Wife (*Into The Woods*), Clara (*Passion*) Roxie Hart (*Chicago*), Mary Magdalene (*Jesus Christ Superstar*), Mrs. Walker (*The Who's Tommy*), Susan (*Tick, Tick...Boom!*), Betty Haynes (*White Christmas*), and Sally Bowles (*Cabaret*). Ginger has a private voice studio and is a teacher at Weber State University. She is also a proud member of Actors' Equity. Love to Daniel, Axel and Jude. gingerbessmusic.com



MARY FANNING DRIGGS* (Marya, Accordion) is thrilled to be back on the PTC stage for her 25th production, especially since she gets to perform with her daughter Faith! Driggs appeared earlier this season in *Bonnie & Clyde* (Cumie Barrow). Other PTC shows include *Elf* (Emily Hobbs), *Mamma Mia!* (Rosie), *The Last Ship* (regional premiere), *Sweeney Todd*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Rona Lisa Peretti), *Irving Berlin's White Christmas* (Martha Watson), *Once* (Baruska), *The Music Man* (Mrs. Paroo), and *Les Miserables* (Mme Thenardier/ensemble). Film and TV: Hallmark's *The Holiday Stocking*, *The Roads We Travel*, and the upcoming series *Dusty Bluffs*. When she is not performing you can find her cooking, baking, growing things, and playing with her amazing grandchildren. Instagram @marydriggs



ALI EWOLDT* (Natasha) is grateful to return to SLC, where she played Mei in the world premiere of *Gold Mountain* at the West Valley Performing Arts Center. Her other credits include Christine Daaé in *The Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway, Cosette in *Les Miserables* (Broadway, National Tour), *The King and I* (Lincoln Center), Luisa in *The Fantasticks* (Off-Broadway), Amalia in *She Loves Me* (Signature Theatre, Helen Hayes nomination), Rose in *The Secret Garden* (CTG), Mary Sunshine in *Chicago* (The Munny), and Sarah Brown in *Guys and Dolls* (Sacramento Music Circus). Concert/symphony work includes: NY Pops at Carnegie Hall, APO, Houston Symphony, Kaohsiung Symphony and The Boston Pops. BA in psychology: Yale University. Proud Filipina American. Love to her husband, Mat! @aliewoltdt

Meet the AEA Cast



MELANIE FERNANDEZ* (Sonya) is delighted to make her Pioneer Theatre Company debut! Recent credits include Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (Slow Burn Theatre), Kim in *Miss Saigon* (WPPAC) and Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin: A Musical Spectacular!* onboard the Disney Fantasy (Disney Cruise Line). UCLA grad. Huge thanks to KMR Talent, family, and David for their support.



EDWARD JUVIER* (Balaga, Bolkonsky) happily returns to Pioneer after having appeared as Constantine Bouc in this season's opener, *Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express*. Broadway and tour credits include: *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*. Regionally, Edward has appeared at Goodspeed, STAGES St Louis (Theater Circle Award), Engeman, Tuacahn, Riverside, Meadow Brook, Theatreworks Palo Alto, Arrow Rock Lyceum, Allenberry, Ivoryton, Forestburgh, Gulf Coast Symphony, and Transcendence. Graduate of the Boston Conservatory. Thank you for having me back!



JUSTIN LUCIANO* (Dolokhov, Guitar) is excited to be making his PTC debut in this incredible show! He was seen last year in Tuacahn Amphitheatre's productions of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Quasimodo), *Tarzan*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Past credits include: *West Side Story* (Virginia Rep), *Rock of Ages* (The Eagle Theatre), and *The Lightning Thief* (Theatreworks USA). Graduate of Marymount Manhattan College. Special thanks to the team at FSE, and a big thank you to Emily, Daisy, Mom, Dad, Toni, and Pat for their never ending love and support.



ALEKS PEVEC* (Anatole) is honored to be a part of this show. Broadway: *Catch Me If You Can*, *Evita*, *Aladdin*, *The Most Happy Fella*, and *Something Rotten!*. Tours: *Wicked* (LA Company) and *White Christmas* (LA company). He is most remembered for his performance as the title role in *The Who's Tommy* with Alice Ripley and Nona Hendryx. Regional: Jesus in *Jesus Christ Superstar* at North Carolina Theater and Shakespeare in *Something Rotten!* at numerous regional theaters. His short film *Erebus*, which he wrote and produced, will have a premiere in May. Aleks owns a surf company in California called Lipsmack Surf, a surf community that encourages more LGBTQ people to get out in the water and catch waves. @lipsmacksurf. All his love to Danny and Reef. Živjeli!



TROY VALJEAN RUCKER* (Ensemble, Clarinet) Off-Broadway: *Relapse*; *Romeo & Bernadette*. Regional: Dave Malloy & Anne Washburn's *Little Bunny Foo Foo* (world premiere); *Mr. Holland's Opus*; *August Rush*; *Clybourne Park*; *Angels In America*; *The Scottsboro Boys*; *Shrek*; *Oklahoma!*; *The Buddy Holly Story*; *Zanna, Don't!*; *Elegies for Angels*, *Punks and Raging Queens*; *L'Histoire du Soldat*. National Tour: *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Europe: International Symphony Orchestra. Concerts/Opera: Carnegie Hall; New York City Opera; Lincoln Center (David Geffen Hall, Alice Tully Hall, David H. Koch Theatre); The Kennedy Center; Aretha Franklin with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. TV/commercials/voiceovers: *Law & Order: Organized Crime* (NBC); Lifetime; History Channel; Investigation Discovery; UPN.



TYLER SYMONE* (Ensemble) is an NYC-based artist who is thrilled to be back at PTC after appearing earlier this season in *Christmas In Connecticut* and last season in *A Christmas Story*. Select credits: *Beehive* (Florida Repertory Theatre, Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre); *Cinderella* (Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre); *Caroline, Or Change* (Actors' Playhouse, Firebrand Theatre); *Sister Act!* (Post Playhouse); *Xanadu* (The Getz Theater). You can find out more about Tyler at tylersymone.com. Many thanks to her wonderful friends, family, and partner for their support. Repped by MTA. IG: @TheTylerSymone