

# **A Survey of Russian Opera**

***Art Axelrod***



## **The Guild of Mercury Opera Rochester**

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## Russia in Context



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## Russian History Some Highpoints - 1

from 1000 BCE

Archeological evidence of Slavic Tribes occupying area that is now Russia.

250 CE

Slavic Tribes have consolidated and expanded their area. Not yet a sense of statehood.

ca. 800 CE

Norse begin invading Slavic regions.

862 CE

Rurik (Hrorekr) establishes capital at Novgorod  
Norse-Slavic principality named "Rus".

883

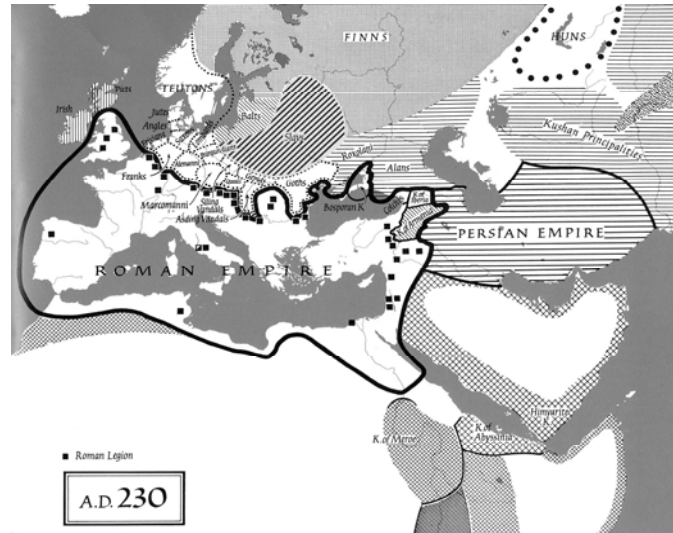
Oleg moves capital to Kiev.

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## 230 CE – Expansion and Consolidation

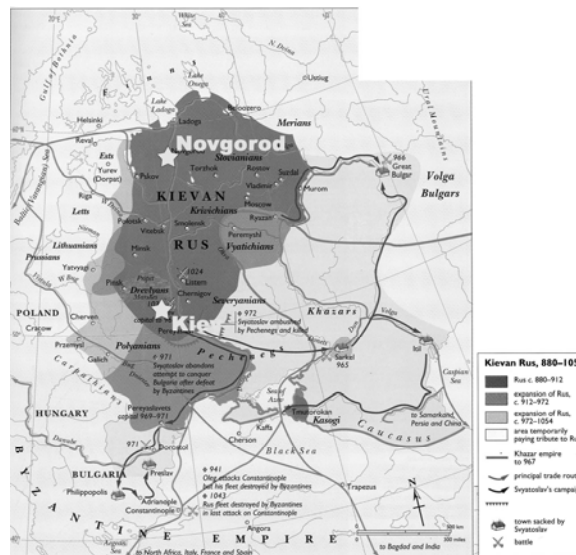


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## 880 – 1054 Rurik and the Kievan Rus



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## Russian History Some Highpoints - 2

- 863 Sts. Cyril and Methodius begin to proselytize in Slavic lands
  - 988 Grand Duke Vladimir I of Kiev converts to Eastern Orthodox Christianity
  - 1096 Polovtsi (Cuman) commence raids on Russian lands
  - 1156 Yuri Dalgoruki founds Moscow
  - 1185 Prince Igor of Novgorod-Seversk – failed campaign against the Polovtsi
- “Russia” is now a loose confederation of feuding Principalities

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## Russia in 1237



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## Russian History

### "The Mongol Yoke"

- 1240 Mongol "Golden Horde" under Batu Khan sacks Kiev.
- 1240-15<sup>th</sup> Century - Russia under "The Mongol Yoke". Mongols hold Russian Principalities under tribute (but do not govern).
- 1240-1242 Prince Alexander ("Nevsky") of Novgorod defeats Swedes & Teutonic Knights.
- 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Century – Rise of Muscovy and dissolution of Mongol Hegemony
  - 1453 – Fall of Constantinople

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## Muscovite Dominance and the Rise of Russian State

- ◆ 1462-1505 Ivan III ("The Great") of Muscovy
  - Muscovy annexes surrounding Principalities
  - Stopped paying tribute to Golden Horde
  - 1480 "Battle of Ugra" (bloodless) marks end of Mongol hegemony
  - Establishes autocratic central state
- ◆ 1533-1584 Ivan IV ("The Terrible")
  - Proclaimed first "Tsar of Russia" - 1547
  - Conquers Tatar Khanates of Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556)
  - Begins to annex Siberia (East of Urals)
  - Russia becomes a unified nation.
  - Mentally ill. Killed his eldest son Ivan in a fit of rage. Middle son, Dimitry, an epileptic, died as a result of accident. Youngest son Fyodor was developmentally disabled
  - Left Russian state in a shambles.

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## Russia in 1598



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## "The Time of Troubles"

- ◆ 1584-1598 Fyodor I
  - Youngest son of Ivan IV, last of the Rurikid dynasty.
  - Unfit to rule. His brother-in-law, Boris Godunov, becomes Regent and "Lord Protector"
- ◆ 1598-1605 Boris Godunov
  - Elected Tsar by Council of Boyars
  - Boris erroneously charged with death of Dmitry Ivanovich
  - Yet, several "False Dimitri" pretenders appear
- ◆ 1598-1613 "Time of Troubles"
  - Succession of weak Tsars and Pretenders ("False Dmitris").
  - Russia under attack by Poles and Swedes
- ◆ 1613 Mikhail Romanov elected Tsar
  - Russia achieves stability
  - Romanov dynasty will continue until Revolution of 1917
  - Polish assassination plot thwarted by commoner, Ivan Susanin

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## Peter The Great

### 1682-1725 Reign of Peter I ("The Great")

- Neutralizes *Streltsy*, diminishes power of the Boyars.
- 1703 Founds St. Petersburg, moves capital.
- 1700-1721 Great Northern War: Sweden vs. Russia, Denmark-Norway, Saxony-Poland.
- 1709 Battle of Poltava mitigates Swedish threat to Russia, establishes Russia as a military power
- Introduces Western European culture and technology.
- Russia is now a European power.

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## Russia and Western Europe

- ◆ Never part of the Roman Empire
- ◆ Never under Roman Catholic Church
  - Monasteries were custodians of knowledge during Dark Ages
  - Western music cultivated by Church
- ◆ Did not experience the Renaissance
- ◆ Did not participate in the Age of Enlightenment.
- ◆ Not part of the scientific and technical advances of 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- ◆ Profoundly influenced by Mongol & Turkic ("Tartar") Central Asia
- ◆ Did not enter Western European world until reign of Peter The Great

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## 19<sup>th</sup> Century - The Golden Age of Russian Literature

- ◆ Nikolai Karamzin 1766-1826
- ◆ Alexander Pushkin 1799-1837
- ◆ Nikolai Gogol 1809-1852
- ◆ Mikhail Lermontov 1814-1841
- ◆ Ivan Turgenev 1818-1883
- ◆ Fyodor Dostoyevsky 1821-1881
- ◆ Leo Tolstoy 1828-1910
- ◆ Anton Chekhov 1860-1904

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## Alexander Sergeyevitch Pushkin

Some Operas from "The Russian Shakespeare"

- ◆ *Ruslan and Ludmilla* (1820) – Glinka (1842)
- ◆ *The Gypsies* (1824) – Rachmaninoff, *Aleko* (1892)
- ◆ *Poltava* (1828) – Tchaikovsky, *Mazeppa* (1883)
- ◆ *The Stone Guest* (1830) – Dargomizhsky (1872)
- ◆ ***Boris Godunov*** (1831) – Mussorgsky (1869)
- ◆ *Eugene Onegin* (1831) – Tchaikovsky (1878)
- ◆ *Tale of the Tsar Saltan* (1831) – Rimsky Korsakov (1900)
- ◆ ***The Golden Cockerel*** (1833) – Rimsky-Korsakov (1909)
- ◆ ***The Queen of Spades*** (1834) – Tchaikovsky (1890)
- ◆ Etc. . . .

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## The Roots of Russian Opera

Prior to 1835 "Russian classical music", including opera, didn't exist. But its roots had been there all along:

- ◆ Russian Folk Music
- ◆ Russian Orthodox Liturgical Music
- ◆ Central Asian Folk Music

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## Roots: Russian Folk Song **Traditional, *In the Kuban***

1990

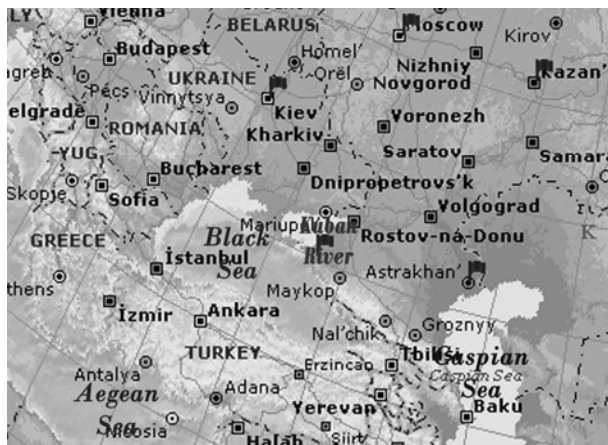
Kuban Cossack Chorus  
Victor Zakharchenko, dir.

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## *In The Kuban* Traditional Russian

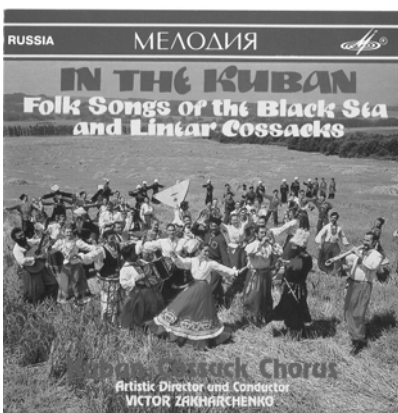


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## *In The Kuban* Traditional Russian



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Roots:  
Russian Orthodox Liturgy

***Anonymous, Many Years***, c. 1700

1998

Andrei Popkov, "oktivist" bass  
The Orthodox Singers Male Choir, Georgy  
Smirnov, dir.

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*Many Years*

Each office in the Orthodox rite concludes  
by wishing long life to the local deacon.

This chant by an anonymous composer  
from the period of Peter the Great (1682–  
1725). The deacon recites the names  
and titles of those dedicated followed by  
the full choir wishing *Many years*.

*...from the album liner notes*

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Roots:  
Central Asian Folk Music  
**Traditional Uzbek, *Uzbekiston*  
*Dyorim***

Soviet Field Recording, 1925-1948

A. Mirzaeva, vocalist, and unnamed band

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*Uzbekiston Dyorim*

Between 1925 and 1948, groups of Soviet ethno-musicologists made field recordings of the music of ethnic minorities within the Soviet Union.

This is from Uzbekistan. The CD it appears on gives no further information.

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## Uzbek Dancer



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## Our Composers

- ◆ **Michael Glinka** (1804-1857)
- ◆ **Anton Rubinstein** (1829-1894)
- ◆ **"The Five"**
  - Mily Balakirov (1837-1910)
  - César Cui (1835-1918)
  - **Modest Mussorgsky** (1839-1881)
  - **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov** (1844-1908)
  - **Alexander Borodin** (1833-1887)
- ◆ **Peter Tchaikovsky** (1840-1893)

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## The First Russian Opera Mikhail Glinka

### **Through Storm and Gale from *A Life for the Tsar (Ivan Susanin)***

1989

Sofia National Opera Chorus, Sofia  
Festival Orchestra, Emil Tchakarov,  
cond.

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## A Life for the Tsar

Mikhail Glinka, 1804 – 1857

Libretto by Georgy Rosen, Vasily Zhukovsky and  
Nestor Kukolnik.

First Performance, 1836, St. Petersburg

1613: A brave commoner, Ivan Susanin,  
sacrifices his own life to thwart a Polish  
assassination plot against the young Tsar,  
Mikhail Romanov.

Loyal peasants rejoice the coming of the young  
Tsar and the end of the Time of Troubles

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**"Through Storm and Gale" from  
*A Life for the Tsar***

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

In storm and gale....

CHORUS OF PEASANT MEN

Through the sky the falcon holds his valiant course.

LEADER

In a storm across Russia...

MEN

A fine fellow sings a Russian song.

LEADER

Fear I fear not,

MEN

I do not fear death! I'll die for the Tsar, for Russia!

LEADER

Peace in the damp earth,

MEN

Honour in my native land, Glory be to me in holy Russia!

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**"Through Storm and Gale" – 2**

PEASANT WOMEN (*offstage*)

Spring has taken its course, Lovely Spring has come.

All the birds are back, And we are glad to have these  
dear guests!

(*They come on stage.*)

MEN

We have rescued The sun from the hostile dark,

WOMEN

When Russia took Moscow, And re-entered the Kremlin,  
All our fine men came back to us And we rejoice to see  
our brothers and husbands!

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### "Through Storm and Gale" – 3

ALL

From captivity, back home to us Our young boyar has  
returned!

All grief has gone. Now that the sun has risen!

Who's as bright as the sun? Who's as fiery as the sun?

Mikhail Fyodorovich! *{Romanov – founder of the Romanov dynasty}*

He's back with us, back with us, We'll all stand behind  
him like a dense forest, While he shines like the sun  
from the heavens.

Who will seize him, who will seize him? Who will dare  
confront you? Who will dare confront us? Who?

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### "Through Storm and Gale" (conclusion)

We will all protect him like a wall, like a  
mountain,

We will all move forward as one dark mass, like  
a thunderstorm,

We are all ready to die for him!

We will all protect him like a wall, like a  
mountain,

Woe betide evil invaders,

Evil invaders!

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## A Very Russian Demon Anton Rubinstein

**"I am he whom you heard in the  
midnight silence" from *The  
Demon***

Dmitry Hvorostovsky (bbr) - 1994  
Kirov Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, cond.

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## The Demon

Anton Rubinstein, 1829 – 1894

Libretto by P.A. Viskovatov after a poem by  
Mikhail Lermontov

First Performance, 1875, Mariinsky Theater, St.  
Petersburg.

A Demon attempts and fails to seduce a  
virtuous young woman, during the course of  
which the Demon seems to fall in love her.

Attempting to seduce Tamara, the Demon  
expresses his love for her

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## Rubinstein's *Demon*

I am he whom you heard in the midnight silence,  
whose thoughts reached your soul as a whisper,  
whose sadness was to you a vague feeling.

I am he who kills hope with a glance, the moment hope  
begins to flourish, I am he who is loved by none and  
is cursed by every living thing. Yes, I am he who is  
loved by none and is cursed by every living thing.

I am the scourge of those who serve me on Earth, I am  
the king of knowledge and freedom, I am heaven's  
enemy, a vexation to Nature and, look, I am at your  
feet. With sweet delight, I bring to you a simple  
prayer of love, the first earthly torment I have known  
and the first tears I have shed.

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## The Mongol Yoke Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

### **Fevronia's Prayer from *The Invisible City of Kitezh***

Elina Prokina (s), Vladimir Galusin (t) – 1995

Vienna Symphony, Sofia Chamber Choir,  
Vladimir Fedoseyev, cond.

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## The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, 1844 – 1908

Libretto by Vladimir Ivanovich Bel'sky based on  
Russian Folktales.

First Performance, 1907, Mariinsky Theater, St.  
Petersburg.

The virtuous "nature girl", Fevronia, falls in love  
with Prince Vsevolod and his city, Kitezh,  
during the time of the Mongol invasions.

Fevronia and the town drunk, Grishka  
Kutyerma, are captured by Mongols.  
Kutyerma capitulates but Fevronia prays to  
God to save her adopted city.

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## Fevronia's Prayer from *Kitezh*

### **Kutyerma**

Stop, you godless heathens! (*With great sadness. Softly.*) I  
am afraid of the torture...

(*Desperately. Decisively.*)

As you wish. I shall lead you, cruel enemies, even if I  
suffer eternal damnation and the memory of me is  
forever linked with that of Judas.

(*The Tartars laugh cheerfully.*)

### **Tartar Chieftan**

It took long enough!

**Both Tartar Chieftans** (*to the Tartars*)

Onward to Kitezh, warriors!

(*They mount their steeds and ride away. They gradually  
disappear.*)

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## Fevronia's Prayer from *Kitezh* – (2)

### **Tartars**

We spread cruel and deadly punishment over Russia.

We will raze your powerful cities and burn down  
God's churches; we will kill the children and the  
aged, and will take whoever is strong enough back to  
our horde.

*(Fevronia remains alone, guarded by a group of Tartars. Some of  
the guards are preparing a wagon on which Fevroniya will be  
placed.)*

### **Fevronia** *(praying)*

God, make Kitezh and its righteous citizens invisible.

*(She is dragged to the wagon.)*

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## Oriental Fantasy Rimsky-Korsakov

### **"Hymn to the Sun" from *The Golden Cockerel*** (Video)

Olga Trifonova (s) – 2002

Orchestre de Paris, Kent Nagano, cond.

Théâtre Musical de Paris – Châtelet

Stage Director, Ennosuke Ichikawa, Kabuki  
actor and director.

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## The Golden Cockerel (Le Coq d'Or) Rimsky-Korsakov, 1844 – 1908

Libretto by V.I. Bel'sky after an epic poem by Pushkin.

First Performance, 1909, Moscow

A scathing political satire disguised as a fairy tale.

After a crushing military defeat, King Dodon and General Polkan, wandering lost, happen upon the camp of the mysterious Queen of Shemakha. It is dawn and the Queen sings a Hymn to the Sun.

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## The Varangians Rimsky-Korsakov

### **Song of the Viking Guest from *Sadko***

Fyodor Chaliapin – 1927

Orchestra not listed, Eric Coates, cond.

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## Sadko

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, 1844 – 1908

Libretto by composer and V.I. Bel'sky, after 11<sup>th</sup> century epic poem.

First Performance, 1898, Moscow

A minstrel, Sadko, charms the daughter of the King of the Ocean Sea, who rewards him with enough gold to become a merchant.

Sadko is trying to decide where to sail his new ship. Three travellers sing about their native lands. Here, a Viking sings about the North.

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## Song of the Viking Guest

*Ritornello*

### **VIKING MERCHANT**

On the terrible rocks the waves break with a roar and run back  
whirling with white foam;

But the grey cliffs stoutly bear the pressure of the waves, standing  
over the sea.

Our Viking bones are of those stone rocks, our life's blood came  
from those ocean waves; our secret thoughts from the mists.  
We were born in the sea, we will die on the sea.

The Vikings have swords of Damascus steel, deadly sharp arrows,  
they bring unfailing death to our foes.

Courageous are the people of the midnight lands, great is their  
God Odin, gloomy their sea.

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## Russia and The Polovtsi Alexander Borodin

### **Dance of the Polovstian Maidens from *Prince Igor***

(Video)

Tatiana Pavlovskaya (s) - 1998  
Kirov Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet,  
Valery Gergiev, cond

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## Prince Igor

Alexander Borodin, 1833 – 1887

Libretto by the composer, scenario by V.V  
Stasov after the medieval epic *Song of Igor's  
Campaign*.

First Performance, 1890, Mariinsky, St.  
Petersburg

Prince Igor of Novgorod-Seversk fights a valiant  
but losing campaign against the Polovtsi.

Igor has been captured by the Polovtsi Khan  
Konchak, who treats him as a noble guest.  
The Polovtsi stage an evening entertainment  
and a maiden sings to the Khan's daughter.

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Cultural Ambivalence  
Peter Tchaikovsky  
**Lisa's Party Scene**  
**from *The Queen of Spades***  
(Video)

Olga Borodina (ms), Evgenia Perlasova  
(ms) - 1992  
Kirov Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet,  
Valery Gergiev, cond

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The Queen of Spades  
Peter Ilitch Tchaikovski (1840-1893)

Libretto by composer and Modest Tchaikovsky  
after novel by Pushkin.

First Performance, 1890, Mariinsky, St.  
Petersburg

An army officer, obsessed with a magical  
gambling formula, seeks to reach a  
mysterious countess by wooing her ward.

Lisa's aristocratic friends give her a party to  
celebrate her forthcoming wedding to a  
prince.

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## Lack of Esteem in Some Russian Intellectual Circles

"Every time a Russian opera is performed, there is a disgusting smell of cabbage soup and gruel and already during the overture an unbearable stench of vodka spreads through the theater."

*A Director of the Russian Imperial Opera,  
quoted by Fyodor Chaliapin in his Autobiography*

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## The Time of Troubles Modest Mussorgsky

### **Coronation Scene from *Boris Godunov***

(Video)

Robert Lloyd (b) – 1990

Kirov Orchestra and Chorus, Valery Gergiev, cond.

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

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## Boris Godunov

Modest Mussorgsky, 1839 – 1881

Libretto by the composer after dramatic poem by Pushkin and *History of the Russian State* by Nikolai Karamzin.

First Performance, 1874, Mariinsky, St, Petersburg

Boris has achieved the throne as a result of assassinating Tsarevitch Dimitry. He is destroyed by his conscience

At his coronation he reveals the self-doubts that will ultimately destroy him.

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## The Time of Troubles Modest Mussorgsky

### **Death Scene: Boris' Farewell to His Son from *Boris Godunov***

Boris Christoff (b) – 1952

National Orchestra and Chorus of Radiodiffusion Francaise, Issay Dobrowen, cond.

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## Boris Godunov

Modest Mussorgsky, 1839 – 1881

Death Scene: Boris' Farewell to his son.

Boris realizes he is dying. He says farewell to his beloved son, Fyodor, giving him advice on ruling. Then he prays for forgiveness.

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## Boris' Farewell to his Son

**BORIS**

Good-bye, my son – I'm dying! Soon you will be Tsar.

Don't ask me by what means I acquired the throne.  
There is no need for you to know. You yourself have every right to rule – as my successor and as my first-born son.

Oh my son, my own flesh and blood! Don't trust these seditious Boyars and their slanders. Keep a sharp eye on their secret dealings with Lithuania. Don't spare the traitors – punish them mercilessly! Be stern but just and impartial in judging your countrymen.

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## Boris' Farewell to his Son – 2

Guard the True Faith and fight to defend it, and  
venerate the holy saints of God. Cherish your  
sister the Czarevna. She has only you to  
protect her now – Xenia, that sweet innocent  
darling of ours. . . .

Oh God, God! Look down, I pray You, upon  
these tears – the tears of a sinning father!  
Not for myself do I beseech thee, my Lord.  
From those remote celestial summits let there  
be shed upon my guiltless children the light  
of grace. . . .

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## Boris' Farewell to his Son – 3

Pure and gentle Powers of Heaven, guardians  
of the Eternal Throne – with your luminous  
wings preserve this boy of mine from all harm  
and evil and deliver him from temptation.

*{Sound of Funeral Bells}*

Listen! It's ringing! . . . The funeral bell is  
ringing! . . . The wailing has started! . . .

Bring me the holy shroud – the Tsar is leaving  
for his tomb!

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Спасибо



И До Свидания!

Thank You



And Good Night!

## Playlist

# Survey of Russian Opera

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12/15/2005

### Roots: Folk Song

**1. “In the Kuban” (Kuban Region Folksong) (1:35)**

Traditional – 1990

Kuban Cossack Chorus, Victor Zakharchenko, dir.

Melodiya SUCD 30-00610

### Roots: Liturgical Music

**2. “Many Years” (Russian Orthodox Liturgy) (2:39)**

Traditional Liturgy (c. 1700)

Andrei Papkov (“oktavist” bass) - 1998

The Orthodox Singers Male Choir, Georgy Smirnov, dir.

Russian Season SMK 53507

### Roots: Central Asia

**3. “Uzbekiston Dyorim” (Uzbekistan) (1:48)**

Traditional

A. Mirzaeva – (Field Recording 1925-1948)

Yazoo 7007

### The First Russian Opera: Glinka

**4. Chorus: “Through Storm and Gale” from *A Life for the Tsar* (6:02)**

Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)

1989

Sofia National Opera Chorus, Sofia Festival Orchestra, Emil Tchakarov, cond.

Sony Classical S3K 46487

### A Very Russian Demon: Anton Rubinstein

**5. “I am he whom you heard in the midnight silence” from *The Demon* (3:33)**

Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894)

Dmitry Hvorostovsky (bbr) - 1994

Kirov Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, cond.

Philips 438 872-2

### The Mongol Yoke: Rimsky-Korsakov

**6. Fevronia’s Prayer from *The Invisible City of Kitezh* (2:22)**

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 -1908)

Elina Prokina (s), Vladimir Galusin (t) – 1995

Vienna Symphony, Vladimir Fedoseyev, cond.

Sofia Chamber Choir

Koch 3-1144-2

### Oriental Fantasy: Rimsky-Korsakov

**7. “Hymn to the Sun” from *The Golden Cockerel* (5:12)**

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 -1908)

Olga Trifonova (s) – Théâtre Musical de Paris – Châtelet, 2002

Orchestre de Paris, Kent Nagano, cond.

TDK DVUS-OPLCO (DVD Video)

**The Varangians: Rimsky-Korsakov****8. “Song of the Viking Guest” from *Sadko* (3:37)**

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 -1908)  
 Fyodor Chaliapin (b) – 1927  
 Orchestra not listed, Albert Coates, cond.  
 EMI CDH 7610092 (Transferred from shellac 78 rpm, 1987)

**Russia and the Polovtsi: Borodin****9. “Dance of the Polovtsian Maidens” from *Prince Igor* (7:21)**

Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)  
 Tatiana Pavlovskaya (s) - 1998  
 Kirov Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet, Valery Gergiev, cond.  
 Philips B0001093-09 (DVD Video)

**Cultural Ambivalence: Tchaikovsky****10. Lisa’s Party from *Queen of Spades (Pique Dame)* (8:08)**

Peter Ilitch Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)  
 Olga Borodina (ms), Evgenia Perlasova (ms) – 1992  
 Kirov Orchestra and Chorus, St. Petersburg, Valery Gergiev, cond.  
 Philips 070 434-9 (Video DVD)

**The Time of Troubles: Mussorgsky****11. Coronation Scene from *Boris Godunov* (1872) (7:46)**

Modest Mussorgsky (1839 -1881)  
 Robert Lloyd (b) – 1990 Royal Opera House, Covent Garden  
 Kirov Orchestra and Chorus, St. Petersburg, Valery Gergiev, cond.  
 Philips 075 089-9 (Video DVD)

**The Time of Troubles: Mussorgsky****12. Boris’ Death: Farewell to his Son from *Boris Godunov* (Rimsky-Korsakov) (6:43)**

Modest Mussorgsky (1839 -1881)  
 Boris Christoff (b) – 1952  
 National Orchestra and Chorus of Radiodiffusion Francaise, Issay Doborwen, cond.  
 Pearl GEMS0188 (Reissue)