

November 12, 2020 – Alexander Borodin’s *Prince Igor*

On this week’s Thursday Night Opera House we’ll hear the 1995 Mariinsky Theater production of Alexander Borodin’s epic Russian opera *Prince Igor*. Known in Russian as *Knjaz’ Igor*, it consists of a prologue and four acts. The composer adapted the libretto from the ancient Russian epic *The Lay of Igor’s Host*, which recounts the campaign of Ruthenian prince Igor Svyatoslavich against the invading Polovtsian tribes in 1185. Borodin also incorporated material drawn from two medieval Kievan chronicles. The opera was left unfinished when the composer died in 1887 and was edited and completed by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Glazunov, and Yuri Faliek. It was first performed on October 23, 1890 at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia.

In the Prologue, Prince Igor (bass **Mikhail Kit**) leads his army against the Polovtsians, who have enslaved Russia. A solar eclipse frightens the people, but Igor presses on. He leaves his wife, Yaroslavna (soprano **Galina Gorchakova**), in the care of her brother, Prince Vladimir Galitsky (bass-baritone **Vladimir Ognovienko**).

Galitsky is living it up in the prince’s absence. Having bribed the people of Putivil with wine and song, he persuades them to depose Igor and elect him. No news has come of Prince Igor and Yaroslavna misses her husband. She receives a delegation of young women who complain that Galitsky has abducted one of their number against her will. When Yaroslavna demands her release, Galitsky complies but reminds his sister that he is now the ruler, not her husband. The boyars bring news that the Polovtsian army is at the gate and that Igor has been captured.

Igor’s son, Vladimir Igorievich (tenor **Gegam Grigorian**), has fallen in love with Konchakovna (mezzo-soprano **Olga Borodina**), daughter of Khan Konchak (bass **Bulat Minjelkiev**). Alone, Igor prays for freedom. He refused his captor Ovlur’s (tenor **Nikolai Gassiev**) offer to help him escape, calling it dishonorable. Konchak admires Igor and tries to cheer him up with dances.

Konchak welcomes the return of Khan Gzak and his army. When Ovlur proposes to take advantage of the guards’ drunkenness to escape, Igor finally agrees. Vladimir is torn between duty and love for Konchakovna. When he hesitates to escape with Igor, she sounds an alarm.

Igor returns home to a loving wife and a devastated city. He vows to raise a new army and defeat the Polovtsians. The people of Putivil welcome Igor home.

Valery Gergiev conducts the Kirov Orchestra and Chorus of St. Petersburg in this 1995 Philips Digital Classics recording.

Stanislav Kochanovsky conducts the Chorus, Orchestra and Ballet of the Dutch National Opera in the “Polovtsian Dances”: <https://youtu.be/kns3F5Q0gTc>.

Be sure to join us next Thursday, November 19th, as the late Al Ruocchio hosts a rebroadcast of Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, with **Sherrill Milnes** as the court jester, **Joan Sutherland** as his daughter Gilda, and **Luciano Pavarotti** as the rakish Duke of Mantua. **Richard Bonyng**e conducts this 1971 Decca/London recording.

The Thursday Night Opera House is heard at 7:00 p.m. Eastern on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're also streamed online, and you can listen as well on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the Thursday Night Opera House