

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
The Tale of Tsar Saltan

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PACO 120

Rimsky-Korsakov
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The Tale of Tsar Sultan

Question: Which opera besides *Götterdämmerung* opens with three sisters spinning? Answer: *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. But these three are human sisters, each idly speculating on what she would do if the Tsar chose her as bride. Give a great banquet, says the eldest; make spinning a royal monopoly, says the second; and the third, who Cinderella-like does all the work, says simply: bear a hero son. And since this is a fairy tale, you will guess that the Tsar has been outside listening, that he makes the youngest sister, Militrissa, his bride, and appoints the others Crown Bakeress and Serene Spinstress. Later these two, with the help of their horrid cousin, Babaricha, send false news to the Tsar (who is off at the wars) that his wife has borne a monster, so by his orders she and the child are set adrift in a barrel (like Danae and Perseus). The pair arrive at an island: Robinson Crusoe-like the boy, Prince Gvidon, fashions a bow, and saves a swan from an attacking falcon. A wondrous city appears, and Gvidon is hailed as its Tsar. Later he travels back to court in the form of a bumblebee; three sailors there sing the marvels of Gvidon's island—a squirrel cracking golden nuts with emerald kernels, a wave that casts up hero warriors on the shore, and a princess lovely beyond compare, and Tsar Saltan resolves to visit it. The last marvel has come as news to the bumble-bee-prince, eavesdropping on the scene, but when he returns home he finds that the swan he saved is in fact the lovely Princess Swanhilda. Saltan arrives for joyful reunions. The tale is Pushkin's.

AP, *The Gramophone*, October 1960 (Excerpt from review of the present recording - continues online)

Producer's Note

This recording had been awaiting transfer for some time when it popped up on the wish list of the associate editor of one of America's major classical review magazines in an e-mail I received a few weeks ago, together with a very good reason to tackle it: "The c. 1957 recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Tale of Tsar Saltan* with the Zagreb Opera. I've never even heard it, but it was universally praised upon its original release, and remains one of only two recordings ever made". The other recording, a Soviet Melodiya production with the Bolshoi Theatre, was made in 1958, two years after the present Zagreb recording - and a copy of this helped me with the track splitting of this release. Although the Philips LPs from which this transfer was taken were in excellent condition (some occasional swish notwithstanding), the sound of the original was dim and murky in the extreme. So it came as a very pleasant surprise to me to discover that, hiding in the murk, there was a very nicely recorded opera trying to get out. That's not to suggest it's without criticism, technically: a boxy bass lacks real depth despite my best efforts; wow and flutter was persistent throughout, though has been largely cured here; end of side distortion was a problem to be largely overcome. It's certainly a product of its age - and yet there's a good balance between the musicians and singers, and the latter come across very well indeed, with diction crisp, clear and very well defined.

The Tale of Tsar Saltan may be one of the less well known of operas - it was certainly new to me - except for the appearance in the third act of the *Flight of the Bumblebee*, a test for any orchestra. The Zagreb Opera Orchestra tackles it with confident aplomb. Meanwhile the singers do a sterling job. This first CD and digital issue of this recording is surely long overdue. **Andrew Rose**

Tsar Saltan - Zdravko Kovac
Tsarina Militrissa - Nada Tonic
Serene Spinstress - Tatjana Slastenko
Royal Bakeress - Bjanka Decman
Barbaricha - Mariana Radev
Tsarevich Gvidon - Janec Lipusek
Princess Swanhilda - Maria Glavasevic

Old man - Franco Paulik
Messenger - Miliyoy Belavic
Skomoroch - Miliyoy Bacanovic
First sailor - Sergey Reinis
Second sailor - Tugomir Alaupovic
Third sailor - Drago Bernardic
National Opera of Zagreb, conductor Dimitry Zebre



Studio recording, 1956

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RIMSKY-KORSAKOV *The Tale of Tsar Saltan, Op. 57*

- CD 1
- 1 Prologue (14:00)
 - 2 Act I - Introduction (4:53)
 - 3 Act I - Conspiracy (Miltrissa, The Court Fool) (20:03)
 - 4 Act I - Arrival of the Messenger (7:13)
 - 5 Act I - Conclusion (Miltrissa, People) (8:46)
 - 6 Act II - Introduction (5:34)
 - 7 Act II - Vulture Scene (Miltrissa, Guidon) (6:24)
 - 8 Act II - Duet (The Swan Princess) (9:02)

- CD 2
- 1 Act II - Apparition of the City and Conclusion (10:02)
 - 2 Act III - Flight of the Bumblebee (7:35)
 - 3 Act III - Story of the Three Merchants (6:22)
 - 4 Act III - Conclusion (9:50)
 - 5 Act IV - Introduction and Duet (12:46)
 - 6 Act IV - Conclusion (4:24)
 - 7 Act IV - Homecoming (7:23)
 - 8 Act IV - Conclusion (9:34)
 - 9 Act IV - Final Choral (11:48)

Zagreb National Opera *Dimitry Zebre*

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on "Merchants",
illustration for Alexander Pushkin's
'Fairytale of the Tsar Saltan'
by Ivan Bilibin, 1905

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