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DIGITAL AUDIO  
PACO 123

# MUSSORGSKY

## *Boris Godunov*

Pristine  
XR

Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is that rarest of events in musical history, a revolutionary masterpiece—a work that demanded for its realization not the refinement or the development of existing techniques but their virtual abandonment.

Instrumentation and harmony alike are made to serve Mussorgsky's intensely dramatic purpose not with mere skill, but with the authoritative accuracy of a genius with a vision to communicate.

No one who has grasped this could possibly be willing to accept Rimsky-Korsakov's well-intentioned "improvements", and Covent Garden is to be congratulated on sticking to the original, in spite of the offence its magnificent starkness may give to some ears. "The original", one says, meaning of course a conflation of Mussorgsky's two main versions. This year we are given, as usual, both the St. Basil and the Kromy forest scenes; Pimen's account of the murder at Uglich (dropped last year) has been restored, and so too has the vital but rarely heard passage in which Feodor tries to distract his sister by showing her the pretty new clock—the clock that later in the same scene will tangle with the haunted Tsar's hallucinations.

This is all to the good, but Jess satisfactory is the treatment of the Polish act, now cut to little more than the polonaise and the love duet. Both are worth hearing, but without the Jesuit Rangoni half the dramatic point has gone. This scene should be either played in full or cut altogether.

That would be a sad loss, but it would at least concentrate attention on the psychological drama that lies at the heart of the whole opera. Mr. Boris Christoff's interpretation of the title-role is justly famous, but last night he seemed to have refined it still further; purged of obvious theatricality, this was at once a noble and a spine-chilling performance, excellently supported by Mr. John Lanigan's foxy Shuisky.

In so large a cast it is impossible to do more than single out one or two newcomers. Of these, Michael Langdon was outstanding as the drunken monk Varlaam, never toppling over into farce. Miss Josephine Veasey and Miss Jeannette Sinclair brought great charm to their part of the nursery scene, and Miss Margreta Elkins did what she could with the remnant of Marina's role. Under Mr. Reginald Goodall's somewhat score-bound direction ensemble was often sluggish, but for all that he showed a real sympathy with the score, and the performance eventually took fire from the sheer integrity with which he approached it.

*The Times (London, England)*, Friday, June 2nd, 1961 (review of another performance, published 8 days prior to live broadcast)

#### Producer's Note

This recording came to me through a collector (who prefers anonymity), with the following compelling explanation as to its importance in the history of recorded music: "This Boris has two major selling points for me: Boris Christoff in one of his signature roles; and Reginald Goodall as conductor. Goodall's discography is really small, largely consisting of Wagner recorded/broadcast with ENO from 1968 onwards, plus some Bruckner [issued by BBC legends], and Britten [in the 1940s]. Yet he was a house conductor for the Royal Opera for a long time, and this is the only complete recording I have been able to find of him between the 1940s and 1968. Finding a good tape of the performance has taken a long time. The one circulating among collectors is poor quality and even Goodall's own tape collection (now donated to the BL) didn't contain a good copy. I finally tracked down a good quality tape from a recently deceased collector..." The tape in question has suffered over the years somewhat, and I've done my best to restore section of dropout and the like. Sound quality was otherwise very good, and has been further assisted by XR remastering to produce a remarkably vivid sound for a live production of its day. Originally broadcast over three segments, one for each act, I've retained only the opening announcement and cut short the rapturous applause in order to squeeze the music onto two CDs. **Andrew Rose**

# Boris Christoff

sings Mussorgsky's

# Boris Godunov

BBC broadcast from Covent Garden, 10 June 1961

Boris - Boris Christoff  
Grigory (False Dmitry) - Edgar Evans  
Marina - Margreta Elkins  
Pimen - Joseph Rouleau  
Varlaam - Michael Langdon  
Shuisky - John Lanigan  
Missail - David Tree  
Fyodor - Josephine Veasey  
Xenia - Jeannette Sinclair  
Hostess - Edith Coates  
Simpleton - Robert Bowman  
Tcheikalov - David Ward  
Krushchov - Thomas Fletcher  
Nurse - Noreen Berry  
Nikitich - Robert Savoie  
Mityukha - Ronald Lewis  
Lavitsky - Ronald Lewis  
Cherniovsky - Rhydderch Davies

Orchestra & Chorus of the Covent Garden Opera

Reginald Goodall, conductor

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## Disc One

- 1 Radio Introduction (2:01)
- 2 Act 1, Scene 1  
(The Novodevichi Monastery, near Moscow) (1:52)
- 3 What's going on here? (5:05)
- 4 Fellow believers of the Orthodox faith! (2:57)
- 5 Glory on earth to Thee (3:48)
- 6 Act 1, Scene 2 (A square in the Kremlin):  
Long live Tsar Boris Feodorovich! (1:54)
- 7 Even as glory to the radiant sun (2:03)
- 8 My soul is torn with anguish! (3:02)
- 9 Glory! (1:42)
- 10 Act 1, Scene 3 (The Monastery of the Miracle):  
One last episode to tell (4:56)
- 11 God, all-powerful and just (6:09)
- 12 I have wanted to ask you (5:58)
- 13 There's the call to morning prayers (2:04)
- 14 Boris! Boris! (1:28)
- 15 Act 2, Scene 1 (An inn on the Lithuanian border):  
I caught myself a dove-colored drake (4:06)
- 16 Why so preoccupied, comrade? (1:35)
- 17 While our troops were at the city walls (3:50)
- 18 There goes that man (3:31)
- 19 Honest monks and humble old men (4:05)
- 20 A worthless novice... (4:10)
- 21 Act 2, Scene 2 (The Tsar's Chambers in the Kremlin):  
Where do you lie, beloved mine (4:20)
- 22 A gnat sawed wood (2:20)
- 23 This little tale is all about (1:30)
- 24 What's this? Has some ferocious animal... (2:39)

## Disc Two

- 1 Excellent, my boy! (7:42)
  - 2 Mighty lord... (6:10)
  - 3 It is not death that is hard to bear... (1:42)
  - 4 God, how stifling it's become! (4:23)
  - 5 Act 3, Scene 1 (Mnishek Castle at Sandomir, Poland):  
Meet me at midnight near the fountain (3:04)
  - 6 Polonaise: I don't believe a thing you say... (3:58)
  - 7 Dimitri! Tsarevich! Dimitri! (3:19)
  - 8 But it's you, you alone, Marina... (2:23)
  - 9 Stop that at once, Marina! (1:23)
  - 10 No, no, Tsarevich, I beg you! (4:20)
  - 11 Act 3, Scene 2: St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow (1:18)
  - 12 Is mass over? (2:59)
  - 13 Trrrr, trrr, trrr, trrr! (2:17)
  - 14 The Tsar is coming! (3:28)
  - 15 Let bitter, bitter tears be shed (2:35)
  - 16 Act 3, Scene 3: (The Kremlin Palace):  
Well, then Boyars, let's open the discussion (3:31)
  - 17 A pity Prince Shuiski isn't here (1:45)
  - 18 Go away! (3:35)
  - 19 A humble monk... (4:56)
  - 20 Oh, I need air, air! (6:47)
  - 21 Listen! It's ringing!...The funeral bell is ringing! (5:24)
- Covent Garden Opera Chorus, chorus master: Douglas Robinson  
Members of the George Green Grammar School, trained by Kathleen Robson  
The Covent Garden Orchestra, leader Charles Taylor  
Reginald Goodall, conductor

Broadcast on the BBC Third Programme, 10th June, 1961  
XR remastered by Andrew Rose  
Cover: Boris Christoff as Gudonov, 1958  
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