

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

# Prince Igor



Music and Libretto by  
Alexander Borodin

Based on the epic  
“The Tale of Igor’s Campaign”

Opera in Four Acts  
with a Prologue

Setting: Russia  
Time: The year 1185

## Characters

Prince Igor Svyatoslavich (baritone) ..... Ildar Abdrazakov  
Yaroslavna, his second wife (soprano) ..... Oksana Dyka  
Vladimir Igorevich, Igor’s son from his first marriage (tenor) ..... Sergey Semishkur  
Prince Galitsky, Yaroslavna’s brother (“high bass”) ..... Mikhail Petrenko  
Konchak, Polovtsian Khan (bass) ..... Štefan Kocán  
Konchakovna, his daughter (contralto) ..... Anita Rachvelishvili  
Ovlur, a Christian Polovtsian (tenor) ..... Mikhail Vekua  
Skula, a gudok-player (bass) ..... Vladimir Ognovenko  
Yeroshka, a gudok-player (tenor) ..... Andrey Popov  
Yaroslavna’s nurse (soprano) ..... Barbara Dever  
Polovtsian maiden (soprano) ..... Kiri Deonarine

Conducted by Gianandra Noseda  
The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus  
Première performance in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1890  
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# Synopsis

## Prologue

### The cathedral square in Putivl



Prince Igor is about to set out on a campaign against the Cumans/Polovtsy and their Khans who have previously attacked the Russian lands. The people sing his praise and that of his son, the other leaders and the army (“*Glory to the beautiful Sun*”).

A solar eclipse takes place to general consternation. Two soldiers Skula and Yeroshka desert, feeling sure that Vladimir Yaroslavich, Prince Galitsky, will offer them work more to their liking. Although Yaroslavna, Igor’s wife, takes the eclipse for a bad omen, Igor insists that honor demands that he go to war. He leaves her to the care of her brother, Prince Galitsky, who tells of his gratitude to Igor for sheltering him after he was banished from his own home by his father and brothers. The people sing a great chorus of praise (“*Glory to the multitude of stars*”) as the host sets out on their campaign against the Polovtsy.

## Act I

### Scene 1: Vladimir Galitsky’s court in Putivl

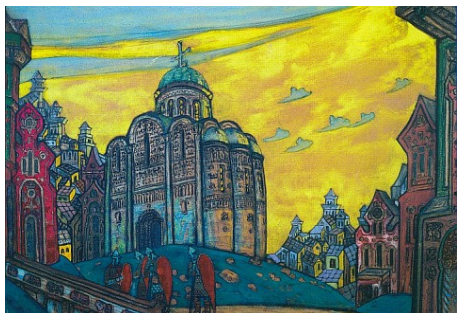
Galitsky’s followers sing his praise. Skula and Yeroshka are now working as gudok<sup>1</sup> players. They entertain the followers and all sing of how Galitsky and his men abducted a young woman and how she pleaded to be allowed to return to her father without being dishonored. The prince arrives and sings of how, if he were Prince of Putivl, he would drink and feast all day while giving out judgment, and have the prettiest maidens with him all night (Galitsky’s Song). The treasury would be spent on himself and his men, while his sister would be praying in a monastery.

A group of young women beg the prince to restore their abducted friend. He threatens them and drives them away, saying how she now lives in luxury in his quarters and does not have to work. The prince returns to his rooms having sent for wine for his followers. The gudok players and the prince’s followers mock the women. They wonder what might happen if Yaroslavna hears of what happens, but then realize that she would be helpless with all her men gone to war. They sing of how they are all drunkards and are supported by Galitsky. The men decide to go to the town square to declare Galitsky the Prince of Putivl, leaving just the two drunk musicians behind.

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<sup>1</sup>An ancient Russian stringed instrument with a hollow, oval or pear-shaped wooden body, a flat soundboard with resonating openings and a short neck.

## Scene 2: A room in Yaroslavna's palace



Yaroslavna is alone worrying about why she has not heard from Igor and his companions (Yaroslavna's Arioso). She sings of her tearful nights and nightmares, and reminisces about when she was happy with Igor by her side. The nurse brings in the young women who tell Yaroslavna of their abducted friend. They are reluctant at first to reveal the culprit, but eventually name Galitsky and talk of how he and his drunken followers cause trouble around Putivl.

Galitsky enters and the women run away. Yaroslavna questions him as to the truth of their story, and he mocks her saying that she should treat him as a guest in her house. She threatens him with what Igor will do on his return, but Galitsky replies that he can seize the throne whenever he wants. Yaroslavna accuses him of repeating the betrayal that he carried out against their father, but he replies that he was only joking and asks if she has a lover now that her husband is away. She threatens him with sending him back to their father. He replies that he will return the girl, but will take another later; he leaves the room.

The council of boyars arrive to inform Yaroslavna that the Polovtsy under Khan Gzak are about to attack Putivl. Igor's army has been utterly destroyed and he has been wounded and captured with his son and brother. After a moment of faintness, Yaroslavna orders messengers sent to the city's allies, but the Boyars report that the roads are cut, some towns are in revolt and their princes will be captured. The Boyars say that they will organize the defense, but Galitsky returns with his followers to demand that a new Prince be chosen. His followers say that it should be him since he is Yaroslavna's brother and Igor's brother-in-law. The boyars refuse. The argument is interrupted by the sight of flames and the sound of crying women. Some of the boyars flee; some join the battle, others guard the Princess. They call the attack God's judgment.

## Act II Evening in the Polovtsian Camp

Polovtsian maidens sing, comparing love to a flower that droops in the heat of the day and is revived by night. They dance together ("Dance of the Polovtsian Maidens"). Konchakovna joins in the singing, hoping that her own lover will join her soon ("Konchakovna's Cavatina"). The Russian prisoners arrive from their day's work and express their gratitude when they are fed by Konchakovna and the maidens.

Their guards retire for the night, leaving just Ovlur, a Christian, in charge. Vladimir, son of Igor, sings of his hope that his love will soon join him now that the day is fading ("Vladimir's Cavatina"). His love is Konchakovna. She comes and the two sing of their love and their desire to marry (Love Duet). While her father will consent to the marriage, they both know that his will not. They part when they hear Igor coming. He sings of his disgrace and torment at being captured with his followers dead (Prince Igor's Aria). He feels that only his wife will be loyal. He hopes for the chance to regain his honor.

Ovlur urges Igor to escape, and the prince agrees to think about it. Khan Konchak asks him if all is well (Konchak's Aria) and he replies that the falcon cannot live in captivity. Konchak

says that as Igor did not ask for mercy, he is not considered a prisoner but an honored guest who is equal to a Khan. Igor reminds him that he too knows what it is like to be a captive. Konchak offers Igor freedom if he will promise not to wage war on him again, but he refuses saying he cannot lie. Konchak regrets that they were not born to be allies. They would then have captured all of Russia. He summons the Polovtsian slaves to entertain Igor and himself and offers Igor his choice of them. As the slaves dance the Polovtsy sing of Konchak's glory ("Polovtsian Dances").

### **Act III**

#### **The Polovtsian camp**

The Polovtsian army returns in triumph, singing the praise of Khan Gzak ("Polovtsian March"). Konchak sings of the sack of Putivl and other victories and confidently predicts that they will soon capture all of Russia. Igor and his son Vladimir have their worst fears confirmed by the new captives. Vladimir and the other prisoners urge Igor to escape, but he is at first reluctant, singing of his shame and saying that it is the duty of the other Russian princes to save the homeland (Igor's Monologue).

Ovlur now arrives to say that he has prepared horses for Igor and Vladimir and Igor now agrees to escape. The distressed Konchakovna comes, challenging Vladimir to show his love by either taking her with him or by staying. Igor urges his son to come, but Vladimir feels unable to leave Konchakovna who threatens to wake the camp.

Eventually Igor flees alone and Konchakovna sounds the alarm. She and her father refuse to let the Polovtsy kill Vladimir. Instead Konchak orders the death of the guards and marries Vladimir to his daughter. As for Igor, Konchak thinks more of him for his escape.

### **Act IV**

#### **Dawn in Putivl**

Yaroslavna weeps at her separation from Igor and the defeat of his army, blaming the very elements themselves for helping the enemy (Yaroslavna's Lament). Peasant women blame not the wind but Khan Gzak for the devastation to their land.

As Yaroslavna looks around to acknowledge the destruction, she sees two riders in the distance who turn out to be Igor and Ovlur. The two lovers sing of their joy of being reunited and of the expectation that Ivan will lead the Russians to victory against the Khan. Unaware of Igor's return, Skula and Yeroshka, the drunken gudok players, sing a song that mocks him. Then they notice him in the distance. After a moment of panic about what will happen to them, Skula says that they should rely on their cunning and comes up with a plan that will save them. They ring the church bells to summon a crowd. Although people at first treat them with suspicion, the gudok players manage to convince the crowd that Igor has returned and the boyars that they are loyal followers of the true prince and not Galitsky. All joyously celebrate Igor's return.

# Alexander Porfiryevich Borodin

November 12, 1833 – February 27, 1887 in St. Petersburg, Russia



Alexander Porfiryevich Borodin was a Russian Romantic composer, doctor and chemist. He was a member of the group of composers called The Five (or “The Mighty Handful”), who were dedicated to producing a specifically Russian kind of art music. He is best known for his symphonies, his two-string quartets, “In the Steppes of Central Asia” and for his opera, *Prince Igor*.

Borodin was a notable advocate of women’s rights and a proponent of education in Russia, and was a founder of the School of Medicine for Women in St. Petersburg.

Borodin is co-credited with the discovery of the Aldol reaction, with Charles-Adolphe Wurtz. In 1872 he announced to the Russian Chemical Society the discovery of a new by-product in aldehyde reactions with alcohol-like properties, and he noted similarities with compounds already discussed in publications by Wurtz from the same year.

Borodin met Mily Balakirev in 1862. While under Balakirev’s tutelage in composition he began his Symphony No. 1 in E flat major; it was first performed in 1869, with Balakirev conducting. In that same year Borodin started on his Symphony No. 2 in B minor, which was not particularly successful at its premiere in 1877 under Eduard Nápravník, but with some minor re-orchestration received a successful performance in 1879 by the Free Music School under Rimsky-Korsakov’s direction. In 1880 he composed the popular symphonic poem “In the Steppes of Central Asia.” Two years later he began composing a third symphony, but left it unfinished at his death; two movements of it were later completed and orchestrated by Glazunov.

In 1868 Borodin became preoccupied with the opera *Prince Igor*, which is seen by some to be his most significant work and one of the most important historical Russian operas. It contains the Polovtsian Dances, often performed as a stand-alone concert work forming what is probably Borodin’s best-known composition. Borodin left the opera (and a few other works) incomplete at his death.

Borodin’s fame outside the Russian Empire was made possible during his lifetime by Franz Liszt, who arranged a performance of the Symphony No. 1 in Germany in 1880, and by the Comtesse de Mercy-Argenteau in Belgium and France. His music is noted for its strong lyricism and rich harmonies. Along with some influences from Western composers, as a member of The Five his music exudes also an undeniably Russian flavor. His passionate music and unusual harmonies proved to have a lasting influence on the younger French composers Debussy and Ravel (in homage, the latter composed in 1913 a piano piece entitled “À la manière de Borodine”).

The evocative characteristics of Borodin’s music made possible the adaptation of his compositions in the 1953 musical, *Kismet*, by Robert Wright and George Forrest, notably in the songs “Stranger in Paradise” and “And This Is My Beloved“. In 1954, Borodin was posthumously awarded a Tony Award for this show.



Borodin's music is full of romantic charm and enticing melody, and much of it also rings with the pageantry and landscape of old Russia; of onion-domed churches, richly decorated icons, and the vastness of the land.

## ***Prince Igor***

Borodin worked on *Prince Igor* off and on for almost 18 years. He died suddenly in 1887, leaving the opera unfinished. Rimsky-Korsakov and Stasov went to Borodin's home, collected his scores, and brought them to Rimsky-Korsakov's house. *Prince Igor* was completed posthumously by Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov. Although for a while the opera was rarely performed in its entirety outside of Russia, it recently received two notable new productions: one at the Bolshoi State Opera and Ballet Company in Russia in 2013, and one at the Metropolitan Opera in 2014 (which we will be seeing).

At the beginning of the 2014 Opening Ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, some of Borodin's music from this opera was played while a crescent-shaped eclipsed sun, drifted across the upper levels of the center of the stadium, showing the basis of Russian history in the *Prince Igor* story.

### **Prince Igor: The Video**

#### **Starring Ildar Abdrazakov, Oksana Dyka and Sergey Semishkur**



Borodin's defining Russian epic, famous for its Polovtsian Dances, returns to the Met for the first time in nearly 100 years. Dmitri Tcherniakov's new production is a brilliant psychological journey through the mind of its conflicted hero, with the founding of the Russian nation as the backdrop. It has the power to haunt. The arias are long, luscious and memorable; the choruses are justly famous; the orchestral score is eloquent and powerful. It is very impressive and memorable.

The impressive cast, with many Russian singers, is headed by the compelling bass Ildar Abdrazakov in the title role. His Igor has moments of Italianate lyrical refinement. He brings passion, even a touch of neediness, to his exchanges with his devoted wife, Yaroslavna, the Ukrainian soprano Oksana Dyka, a classic Russian soprano with a cool, penetrating intensity, fearless high notes, and a glint of steel in her sound. This is her Met debut.

The hugely talented Tcherniakov is a director designed his own sets — dream-like, wrenchingly human and viscerally theatrical. *Prince Igor* is a co-production of the Metropolitan Opera and De Nederlandse Opera, Amsterdam. The Met makes a masterpiece of an unlikely opera, and has returned a long-absent marvel to its rightful place in the repertoire.