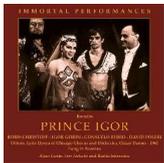


Borodin – Prince Igor (Live 1962)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 08 June 2017 12:21 -

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CD1 *Tracks 1 – 14* CD2 *Tracks 1 – 14* Yaroslavna - Consuelo Rubio Konchakovna - Carol Smith Polovtsian Girl - Jeanne Diamond Nurse - Prudencija Bickus Vladimir - David Poleri Eroshka - Mariano Caruso Ovlur - Rudolf Knoll Prince Igor - Igor Gorin Prince Galitsky - Boris Christoff Skula - Renato Cesari Khan Konchak - Boris Christoff Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestra & Choir Oskar Danon – conductor Lyric Opera of Chicago, 10/12/1962

Some operatic careers are puzzling to those of us who do the observing rather than the singing or hiring, and certainly one of the most puzzling must be Igor Gorin. The Russian-Jewish baritone began his career as a cantor, and achieved quite a measure of fame in America as a concertizer and as a star of radio. He was a regular on the Bell Telephone Hour and Voice of Firestone, and an RCA recording artist, yet he made a single performance as Germont at the Met, quite late in his career. The principal value of this important release is Gorin's Igor, a towering achievement vocally and dramatically. His rich, resonant, firmly focused voice is based on an extremely sound technique, and he sings with presence and character. Those who really love this opera should know this performance, which is as richly characterized and beautifully sung as any.

One cannot, however, consider this as a main recommendation for a recording of Prince Igor. As with so many recordings and performances, it is severely cut, omitting the third act entirely. The Philips recording with Gergiev is the gold standard for this opera. Benjamin Pernick's brilliant review of that recording in *Fanfare* 19:1 gives a thorough history of performing editions and other recordings, and I would refer the interested reader to the *Fanfare* archive for the valuable information contained therein. There is something to be said, as a supplement, for the Opera d'Oro release of the 1951 Russian recording with Andrei Ivanov, Mark Reizen, Alexander Pirogov and Sergei Lemeshev. George Jellinek reviewed that in 26:6.

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What Immortal Performances offers us in addition to a chance to hear a wonderful baritone in a major role is a glimpse into an important moment in a major American opera company. The Lyric Opera of Chicago during the period in which it was run by Carol Fox competed with any house in the world (save for the fact that no one in that administration was smart enough to make some kind of recorded archive, so many truly important performances are lost to us). The Björling/Callas *Trovatore* is one that we'd all like to have heard. The standard practice was to broadcast the opening night, so only one opera per year was broadcast, thus allowing for preservation. In 1962 it was *Prince Igor*, a performance that had an extra frisson as Ms. Fox engaged a dancer for the Polovtsian Dance sequence who would make his American debut that night—Rudolf Nureyev. Sadly we cannot know his performance from an audio recording, though we can share in the excitement of the ovation he receives during his bows. It is worth noting that for this era it was an act of some courage for the Lyric Opera to produce the opera entirely in Russian.

In addition to Gorin, this performance boasts Boris Christoff in the dual roles of Galitsky and Konchak, a trick he repeated for EMI about five years later. In his excellent notes, producer Richard Caniell notes that Christoff is not in quite as firm voice as he was on his earlier EMI Boris Gudonov recording. That may be true, but he sounds pretty good to me here, and with much firmer tones than he shows on the later EMI set. The voice had really started to spread by that time. So the monumental presence of Christoff and the rich Prince of Gorin are the reasons for serious collectors to explore this set. That is especially true because of the added bonus of a 1961 studio recording originally on the Golden Crest label called *Arie antiche*, with Gorin accompanied very nicely by pianist Willard Straight. This recital includes music of Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Scarlatti and many others, and adds immensely to the value of this set. Again, it shows a warm, rich, focused baritone voice supported by a very firm technique. And one further bonus—*Largo al factotum* in a 1945 Gorin broadcast from *The Voice of Firestone* that demonstrates (along with the *Arie antiche*) the truth of his claim that he tried to build his technique by studying recordings of Battistini. A brief interview rounds out the Gorin material here.

There is one more highlight in *Prince Igor*, and that is the tenor David Poleri. Those of us who still treasure his brilliant Michele in Menotti's *Saint of Bleecker Street* recording will be delighted by his sensitive and lovely singing here. This version of Vladimir's *Cavatina* can stand with some of the finest.

The remainder of the *Prince Igor* is, to be honest, a mixed bag. I find Consuelo Rubio a bit harsh and unsteady, the other singers fair but rarely more, and the chorus sounds a particularly motley conglomeration. The Lyric Opera Orchestra plays much better today than it did in those days, with some ensemble problems and less-than-stellar solo playing. Danon's conducting is, however, well shaped.

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As usual, Immortal Performances's production standards are top of the line. The notes are both informative and interesting (yes, it is possible to be one without the other), and the sound is quite good. Caniell also provides a remarkably well designed scene-by-scene chart telling us who composed which scene and who orchestrated it. Very helpful indeed, and a major asset of this set. There are some minor issues with the source, which Caniell explains, but overall this is a natural sounding early 1960s monaural radio broadcast, and for this kind of material the sound is really terrific. The original radio announcer from Chicago is kept, but is tracked separately should you wish to omit that particular piece of atmosphere.

For those with an interest in Borodin's opera, or in hearing Gorin and Christoff in wonderful live, staged performances, this is a very valuable release. --- Henry Fogel, FANFARE magazine

Prince Igor (Knaz Igor) is an opera in four acts with a prologue by Alexander Borodin. The libretto, adapted by the composer from the East Slavic epic The Tale of Igor's Campaign, centers on a 12th-century Russian prince (Igor Svyatoslavich) and his campaigns against the invading Polovtsian tribes. The opera was first performed in St.Petersburg on November 4, 1890. In the USA the opera was first produced at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, December 30, 1915. Borodin left the opera incomplete at his death in 1887. Composition and orchestration was completed posthumously by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov. According to the printed score, the opera was completed as follows: Rimsky-Korsakov orchestrated the previously unorchestrated passages from the Prologue, Acts 1, 2, and 4, and the "Polovetsian March" which opens Act 3. Glazunov used what existing material was left to compose and orchestrate the rest of the third act; the often-repeated legend is that he also reconstructed and orchestrated the overture from memory after hearing the composer play it at the piano several times. (In his memoirs, Shostakovich quotes Glazunov as admitting to, in essence, writing the overture based on Borodin's themes; this explanation appears to make more sense, because of the rather complex polyphonic nature of the overture, which would have made it virtually impossible to adequately render on the piano.) Both the Overture to Prince Igor and the "Polovetsian Dances" (from Act II) are well-known concert standards. Together with the "Polovetsian March", they form the so-called "suite" from the opera. --- balletandopera.com

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