Tchaikovsky – Oprichnik (2004)

Disc: 1 *1. Introduction 2. Come In, Do Us the Honour 3. A Duckling Was Swimming in the Sea 4. How Wearisome It Is to Spend the Whole Day 5. A Nightingale Chirps On Leafy Fronds 6. See Here If One Should Get Sad Over Such a Song! 7. Don't Worry, Dear Andrey, Step Forward 8. Tell Me, Have You Taken a Decision? 9. No, My Friend 10. I Thought I Heard Some Voices 11. Here You Are Then! 12. Introduction 13. Much As One Tries, Life Never Changes 14. No More Worries, Mother, Let the Wind Disperse Your Troubles 15. But You, Son, Keep Purer Than the Snow 16. Basmanov Likes Wine and Pleasures 17. Dear Son, Do Not Abandon Me 18. I Leave, Mother, But I Won't Be Away for Long* Disc: 2 *1. Introduction 2. What Refuge Shall I Find from My Sins? 3. Brothers, Stop Being Engrossed in Godly Things! 4. No, Stay, I Come from the Czar 5. Have You Made This Choice Freely 6. Before You, Like Before God 7. Are You Ready, Then, to Take the Sacred Oath? 8. O Natalya, O Mother! 9. In the Name of the Almighty God 10. As Glorious As the Sun in a Clear Day 11. Introduction 12. Dark Times Are Looming On Us 13. Oh, How Lonely I Already Feel! 14. Filthy Bitch, Dirty Broom 15. I Run to You, Dear Mother* Disc: 3 *1. Let's Run Away, Come, Let's Flee Somewhere 2. I Am Before You and Before the Lord 3. Go, Princess 4. I Deny You, Off With You, Praetorian 5. Alas, I Cannot Fully Grasp 6. Take Heart, Brother in Faith 7. Honour and Glory to the Fine, Courageous Lad 8. Dances of Oprichniks and Women 9. Friends, This Day Is Both Joyful and Sad 10. Oh, If Only This Banquet Would End! 11. You Are My Light, My Life 12. Oh, May They Never Age 13. My Respects to the Noble Congregation 14. Look, a Frightening Storm Threatens 15. And So, My Dove, Do You Know Who Is Calling You?* Irina Doljenko (Mezzo Soprano) Dimitri Ulianov (Bass) Vsevolod Grivnov (Tenor) Cinzia De Mola (Soprano) Vassily Savenko (Bass) Alexandra Durseneva (Alto) Vladimir Ognovenko (Baritone) Elena Lassoskaya (Soprano) Cagliari Theater Chorus, Cagliari Theater Orchestra Gennadi Rozhdestvensky - conductor

An atmospheric live recording of Tchaikovsky's opera The Oprichnik, with wonderful, full blooded Russian voices, and the inimitable Gennady Rozhdestvensky conducting. Tchaikovsky wrote the libretto for the opera himself, set in the 16th Century, the tumultuous period in

Russian history of Ivan the Terrible. Hardly any competition for this release, a must for the opera aficionado and Tchaikovsky fan! Extensive synopsis included in the booklet. This live recording of one of Tchaikovsky's least-known operas derives from a live production of a staging by Graham Vick in Cagliari, Sicily. It features the always quirky musicianship of Gennady Rozhdestvensky, whose musical appetite for the curio and the unfamiliar is apparently insatiable. He conducts a cast of real Russian singers, most of them stalwarts at the Bolshoi, with voices that come from the long tradition of Lisitsian, Chaliapin and Vishnevskaya, including the rich mezzo of Irina Dolzhenko and imposing bass of Vsevolod Grivnov. The opera itself tells the tale of Andrey, who joins the eponymous oprichnik (the tsar's mercenary retinue, set up to assert his power against the boyars) in order to pursue or defend a family feud. Crossed lovers and curses ensue; the end is inevitably tragic, with not only Andrey coming to a sticky end but also his widowed mother. As his first surviving completed opera, first performed in 1876,The Oprichnik is full of tell-tale signs of the great dramatic composer which Tchaikovsky would become in Eugene Onegin and The Queen of Spades. ---Editorials Reviews, amazon.com

So rare an opera is lucky to benefit from such a richly and lovingly realized performance. As expected, much of the credit belongs to the veteran Rozhdestvensky, who constantly coaxes pointed accents, elegantly shaped solos, and a warmly unified if fine-grained string sound from his Sardinian players. His precise attention to phrasing and color is a model of theatrical realization, minimizing the longeurs of repetitive passages and shaping the musical arcs of each act convincingly, drawing out underlying harmonic and coloristic tensions. The chorus, perhaps as a result of working with this conductor in similar repertoire, seems comfortable with Russian diction and the idiom. The basses are suitably resonant in the haunting chorus of the Oprichniks in act II. Stage noise is less obtrusive than in other recordings from this source, and applause is enthusiastic, yet confined to judicious moments.

Although one can theorize a more polished cast of better-known singers, the demanding lead roles are cast from among the leading lights of the Bolshoi Theater and leave little to be desired. As Andrei’s mother, mezzo Irina Doljenko displays a multi-textured voice ideally suited to her complex, tormented character, richly vibrant in the lower register, clearly and attractively focused in the soprano register, revealing her character as a true cousin to Verdi’s signature achievements in that range. Tenor Vsevolod Grivnov’s voice can spread under pressure, but he is able to modulate it ardently, spitting venom when threatened, arcing beautifully when declaring his love for Natalya, producing a thrilling heldentenor ring in the pivotal scene where he joins the Oprichniks. Grivnov is, in fact, one of the Bolshoi’s rising young stars, and has sung Dmitri in a recent Houston Grand Opera Boris. In his portrayal of the menacing evil of Igor’s hetman Zemchuznii, Ukrainian bass-baritone Vassily Savenko combines a cavernous sound with the incisive diction and flair for drama that made him a compelling Iago for Gergiev at the

Kirov opera.

It is unlikely that as strong a version of this surprisingly gripping opera will come along soon, so I urge anyone who cares about Russian opera—not just hardcore Tchaikovsky aficionados—to track down this recording from Dynamic. The libretto is, unfortunately, provided only in Italian and English, so it helps to be able to follow a bit of Russian. ---Christopher Williams, FANFARE, arkivmusic.com

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