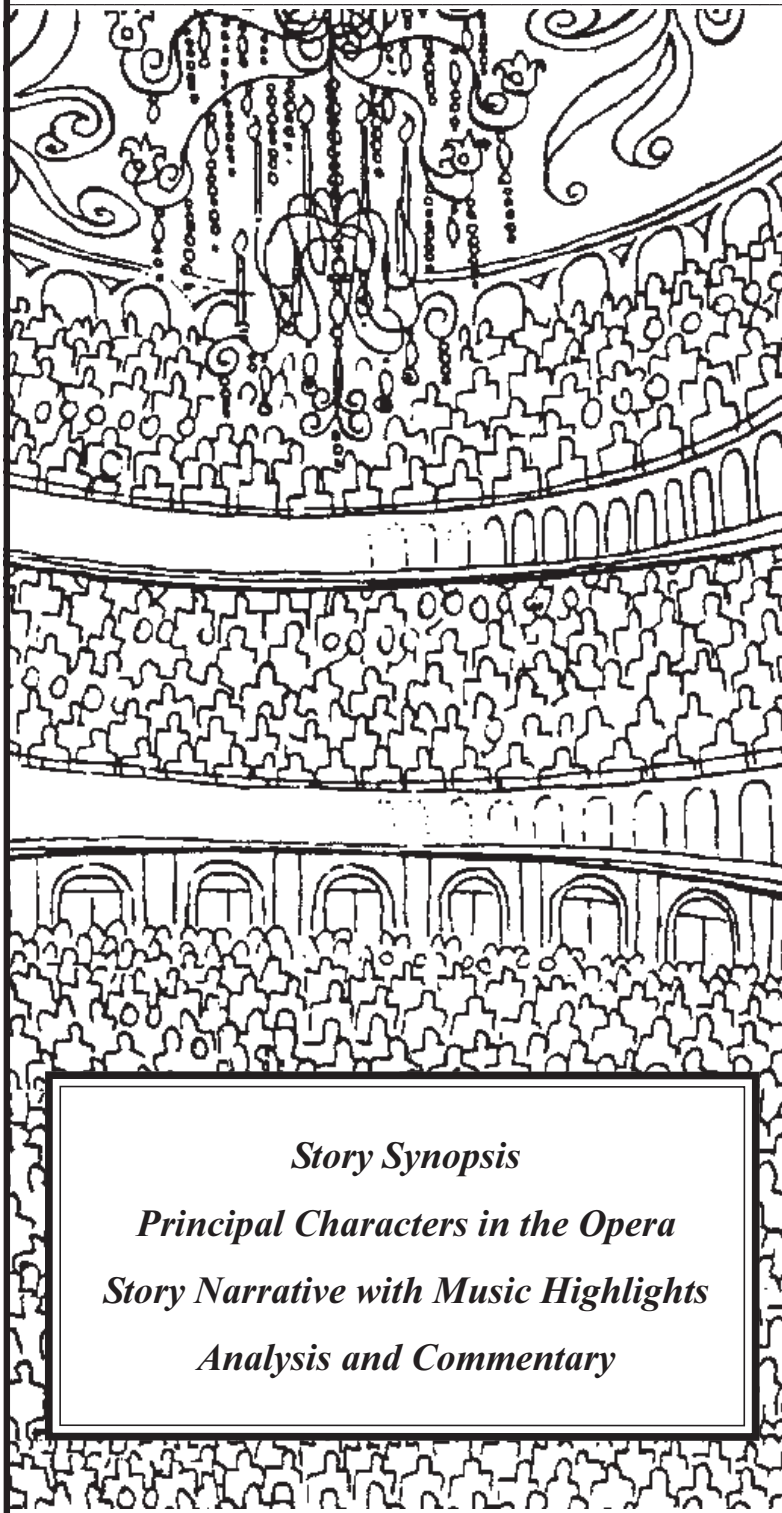


Boris Godunov

Opera Journeys Mini Guides Series



Story Synopsis

Principal Characters in the Opera

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

Analysis and Commentary



**Burton D. Fisher, editor,
*Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series***

Burton D. Fisher is a former opera conductor, author-editor-publisher of the *Opera Classics Library Series*, the *Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series*, and the *Opera Journeys Libretto Series*, principal lecturer for the

Opera Journeys Lecture Series at Florida International University, a commissioned author for Season Opera guides and Program Notes for regional opera companies, and a frequent opera and a frequent commentator on National Public Radio.

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Boris Godunov

Opera in Russian with a prologue and four acts

Music
by
Modest Mussorgsky

Libretto by Modest Mussorgsky
after Alexandr Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* (1869)
and Nikolai Karamzin's
History of the Russian Empire (1816-1829)

Premiere: St. Petersburg, 1873

The version herein incorporates dramatic elements
from both the Mussorgsky original
and the Rimsky-Korsakov version.

Adapted from the
Opera Journeys Lecture Series
by
Burton D. Fisher

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Principal Characters in Boris Godunov

Boris Godunov, Tsar of Russia	Bass or Baritone
Feodor, Boris's son	Mezzo-soprano
Xenia, Boris's daughter	Soprano
Nastasia, the Nurse	Mezzo-soprano
Prince Shuisky, a boyar advisor to Boris	Tenor
Andrei Schtschelkalov Secretary of the Duma	Baritone
Pimen, a hermit monk and chronicler	Bass
Grigori Otrepiev (Dmitri, Pretender to the throne)	Tenor
Marina Mnischek, daughter of a Polish nobleman	Mezzo-soprano
Rangoni, a Jesuit priest	Bass
Varlaam, a vagrant monk	Bass
Missail, a vagrant monk	Tenor
The Hostess of the inn	Mezzo-soprano
Simpleton (The Idiot)	Tenor
Nikitich, a police officer	Bass

The Russian people, Boyars, Guards, Pilgrims,
Polish ladies, gentlemen, and girls of Sandomir, Poland.

TIME: Between 1598 and 1605

PLACE: Russia and Poland

Brief Story Synopsis

A crowd of Russian people, in poverty and despair, are exhorted by the police to urge Boris Godunov to accept the throne left vacant by the death of Tsarevich Dmitri.

At his coronation, Boris becomes haunted by his conscience; he murdered the young Tsarevich in order to become tsar.

In the Monastery at Chudov, the old monk and chronicler, Pimen, relates the events leading to Boris's coronation to the young novice, Grigori; Grigori believes he is the Tsarevich, having miraculously survived Boris Godunov's attempt to murder him. Grigori flees the monastery to seek Lithuanian support for his cause.

Grigori arrives in Poland and declares himself Tsarevich Dmitri, the rightful heir to the throne of Russia. The Jesuit priest Rangoni, determined to convert Russia to Catholicism, urges Princess Marina to exploit Dmitri for the interests of Poland.

The tormented Boris is told by Pimen that a miracle saved the life of Tsarevich Dmitri. The news causes Boris to erupt into a fatal seizure. Before he dies, Boris names his son Feodor his successor, and begs forgiveness for his crimes.

In the Kromy Forest, the Russian people join Dmitri and march to Moscow.

The Simpleton is left alone to bewail the fate of Russia.

*Story Narrative with Music Highlights***Prologue - Scene 1:*****Outside the Monastery of Novodievich near Moscow***

Andante



A ragged and despairing crowd of peasants have gathered in the square. A policeman terrorizes and intimidates them, exhorting them to bless Boris Godunov, and urge him to accept the crown of Tsar.

The crowd pleads for mercy and pity from Boris Godunov, praying that he will not abandon them to endless misery and squalor like the tsars who preceded him.

The appeal of the Russian people:

Moderato



After the police depart, the peasants revert to complaining of their despair, misfortunes, and hardships.

As emotions intensify, they begin to fight with each other. The police return and restore order, threatening them brutally with whips and clubs. The peasants fall to their knees, repeating their appeal to Boris for relief from their misfortunes.

Schtschelkalov, the secretary of the Duma, announces that a Council of Boyars and the Patriarch of the Church have tried to convince Boris to accept the throne vacated after the death of the Tsarevich, but Boris refuses to accept the crown.

He characterizes the misfortunes and suffering of the Russian people and prays to God to enlighten the soul of Boris Godunov, who, if he accepts the crown of tsar, could bring comfort and consolation to them in their hour of need.

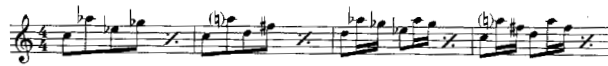
Pilgrims pray for God's protection of Russia, now so grievously afflicted by internal as well as external misfortunes. The Pilgrims distribute amulets among the crowd, exhorting them to take ikons and holy emblems to Boris.

As the Pilgrims enter the monastery, they offer prayers for the widow of the recently deceased Tsar, the sister of Boris.

A policeman, wielding a threatening club, urges the people to appear at the Kremlin the next day and supplicate themselves before Boris Godunov.

Prologue - Scene 2:**Courtyard of the Kremlin - The Coronation of Boris**

The air pulsates with the clanging of bells, great and small.

Large Bells:**Small Bells:**

The crowd kneels as boyars appear in a solemn procession on their way to the Cathedral of the Assumption.

Boris has yielded to the pleas of the boyars and accepted the crown. Boris appears, and the crowd praises their new Tsar, their father and benefactor.

As trumpets blare, Shuisky stands on the steps of the Cathedral and proclaims: "Long live the Tsar Boris Feodorovich!", his praises echoed emotionally by the crowds of people.



Boris becomes emotionally stirred as he stands before the people, a pretense that disguises his long-coveted obsession for power. The character of the music suddenly transforms from colorful brilliance to sadness when Boris addresses them; he reveals his forebodings and fears of the future for himself and for all Russia. Boris invokes heaven's blessings and urges them to kneel in prayer before the tombs of the great Tsars and pray for his reign: that God should grant him divine goodness and justice so that he may rule Russia with benevolence and in glory.

Boris and the procession enter the Cathedral. The bells resound, and the crowd disperses. The Coronation climaxes as all proclaim: "Glory to the Tsar!"



Act I - Scene 1: A cell in the Monastery of Chudov

It is 1603, five years after the coronation of Boris Godunov. The venerable monk Pimen writes by lamp-light in his cell in the monastery of the Miracle at Chudov, the old hermit monk adding the final pages to his anonymous chronicle of a gruesome period of Russian history.

A wandering motive in the bass graphically suggests the passage of the monk's pen as it moves across the parchment.

Pimen writing:

Andante molto



Pimen interrupts his writing, suddenly becoming engrossed in deep thought. He wonders if one day an industrious monk will complete his laborious historical record, so that Russia will learn the truth of its horrible past. He returns to his work and proceeds to write his last sentences.

Grigori Otrepiev, a young monk, is asleep near Pimen. Grigori suddenly awakens in agitation and panic. He reveals that it is the third time that he has been haunted by the same frightening nightmare: he dreamed that he climbed the stairs of a high tower from which Moscow appeared below like an anthill. From the square below, a seething crowd was pointing to him, all of them jeering and laughing at him. Overcome by shame and terror, he fell from the tower to the ground. Then, he awakened from his nightmare.

The placid old monk admonishes Grigori that he will have gentler dreams if he devotes his life to prayer and fasting.

Pimen relates his rich personal background and his memories of glory. He had known the great Tsar, Ivan the Terrible: he had attended his splendid court and banquets, and fought with the Tsar against the Lithuanians at the walls of Kazan. Grigori envies the old monk's adventurous experiences, and then laments his gloomy life as a monk. But Pimen praises monastic life, reminding Grigori that so many tsars became world-weary and surrendered their vanity for its peace and humility.

Pimen recalls that he even saw the great Ivan himself, sitting in this very cell and shedding tears of remorse as he begged for penitence. His son, the gentle and pious Feodor, heard God's calling and transformed the palace into a cloister; with the grace of God, Russia experienced peace and happiness during his reign. But afterwards, God was angry with Russia, and instead of a benevolent tsar, he sent Russia Boris Godunov, an assassin who usurped the crown by murdering the Tsarevich.

Grigori inquires about the age of the Tsarevich Dmitri when he was murdered? Pimen recounts that he was in Uglich to do penance when that horrible murder occurred. He was awakened by alarm bells and followed the excited crowd to

the palace where the body of the slaughtered Tsarevich lay in a pool of blood. His mother was bent over the corpse, insane with grief, and weeping in despair. When the frenzied mob captured suspects and dragged them before the dead Tsarevich, the corpse began to shake, proof of their guilt. The crowd called for the suspects to repent, but they refused. But just before their execution, they confessed that it was Boris Godunov who murdered the Tsarevich.

Pimen's story of the Tsarevich's murder occurred some twelve years ago; at the time, the child Dmitri was only seven years old. Had Dmitri lived he would be the same age as Grigori.

Pimen tells Grigori that he has closed his historical chronicle with the revelation of Boris's hideous crime, but he recommends that Grigori devote himself to its continuation.

As the matin bells toll, the voices of monks are heard in prayer. Pimen extinguishes his light, leaves the cell, and is escorted to the door by Grigori. Grigori pauses, bewildered and perplexed that he might be the surviving Tsarevich Dmitri, the fruit of the seeds planted in his mind by Pimen. In anger, he addresses Tsar Boris Godunov, vowing that his crime will one day be condemned and punished by the judgment of God.

Act I - Scene 2: An inn near the Lithuanian border

A hostess sings a Russian folk song: "I have caught a grey duck," an allegorical song about a lonely widow who yearns for love; but love always escapes her, never to return.

Her song is interrupted by the voices of guests heard from outside. Varlaam and Missail enter the inn: two wandering and engaging vagabond monks, who manage to combine piety and begging with heavy drinking. They appeal for a wealthy man of faith, whose alms would help them build a new church; they promise the man God's reward for his benevolence.

Grigori, wearing secular clothes, accompanies the monks; he had met them in his travels and requested their help in leading him to the Lithuanian border. The monks have been suspicious of the stranger's purposes; all they have managed to learn is that the young man is anxious to reach the Lithuanian frontier, but they are unaware of his reasons.

Varlaam, inspired by wine, provides a cheerful philosophy to the worried young Grigori, launching into a robust song about Russia's great victory at Kazan, in which forty thousand Tartars were slain.

Varlaam's song:

Allegro
VARLAAM



While Varlaam and Missail indulge in more drink, Grigori takes the hostess aside and inquires how far the inn is from the Lithuanian frontier. She tells him he can reach the border by nightfall, but he will have difficulty passing the guards, because they are seeking a fugitive from Moscow and have been ordered to search and detain all travelers. The hostess suggests another road into Lithuania that will avoid the guards, her description and details frightening Grigori.

The hostess has barely finished her instructions when a captain enters, accompanied by guards. Immediately, the captain proceeds to interrogate the three men. He finds Grigori not worth bothering with since his wallet is empty. Varlaam announces that he and his pious brother are poor and humble pilgrims, victims of stingy people who no longer donate alms to God. The vagrant monks proceed to drink to drown their sorrows.

The captain scrutinizes Varlaam with suspicion: he was advised that the fugitive who escaped from Moscow was a heretic monk, and he has been ordered to arrest and hang him: Varlaam seems to him to perfectly fill the description of the fugitive. The captain orders Varlaam to read the warrant, but the monk prudently proclaims illiteracy. The captain hands the warrant to Grigori to read aloud: "An unworthy monk of the monastery of Chudov, Grigori Otrepiev, has been tempted by the devil and tried to corrupt his holy brethren with temptation and lead them astray. He has fled towards the Lithuanian frontier, where, by order of the Tsar, he is to be arrested."

Grigori protests to the captain that there is no mention about hanging in the warrant, but the captain sagely remarks that hanging is implied; the government's intentions are not always put in writing. Grigori returns to reading the warrant, and at the point where the fugitive is described, he looks contemptuously at Varlaam: about fifty years old, of medium height, baldish, grey, fat, and red-nosed."

Immediately, the guards fall on Varlaam to arrest him. But the monk quickly reinvigorates his prowess at Kazan and repels them, threatening them menacingly with clenched fists.

The captain reads the warrant himself and finds a different description of the fugitive: "about twenty years old, medium height, reddish hair, one arm shorter than the other, a wart on his nose and another on his forehead." He approaches Grigori, stares at him intensely, and then erupts triumphantly: "You are the man!" But before they can apprehend Grigori, he creates havoc; he unsheathes his dagger, brandishes it threateningly, and escapes through the window.

Act II: The Tsar's apartments in the Kremlin

Xenia, Boris's daughter, holds a portrait of her fiancé as she weeps over his recent death. The young Tsarevich, Feodor, tries to console his sister, but she cannot overcome her grief and unhappiness, and vows her eternal faith in her beloved. The Nurse tries to comfort Xenia by distracting her thoughts with a folk song. Likewise, Tsarevich Feodor tries to amuse her with a tale of a hen, a pig, a calf, and other farm animals.

Tsar Boris enters, seemingly delighted by what appears to be his children's joy and happiness. But when the children see their father, they stop abruptly. Boris addresses Xenia in grave words, trying tenderly to comfort her sorrow. In turn, she tries to comfort her father, who seems anxious and distraught.

Boris dismisses Xenia and the Nurse so that he can remain alone with Feodor. Feodor has been eagerly studying a map of Russia, and proceeds to proudly point out all the leading features of the vast Russian empire. Boris shares Feodor's pride in Russia's greatness, and with equal pride advises his son that one day he will rule Russia.

Boris becomes somber, fearful that one day his son will fall victim to the intrigues of power: He reflects on his six years as Tsar: a time of excruciating personal disappointment and unhappiness in which power and glory have become illusions; he weeps for consolation because his soul suffers with secret fears and apprehensions.

Boris wanted comfort and peace for his family, but Xenia bereaves the death of her lover and is in despair and sorrow. Intrigue is prevalent everywhere: the boyars and nobles scheme to betray him, and Poland conspires against him. In spite of his great accomplishments, plague and famine devastate the land, and the Russian people are destitute and hungry. The Russian people curse him: they groan and wander like wild beasts as they deplore their misfortunes, all the while blaming him as the cause of their despair.

Is God punishing him? Night and day, he is haunted by guilt. He is sleepless and continues to see the specter of the bleeding child he murdered, the child's eyes staring at him with scorn, and his hands raised to God in a plea for mercy. But Boris denied mercy for his victim. Boris has become terrified by the guilt of his crime, a haunted, pitiful, and broken man: "O God, in Thy grace have mercy on me!"

An uproar is heard from outside. Boris sends Feodor to investigate the cause. Meanwhile, a boyar enters to announce that Prince Shuisky wishes an audience with the Tsar; the boyar whispers into the Tsar's ear that secret agents have discovered that many boyars, among them Shuisky, are conspiring against him with his enemies, particularly his Polish enemies.

As Shuisky enters, Feodor returns. Boris questions Feodor about the uproar outside. Feodor apologizes for troubling his father with his own trifling affairs when he has

more weighty ones of his own to occupy him. Nevertheless, the boy proceeds to explain at length how the commotion was caused by a tiff between his parrot and the old Nurse Nastasia.

Boris congratulates his son on his deft explanation. He is proud of his son's intelligence and education, which he concludes will represent a valuable asset when he rules Russia in his stead. But he makes sure that Shuisky hears his cynical admonition to Feodor: choose trustful advisors, and beware of wise but sly boyars like Shuisky, enemies of the throne. Boris has been well apprised by intelligence reports from his spies, and knows well that Prince Shuisky is a perfidious schemer, liar, and hypocrite.

Shuisky brings grave news for Tsar Boris: a Pretender has appeared in Cracow, supported by the King of Poland and his nobles, and the Pope of Rome. Boris fears that the Pretender, a man who may win the hearts of the Russian populace and be accepted as the real Tsarevich Dmitri. However, Shuisky assures Boris that his kingdom is secure, because the Russian people truly praise him. Feodor pleads to remain, but Boris, raging from Shuisky's news about a Pretender, dismisses his son.

Boris orders Shuisky to take immediate measures and close the Lithuanian border. He then asks Shuisky if he ever heard of dead children rising from the grave, children who defy the true, legitimate Tsar, who was elected by the people and anointed by the Patriarch?

In a monologue, Boris reveals that he appointed Shuisky to go to Uglich and investigate the death of the Tsarevich. He asks Shuisky to swear that the corpse he saw was that of the young Dmitri; if Shuisky lies, he will inflict a punishment that will be so dreadful that even Ivan the Terrible would have shrunk from imposing it.

Shuisky relates how he spent many days observing the corpse of the bloody and murdered Tsarevich. The body had been laid out in the Cathedral with the corpses of thirteen others who were slaughtered by the mob. But the Tsarevich's face bore a miraculous smile, a tranquility as if he were sleeping peacefully. The other bodies were decomposing.

The crafty Prince Shuisky has poisoned Boris's soul while professing to heal it. He certifies that it was indeed the Tsarevich's corpse that he had seen in the Cathedral, yet he hints that there may have been a miracle, and that the child did not die. Boris crumbles, unable to hear more of Shuisky's revelation: he suffocates, overcome by the guilt in his conscience.

Boris conjures up unerasable images of the murdered Tsarevich, his throat dripping with blood, the body creeping towards him, quivering and groaning. Boris cries out hysterically to the vision: "I am guiltless of your murder! Not I! Not I! It was the people's will! Oh Lord, my God, Thou who desires not the sinner's death, show me Thy grace! Have mercy on the wretched Boris!"

Boris, broken and crazed, cries in horror, a victim of his own guilt. He prays to God, admits his sin, prays for penitence, and begs for mercy for his guilty soul.

Boris dismisses Shuisky, who, as he departs, maliciously glances back toward the agonized Tsar, the man who has become the victim of his intrigue.

Boris remains in convulsion, storms of despair and agony raging in his mind.

Act III - Scene 1: Poland - Marina Mnischek's apartment in the Palace of Sandomir

Marina Mnischek is the daughter of a Polish noble, the Voyevode of Sandomir. Marina's maidens entertain her, praising her beauty with a song that compares her to a flower that is whiter than snow. (The Polish atmosphere is established by the 2/4 time rhythms of the cracovienne, and the mazurka and polonaise in 3/4 time.)

Marina is indifferent to their flattery and rejects their praise. She is only comforted by tales of Polish battles and victories, conquering heroes making the name of Poland resound throughout the world. She dismisses her maidens contemptuously.

Marina laments that she is bored, her days empty and without purpose. But a star has appeared in her life: the Muscovite adventurer Dmitri (Grigori), who has attracted her imagination, rejuvenated her, and introduced new purpose to her life; he is a man chosen by God to avenge the murder of the Tsarevich by punishing the crimes of Boris Godunov.

**Alla mazurka
MARINA**



Marina is obsessed by her ambition and craving for power. She has vowed to persuade the Polish nobles to espouse Dmitri's cause. And she is determined to captivate and bewitch Dmitri with passions of love. With her success, she envisions herself on the throne of Moscow, a Tsarina decked in jewels, and praised by Muscovites and admiring boyars.

Marina's musings are interrupted by the Jesuit priest, Rangoni. Rangoni deplores the neglect that has befallen the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. He provokes Marina to swear her obedient loyalty to the one true faith: the apostolic church. With Marina's support, Rangoni is determined to bring Roman Catholicism to Russia and destroy the Russian Eastern Orthodox Church.

Rangoni's motive:



Rangoni insists that if Marina succeeds to power in Moscow, her first duty will be to convert the Russian heretics and lead them to the true path of redemption through the Roman Catholic faith. Rangoni promises Marina that her reward will be redemption for her sinful soul.

Marina protests that she is powerless to fulfill such a mission; she is a woman whose great talents excel at banquets and society events, not at political intrigue. But the priest insists that her beauty is her most powerful weapon, a tool with which she can bewitch and capture the alien Pretender Dmitri, and then manipulate him for their purposes. She must abandon conscience, scruples, and false modesty. She must use cunning and intrigue to sow passion in the Pretender's heart; when he is her captive, she must force him to serve the glory of the Roman Catholic Church.

The proud, stubborn, self-serving Marina erupts angrily at the Jesuit, cursing his depravity and his demand for her sacrifice. But Marina is powerless against Rangoni, a messenger of Heaven and keeper of her soul. He has injected fear in her and she cannot defy the Church. Contemptuously, Marina orders the Jesuit away. But as he departs he warns her to humble herself and dedicate her soul to the glory of the Church.

Act III - Scene 2: A moonlit evening in the garden of the Mnischek palace

Dmitri waits in the garden for a planned rendezvous with Marina; he is tormented by his passion for her and craves her affection. Rangoni emerges from the shadows, the cunning master who will use intrigue to seduce Dmitri for his own purposes.

Rangoni addresses Dmitri as the Tsarevich. He declares that he is Marina's envoy, and assures him that Marina truly loves him and yearns for him night and day. Her love for the Russian Pretender has subjected her to much criticism, insults and scorn, because the nobles of the court are envious; she has become the victim of their vulgar gossip.

Dmitri vows that through his boundless love for Marina he will defend her honor. He begs Rangoni's help. Rangoni cunningly convinces Dmitri that he is the true Tsarevich Dmitri, prompting Dmitri to vow that he will win Marina's love and she will become his Tsarina. The crafty Jesuit requests his reward: that he become Dmitri's spiritual counselor and father, allowed to follow him in his great destiny. Dmitri vows his promise to Rangoni.

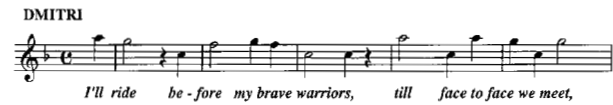
Guests emerge from the palace. Marina is among them. Rangoni advises Dmitri to conceal himself until the appropriate moment when Marina will join him. To the strains of a polonaise, the Polish guests toast and compliment Marina; then they proudly discuss their imminent conquest of Russia and Moscow.

After the nobles reenter the palace, Dmitri emerges from hiding. He does not find Marina and curses the Jesuit for betraying him. Then he explodes into jealousy because he

recalls seeing Marina dancing on the arm of an elderly Polish nobleman.

Dmitri's betrayal infuses him with resolution; he vows to lead his forces into battle and seize his rightful throne, the throne of his fathers.

Dmitri's resolution:



Marina was secretly spying on Dmitri and suddenly reveals her presence. Dmitri pours forth his love for Marina, the ardent passion of a tormented soul. Marina explains that true glory cannot exist by love alone, but only with power. She pretends to reject Dmitri's love, declaring that she is unable to return his love until he conquers Moscow and becomes Tsar. Marina scornfully insults and mocks Dmitri callously: she calls him an impostor, vagabond, and a parasite. In defence, Dmitri swears that he is the rightful Tsar, and that his cause has been steadily gaining strength and support. He will march to Moscow, and when he succeeds in gaining his rightful crown, he will look down on her in contempt; but she will crawl towards his throne, mocked by all, and tormented by the thought of a lost kingdom.

Marina is now assured of Dmitri's resolve. She abandons her contempt for Dmitri and confesses her great passion for him: her desire to share his glory. They fall into each other's arms and embrace. A short distance away, the crafty Rangoni spies on them, gloating with satisfaction that his intrigue will succeed.

Act IV - Scene 1:

The year 1605 - A square in front of the Cathedral of St. Basil the Blessed in Moscow

A crowd of vagabonds report on recent political events in Russia: Boris has cursed Grigori Otrepiev, Dmitri the Pretender, and has ordered a Requiem for him and his godless followers; Dmitri's forces have reached Kromy, about to march on Moscow, and defeat and execute Boris Godunov.

A crowd of malicious children harass and tease the Simpleton, the pathetic and pitiful village Idiot. He seats himself on a stone and sings a heartbreaking song that is a metaphor of the Russian people: cats that cry in the moonlight, and pray to God for good weather. The children steal his last kopeck, and he laments his loss.

Simpleton's song:



Boris appears before the crowd, visibly agitated and distraught. The crowd prays to their benevolent father, pleading for bread to satisfy their hunger.

Boris asks the Simpleton why he cries; he tells Boris that urchins have stolen his last kopeck, and then shocks Boris by advising him that he should have them murdered like he murdered the Tsarevich. The Simpleton cautions Boris that soon his enemies will arise, and then darkness and misfortune will again overcome the starving Russian people. Shuisky intercedes and orders guards to silence the Simpleton.

Boris becomes unnerved by the Simpleton, but mercifully orders his release, urging him to pray for the Tsar because he desperately needs the prayers of the Russian people. But the Simpleton refuses, unable to pray for “Tsar Herod,” the man who has betrayed his people.

Act IV - Scene 2: April 13, 1605 - The Granovitaya Hall in the Kremlin

The Duma of boyars are meeting. A proclamation is read that informs them that Boris, with the blessings of the Patriarch, has proclaimed himself the legitimate Tsar: the perfidious Pretender, his mercenaries, opposing boyars and Lithuanians are to be condemned to death. Boris has urged the boyars to support his proclamation through their wise judgment and conscience. The boyars acknowledge their full support of Boris, affirming that the accursed Pretender must be captured, hung, and his ashes dispersed; there shall be no trace of him ever, and he will disappear together with his treacherous allies. The boyars then pray that the Russian people may be relieved from their suffering.

Prince Shuisky comes forward. The boyars reproach him, accusing him of arousing the people with sedition by claiming that the Tsarevich Dmitri still lives. But Shuisky denies their accusation as a slanderous ploy emanating from his enemies.

Shuisky alerts the boyars that Boris seems severely disturbed. Recently, he noticed that he was despondent, despairing and tormented: he was pale, sweating, trembling, wild-eyed, and muttering strange fragments of phrases. His eyes were fixed on a corner of the room where he envisioned the Tsarevich’s ghost: he spoke to it and chased it away, crying insanely “Go away child!”

Suddenly, Boris enters the boyar’s council. He seems to be mentally disturbed; he is talking to himself and seems unaware that others are present. He shrieks in protest that he is not a murderer: that they are lies from Shuisky, who shall meet with atrocious punishment. Then Boris realizes that he is among the boyars and recovers himself. He seats himself on the throne and explains that he summoned the boyars to counsel him with their wisdom in the difficult times of trouble that have now fallen on Russia.

Shuisky announces that there is a pious old pilgrim outside, who begs an audience with the Tsar, a holy man who has a profound secret to impart. Boris orders the holy man summoned, an opportunity, he believes, to save his soul and ease his grief and troubles.

The humble holy man who enters is Pimen. He immediately plunges into his story about a miracle. He recounts that one evening, an old shepherd, who had been blind from childhood, came to him and told him how he had heard a voice urging him go to the Cathedral at Uglich and pray at the tomb of the Tsarevich Dmitri, who is now a saint in heaven. At the Cathedral, the Tsarevich appeared before the shepherd, and his sight was immediately restored to him.

Boris suffocates as Pimen relates his story. He cries out in agony: “Help! Bring light! Air!” Then Boris collapses. He orders the boyars to send for his son and bring his vestments: he is prepared to be received by the Church; he is prepared for death.

The frightened Feodor enters. The boyars leave Boris alone with his son. Boris senses imminent death and bids farewell to Feodor. He counsels Feodor that his reign now begins and that he should never question how his father obtained the throne. These are troubled times, and there is a strong Pretender yearning to accede to the throne.

Feodor’s new throne will be surrounded by treachery, famine and plague. He must be firm and just, but he must not trust the boyars: watch their activities in Lithuania, punish traitors unmercifully, pursue impartial justice, defend the holy Russian Church like a warrior, be virtuous, and cherish his sister Xenia.

Boris invokes Heaven’s protection and forgiveness not upon himself, but upon his innocent children. He takes Feodor in his arms, kisses him, prays that he will not be tempted by evil, and then falls back exhausted.



From outside, solemn funeral bells and a chorus of Russian people are heard praying for the Tsar. Boris acknowledges their prayers and prays for forgiveness.

With his last breath Boris cries out: “I still am Tsar!” He points to his son, “Here is your new Tsar. Almighty God have mercy on me!” He presses his hand to his heart, sinks back in his chair, and dies.

The boyars return, solemnly acknowledging the death of Boris.

Act IV - Scene 3: A clearing in the forest near Kromy

A crowd of peasants celebrate their imminent liberation from Boris Godunov's tyranny. They prepare to greet their new lawful Tsar, Dmitri, the chosen of God, who had been saved from the assassin's knife. The emotion of the crowd intensifies to a frenzy: "Death to Boris! Death to the murderer."

Dmitri and his army arrive, poised for their triumphal march to Moscow. Dmitri announces that he is the lawful Tsarevich of all Russia, the prince of the royal dynasty. He promises to protect all those persecuted by Boris Godunov with mercy. He urges all of his supporters to join him and march to Moscow and the Kremlin, and then rides off to trumpet fanfares.

Only the Simpleton remains, prophetically lamenting the forthcoming misfortune that awaits the poor, starving Russian people.

"Weep, believing soul. Soon the enemy will come and darkness will fall - unfathomable darkness.

Woe to Russia. Weep, starving Russian people!"

Mussorgsky and Boris Godunov

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Slavic nations of Central and Eastern Europe experienced national awakenings and used the arts to embark on their patriotic adventures: in opera, they turned to their rich culture, that was saturated with folk lore and traditional music.

In Bohemia, composers such as Antonin Dvorák (*Rusalka* - 1901) and Bedrich Smetana (*The Bartered Bride* - 1866), explored the beauties of their peasant idioms and folk music, molding them into a powerful Slavic statement of nationalism in their operas.

In Russia, nationalism was expressed through the glorification of Russian culture and history in their operas: Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov brought fantasy and occasional satire to his treatment of historical themes; and Alexandr Borodin evoked the sumptuous orientalism of medieval Russia in his opera *Prince Igor* (1891). But Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) turned westward for his inspiration: *Eugene Onegin* (1879) and *Pique Dame* (1890) ("The Queen of Spades.")

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) created operatic epics depicting Russian life and history: *Boris Godunov* and *Khovantchina*. In these operas he utilized leading motives (leitmotifs) and elevated the orchestra to symphonic grandeur, but his harmonies and rhythms incorporated musical idioms from Russia's vast cultural history.

According to autobiographical sketches, Modest (Petrovich) Mussorgsky (1839-1881), was born into an aristocratic family of landowners. However, in his formative years he was strongly influenced by his nurse and therefore prided himself as possessing the soul of a peasant: "This early familiarity with the spirit of the people, with the way they lived, lent the first and greatest impetus to my musical improvisations."

The young Modest was directed toward both a military and music career. He received his first piano lessons from his mother, reputed to have been an excellent pianist, who was articulate with many difficult pieces of Franz Liszt. In 1849, at the age of ten, his father introduced him to a military career by enrolling him in the Peter-Paul School of St. Petersburg. Although Modest was not the most industrious of students, he possessed a tremendous and wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, eventually becoming profoundly consumed by Russian history.

Modest's musical inclinations were entrusted to Anton Gerke, future professor of music at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In 1852, at the age of 13, while enrolled in the School for Cadets of the Guard, Mussorgsky composed *Podpraporshchik* (*Porte-Enseigne Polka*), which was published at his father's expense. Four years later, in 1857, the 17-year-old, now a lieutenant, joined the crack Preobrazhensky Guards, one of Russia's most aristocratic regiments. He was an ensign who was taught what every good regimental officer was obliged to know: how to drink, how to chase women, how to wear clothes, how to gamble, how to flog a serf, and how to sit on a horse properly.

But above all, music was Mussorgsky's first love. He made the acquaintance of several music-loving officers who were devotees of the Italian theater, and befriended Alexandr Borodin, who was later to become another important Russian composer. In retrospect, Borodin provided an apt picture of Mussorgsky's personality and musical inclinations at the time: "There was something absolutely boyish about Mussorgsky; he looked like a real second-lieutenant of the picture books . . . a touch of foppery, unmistakable but kept well within bounds. His courtesy and good breeding were exemplary. All the women fell in love with him. . . . That same evening we were invited to dine with the head surgeon of the hospital." Mussorgsky sat down at the piano and played . . . very gently and graciously, with occasional affected movements of the hands, while his listeners murmured, 'charming! delicious!'"

During this period, a regimental comrade introduced Mussorgsky into the home of the Russian composer Alexandr Dargomyzhsky, where his Russophile inclinations were stimulated by his exposure to the music of the seminal Russian composer, Mikhail Glinka. Through Dargomyzhsky, Mussorgsky met another composer, Mily Balakirev, who became his teacher. Balakirev made an overwhelming impact on Mussorgsky, who immediately immersed himself totally into music.

Many landowning families, Mussorgsky's among them, experienced financial hardships after the serfs were emancipated in 1861: during this time, Modest's poorly administered patrimony decreased substantially and virtually vanished. Those distressing financial troubles forced him to take a civil service job at the Ministry of Communications, and often, he sought the help of moneylenders.

In 1866, at the age of 27, Mussorgsky achieved artistic maturity. He composed a series of remarkable songs: "Darling Savishna," "Hopak," "The Seminarist," and the symphonic poem, "Night on Bald Mountain" (1867). One year later, he reached the height of his conceptual powers in composition with the first song of his incomparable cycle *Detskaya* ("The Nursery"), and a setting of the first act of Nikolai Gogol's *Zhenitba* ("The Marriage.")

In 1869 he began his magnum opus, *Boris Godunov*, writing his own libretto based on the drama by Alexandr Pushkin, and Karamzin's *History of the Russian Empire*. But the ultimate success of *Boris Godunov* failed to pacify his inner angst. He entered a lonely period of solitude after the premature death of a deeply beloved cousin; he never married and remained dutifully faithful to her memory. He had lived with his brother, and afterwards shared a small flat with the Russian composer, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, until the latter's marriage in 1872.

Alone and despairing, morose and introspective, he disintegrated, periodically disappearing. During this period of profound psychological distress, Mussorgsky began to drink to excess, which served to distract him from the composition of the opera *Khovantchina*: he completed the piano score in 1874, but the opera was unfinished at his death, completed posthumously by Rimsky-Korsakov.

Mussorgsky then found a companion in the person of a distant relative, the impoverished 25-year-old poet, Arseny Golenishchev Kutuzov, to whom the composer dedicated his last two cycles of melancholy music: “Sunless,” and “Songs and Dances of Death.” At that time Mussorgsky was haunted by premonitions of death, and the death of his friend, the painter Victor Hartmann, inspired him to write the piano suite, “Pictures from an Exhibition,” orchestrated in 1922 by the French composer Maurice Ravel.

The last few years of Mussorgsky’s life were dominated by his alcoholism and a solitude that became even more painful by the total neglect of his friends, all of whom treated him like an outcast. Nonetheless, the composer began an opera inspired by a Gogol tale, the unfinished “Sorochintsy Fair.” He toured southern Russia and the Crimea as an accompanist to an aging singer, Darya Leonova, and later tried teaching at a small school of music in St. Petersburg.

On Feb. 24, 1881, he suffered from three successive attacks of alcoholic epilepsy. His friends took him to a hospital where for a time his health seemed to be improving. Nevertheless, Mussorgsky’s health was irreparably damaged, and he died within a month.

To Western Europeans, Russia was a mysterious nation at the turn of the nineteenth century, an immensely powerful country — as Napoleon learned — but just emerging from its medieval conditions. The entire Western tradition of philosophical thought, culture, and science was largely unknown to Russians except for a few enlightened members of the aristocracy. Russians were traditionally preoccupied with unresolved cultural and religious conflicts between East and West, the role of the Russian folk in their music and literature, and the perennial social and political conflicts about their preferred form of government: autocracy vs. democracy.

Musically, the country had a rich heritage of folk songs that represented their cultural soul, but there was no musical establishment, and musicians were considered second-class citizens; as late as 1850 there was no conservatory of music in all of Russia, few teachers, and few music books and publications. In 1862, Anton Rubinstein wrote of those conditions: “Russia has almost no art-musician in the exact sense of this term. This is so because our government has not given the same privileges to the art of music that are enjoyed by the other arts, such as painting, sculpture, etc.; that is, he who practices music is not given the rank of artist.” In sum, musicians of the times had literally no social status or opportunities.

The idea of a country’s aspirations being consciously reflected in its music evolved during the nineteenth century, most strongly manifested in those countries outside the mainstream of Western European thought: Russia, Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia, all for the most part under the domination of a foreign power, or in Russia itself, subjugated by the iron fist of a czar and his entrenched aristocracy.

Social protest was manifested through artistic expression: literature and music. Nationalistic music became

a form of propaganda; a spiritual call to arms. When activism against social and political injustices and reform was defeated, the language of music could express a country's longing for freedom, as well as its pride and traditions. And all this was helped by the Romantic identification with "the folk."

Nationalism in music became the conscious use of a body of folk music that eventually appeared in such extended forms as symphony and opera. However, even if a composer occasionally wrote a piece incorporating folk elements, that in itself did not necessarily identify him a nationalist composer: Wagner, perhaps the most Teutonic of all composers, was not a nationalist composer because he never drew upon the heritage of German folk music, as did his predecessor, Carl Maria von Weber. As such, nationalism in music was not a superficially applied patina of folk music, but rather, an evocation of the folk spirit and soul of its people through songs, dances, and even religious music. True nationalistic music evoked conscious and unconscious sensibilities of the homeland: it evoked a collective unconscious that suggested the air they breathed, the food they ate, and the language they spoke.

As the nineteenth century unfolded, nationalism arrived in Russian opera as composers began to shed their long subjection to the music of imported Italian, French, and German schools. Until Glinka, Russian musical life had been dominated by the Italians: opera in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as indeed in other European cities, meant Italian opera. But as the century progressed, Eastern and Central European countries expressed their artistic xenophobia, reacting in part to the onslaught of Wagnerism as well as Western artistic dominance of their opera art form. They transformed their operas conceptually and infused them with specific elements of their national identity and culture. Russian opera in particular became so nationalistic and individual that it became impossible for it to be mistaken as anything but purely Russian: opera subjects were derived from their voluminous history, and the music was specifically flavored with authentic adaptations of Russian folk music.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as Russian nationalism in music began to stir: the rules and techniques of the German and Austrian conservatories were emphatically and absolutely denounced.

The first to distinctively assert Russian nationalism in music was Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857): *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), the story about a Russian national hero, and *Ruslan and Ludmila* (1842), a fairy tale with allegorical nationalistic overtones. These works, although reflecting many Western influences by being composed in the old-fashioned Italian-style, achieved an intended "Russianness" through their fusion of Slavic folk music, pre-Wagnerian use of leitmotifs, and colorful orchestration. Glinka's much less successful disciple was Dargomyzhsky (1813-1869), whose *Rusalka* (1856), was an allegorical fairy tale that was musically illustrated with a strong emphasis on melodic recitative. But in *The Stone Guest*, which was completed by Cui and

Rimsky-Korsakov, a form of “sung speech” was developed, which eventually profoundly influenced all Russian opera composers, particularly Mussorgsky.

A group of Russian nationalist composers eventually became known as the “Mighty Handful,” or the “Five”: César Cui (1835-1918), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Mily Balakirev (1837- 1910), Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881), and Alexandr Borodin (1833-1887). Tchaikovsky was composing during this time, but for the most part his music was not engrossed in that aura of “Russianness”: that profound presence of folksongs that evoked national and cultural stirrings. Even in *Eugene Onegin*, Tchaikovsky’s folkish ambience is nothing more than an aspect of its decor, a background for the essential naturalism of the rural society it is intended to portray.

The “Mighty Handful” introduced important innovations in their operas: the Dargomyzhsky-Cui *The Stone Guest* (1872) provides powerful characterizations and advanced harmonies; Borodin’s *Prince Igor* (1890), although dramatically shapeless, is drenched with Slavic and Oriental colors; Rimsky-Korsakov’s numerous fairy-tale operas seem like brilliantly illustrated music books; his finest work, “the Russian *Parsifal*,” *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* (1907), is marked by profound emotional strength. But he also composed lighter works: *The Snow Maiden* (1882), and the fantasy opera buffa, *Le Coq d’or* (“The Golden Cockerel”) (1909). Like Borodin’s *Prince Igor*, Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas contributed largely to what many have come to consider typically “Russian” music: music that radiates with Slavic and Oriental harmonic colors and sounds.

Although Mussorgsky’s intensely powerful *Boris Godunov* is his greatest operatic achievement, his opera *Khovantchina* (1886) possesses much Russian Orientalism, as well as remarkable choral writing that supports its pageantry of the Russian people.

Boris Godunov, perhaps the most popular Russian opera, provides the essence of Russian nationalism in music. Although tsar Boris, the guilty usurper of the throne, dominates this pageant of Russian history, the principal protagonist of the opera is the Russian people, for whom Mussorgsky provided a remarkable dramatic presence through forceful and compelling choral writing.

The libretto for Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* was derived from two sources: Nikolai Karamzin’s *History of the Russian Empire* (1816-1829), and Alexandr Pushkin’s poem *Boris Godunov* (1869).

Nikolai Karamzin (1777-1826), was a Russian historian, poet, and journalist, whose greatest literary achievement was his 11-volume *History of the Russian Empire*, an effort that evolved from his friendship with the emperor Alexander I, and later resulted in his appointment as court historian. Karamzin’s *History*, in effect, became an apology for Russian autocracy, nevertheless, in its time, it was the first serious appraisal of Russian history dating from the early seventeenth century: the “Time of Troubles” that

ends with the accession of Michael Romanov (1613). Nevertheless, although Mussorgsky based his opera principally on Pushkin's dramatic poem, which in turn was based on Karamzin's *History*, Karamzin was a Romanov historian, the implacable enemy of Godunov; therefore, the *History* is absolute in its premise that Boris Godunov indeed succeeded to the throne by murdering the Tsarevich Dmitri, son of Ivan the Terrible, and rightful heir of the Rurik dynasty. In other interpretations, Dmitri was an epileptic who died of a self-inflicted knife-wound during a seizure, a death witnessed by at least four persons.

Karamzin's *History* contained original research as well as a great number of documents that presumed to be foreign accounts of historical incidents. As history, it has been superseded by more recent scholarship, but it remains a landmark in the development of Russian literary style, considered by many to have contributed much to the development of the Russian literary language; it sought to bring written Russian, then rife with cumbersome phrases, closer to the rhythms and conciseness of educated speech, as well as equip the language with a full cultural vocabulary.

Alexandr Pushkin (1799-1837), was Russia's greatest and most revered poet. For Russians, who have always taken their literature seriously, the impetuous Pushkin became an icon, in effect, their uncontested "national poet." In English literature, to produce a figure of comparable scope and status, one would have to venture comparisons to Shakespeare, Byron, Sir Walter Scott, and a few others. In Italian literature, similar comparisons would address Dante and Boccaccio, and in German literature, Goethe and Schiller.

In his time, Pushkin was adored, analyzed and imitated, his legacy inherited by such later Russian writers as Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Nabokov. Even the mighty cultural establishment of the former U.S.S.R. embraced and propagandized his work to school children in a campaign that taught them to cherish Pushkin as a model of patriotism and diligence — rather stretching the truth of his often dissolute existence — and perhaps most importantly, his courageous anti-tzarist behavior.

Today, busts and statues of Pushkin stand in nearly every Russian city, even in such remote locales as Sochi, on the Black Sea, the resort town in which Pushkin died, on January 29, 1837, from a gunshot wound received two days earlier in a duel fought over the honor of his frivolous social-climbing wife. He was only thirty-seven, his death considered the most tragically unnecessary death of any great writer. Like Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* poem, which Tchaikovsky dramatized in his opera, its story unveils a profound irony in the sense of the interplay of life and art: the events of the poem, and the events of Pushkin's own life were identical. An amorous liaison of Pushkin's wife seems not to have gone much further than dance-floor conversations and perhaps some subtle expressions of affection, but Pushkin demonstrated the identical bitterness, rage, and jealousy that his fictional Lenski displayed over Onegin's flirtations with

Olga. Pushkin's honor had been insulted and he was mocked, particularly after he received a spurious certificate naming him to the "Society of Cuckolds." To settle the grievance, a duel ensued. The duel would end the life of the great poet Pushkin, just as the duel had ended the life of his fictional Lenski in his poem *Eugene Onegin*.

Pushkin wrote primarily in meticulously constructed verse — his iambic pentameter familiar to all Russians — with its subtle charms stubbornly eluding, even to this day, the efforts of even the most skilled translators. Yet several translations of Pushkin's poems are available, including the controversial and exhaustively notated version of *Eugene Onegin* by the late Vladimir Nabokov. Scholars have concluded that there are over 500 different works written by Pushkin that are the subject sources for more than 3,000 different compositions. Those works are most notably operatic: Mikhail Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila*; Dargomyzhsky's *The Stone Guest*; Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*; Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mozart and Salieri*, *The Tale of Czar Sultan*, and *The Golden Cockerel*; Rachmaninoff's *Aleko and The Miserly Knight*; Stravinsky's *Mavra*, and, of course, Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, *Pique Dame* ("The Queen of Spades"), and *Mazeppa*.

Despairingly and gloomily, Pushkin's poems addressed the very conflicts and tensions of the Russian soul: his popularity is attributed to his immersion into so many of the fundamental issues that have preoccupied Russian culture, particularly during the early nineteenth century, when social and political transitions were imminent. Pushkin's works possessed an aristocratic sensibility that gave rise to an inner torment over the conflict between his perception of his backward native Russia and the greater sophistication and refinement of Western Europe, an almost paranoid sensibility that led many Russians to a sense of alienation and guilt, if not inferiority. But the overall themes of Pushkin's literary legacy were concerned with the unresolved cultural and religious conflicts between East and West, the role of the Russian folk in their music and literature, and the perennial social and political conflicts about their form of government.

Though Pushkin lived in the early nineteenth century, a time when the idea of aristocratic privilege went largely unchallenged in Russia, he sensed the dramatic political and social apocalypse that was to evolve as the sheltered aristocratic existence of tsarist Russia was becoming increasingly threatened both internally and externally: the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the assassination attempt on Alexander II by terrorists in 1881, pogroms, the appearance of the first Russian Marxists, rapid industrialization, and as the twentieth century unfolded, the Revolution that would destroy the Romanovs and the entire gentry class.

Pushkin, whether in satire or cynicism, portrayed a Russian canvas of human passion that possessed a deep sense of disillusionment, doom, foreboding, and death, all seemingly a metaphor, or a forecast, of the ominous changes about to appear on the Russian horizon; the disappearance of a golden age.

Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, the most Russian of Russian literature, brought to the fore the historical inner conflict of the Russian people: humble and powerless masses pitted in an eternal struggle against the powers of autocracy. Pushkin's drama provided a vast panorama of Russian history involving six Moscow tsars: he depicted not only the later life story of the Tsar Boris Godunov, but also introduced three Russian tsars who succeeded him on the Moscow throne; Boris's son, Feodor, who reigned for a couple of months after his father's death, the pretender Dmitri, who ruled for the next eleven months, and finally Prince Vassily Shuisky, who organized the murder of Feodor and Dmitri, and who reigned for the following four years. The two tsars who preceded Boris Godunov are also cited: both Ivan the Terrible and his son, the saintly Feodor, who is described in great length by the chronicler Pimen in Mussorgsky's opera.

Boris Godunov began his political career serving in the court of Ivan IV: the "Terrible." He gained Ivan's favor by marrying the daughter of the Tsar's close friend, and also manipulated his sister Irina's marriage to the Tsarevich Feodor; his new status as the Tsarevich's brother-in-law facilitated his promotion to the rank of boyar and guardian for Ivan's son Feodor, a regency specifically entrusted by Ivan. (The boyars were Russian aristocrats ranking just below the ruling princes, later abolished by Peter the Great.)

Ivan the Terrible died in 1584. He was succeeded by his son, the pious Feodor, a reign that lasted 14 years until his death in 1598; it was the end of the Rurik Dynasty that had ruled Russia — and the principality of Muscovy — for more than seven centuries. Feodor died leaving no heirs, although Ivan had another son, Dmitri, believed to have been murdered seven years earlier, or to have died from an epileptic seizure, the truth depending on the historical source cited.

The clergy and boyars — all part of the Duma — elected Boris Godunov the next tsar, a position he had held in all but name, since during Feodor's regency, the young Tsarevich wanted little to do with governing and left Boris in total control. Boris was an able and ambitious boyar of Tartar (Turkic) origin, whose family had migrated to Muscovy in the fourteenth century. Nevertheless, it was generally believed that Boris had murdered Ivan's other son, Dmitri, in order to succeed to the throne. Although many boyars considered Boris a usurper and conspired to undermine his authority, but Boris banished his opponents during his reign, virtually succeeding in establishing complete control over Russia.

Tsar Boris Godunov proved himself an intelligent and capable ruler in both domestic and foreign affairs. He undertook a series of benevolent policies that reformed the judicial system, sent students to be educated in western Europe, allowed Lutheran churches to be built on Russian soil, and in order to gain power on the Baltic Sea, entered into negotiations for the acquisition of Livonia. He conducted successful military actions, promoted foreign trade, built numerous defensive towns and fortresses, recolonized and solidified Western Siberia, which had been slipping from

Moscow's control, and arranged for the head of the Muscovite Church to be raised from the level of metropolitan to patriarch (1589).

To reinforce his power he exercised strict controls over the boyar families who opposed him, and also instituted an extensive spy system that ruthlessly persecuted those whom he suspected of treason; in particular, he banished members of the Romanov family, his most prominent opposition. Those measures increased the boyars' animosity toward him and also inflamed popular dissatisfaction, particularly after the ineffectiveness of his efforts to alleviate the suffering caused by famine (1601-03) and the accompanying epidemics. A pretender claimed to be Tsarevich Dmitri, Tsar Feodor's younger half-brother who was presumed to have died in 1591. He led an army of Cossacks and Polish adventurers into southern Russia (1604) but Boris's army impeded Dmitri's advance toward Moscow. With Boris's sudden death in 1605, tsarist resistance broke down, and the country lapsed into a period of chaos characterized by swift and violent changes of regimes, civil wars, foreign intervention, and social disorder.

Boris Godunov's reign, that began in 1598, was deemed the "Time of Troubles." It was during this period that Russia was threatened by major social, political, and economic disruptions, numerous foreign interventions, peasant uprisings due to famines, boyar opposition, and attempts by numerous pretenders to seize the throne.

When Boris died in 1605, a mob instigated by Prince Vassily Shuisky, favored and claimed allegiance to the Pretender Dmitri. Earlier, in 1591, Shuisky had achieved prominence by conducting the investigation of Dmitri's death. Shuisky determined that the nine-year-old child had killed himself with a knife while suffering an epileptic fit, but after Boris's death, he reversed his judgment and fully supported the pretender's claim to the throne, declaring that Dmitri had escaped death in 1591. Boris's son, the new tsar Feodor II, was killed, and Dmitri was named tsar. The boyars, however, soon realized that they could not control the new tsar, and they immediately assassinated him, placing the powerful nobleman, Prince Vasily Shuisky on the throne. Shuisky, a descendant of the Rurik dynasty, became tsar in 1606 and reigned until 1610.

There were any one of three different pretenders who challenged Boris Godunov's Muscovite throne during the "Time of Troubles," and each claimed to be Dmitri Ivanovich, the son of Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible.

The first pretender is considered by many historians to have been Grigori (Yury) Bogdanovich Otrepiev, an adventurer and a member of the gentry who had frequented the home of the Romanovs before becoming the monk Grigori. He was apparently convinced that he was the genuine Dmitri and legitimate heir to the throne. While living in Moscow and threatened with banishment, he fled to Lithuania where he began his campaign to acquire the Muscovite throne by soliciting support from Lithuanians, Polish nobles, and Jesuits.

In the fall of 1604, this Pretender Dmitri gathered an army of Cossacks and adventurers and invaded Russia. Although he was defeated militarily, he had succeeded in attracting a host of followers and supporters throughout southern Russia who opposed the autocratic rule of the Tartar Tsar Boris Godunov. At the same time, he gathered political support from Russia's hereditary enemy, the King of Poland, as well as the Pope of Rome; Grigori recognized the Roman Catholic Church rather than the Orthodox Church as representing the one true faith. After Boris died the government army and Muscovite boyars shifted their support to the pretender, and the pseudo-Dmitri advanced with his Polish allies on Moscow where he had himself proclaimed tsar after marrying Marina Mnischek, the daughter of a Polish noble. Mussorgsky's music drama, *Boris Godunov*, ends with this event in 1605, the Pretender Dmitri triumphantly entering Moscow and proclaiming himself the true Tsar.

In the subsequent history, the new tsar Dmitri alienated his supporters by failing to observe the traditions and customs of the Muscovite court. He favored the Polish army, who had accompanied him to Moscow, and his Polish wife, Marina Mnischek. He attempted to engage Russia in an elaborate Christian alliance to drive the Turks out of Europe. Shortly after Dmitri was crowned, Shuisky reversed his position again, accused the new Tsar of being an impostor, and proceeded to engage in a plot to overthrow him. An organized group of boyars were instigated to oppose the pretender, and a popular uprising was provoked: Dmitri was assassinated. In May 1606, Prince Vassily Shuisky, the cunning and ambitious intriguer, succeeded Dmitri as Tsar of Russia.

A year later another pretender appeared and claimed to be the rightful tsar. Although this second Pretender Dmitri bore no physical resemblance to the first, he gathered a large following among Cossacks, Poles, Lithuanians, and small landowners and peasants who had already risen against Shuisky. He gained control of southern Russia, besieged Moscow for over two years, and together with a group of boyars that included the Romanovs, established a full court and government administration to rival Moscow at the village of Tushino in 1608; this Dmitri became known as the Thief of Tushino.

This second Pretender Dmitri sent his armies to ravage northern Russia, and, after Marina Mnischek insured his credibility by formally claiming him as her husband, he wielded sufficient authority to rival Shuisky. While elements of Dmitri's army took control of the northern Russian provinces, Shuisky bargained with Sweden (then at war with Poland) for aid. With the arrival of Swedish mercenary troops Dmitri fled Tushino. Some of his supporters returned to Moscow; while others joined the Polish king Sigismund III, who declared war on Moscow in response to the Swedish intervention. In September 1609, Dmitri led an army into Russia and defeated Shuisky's forces. This second Pretender Dmitri — the Thief of Tushino — continued to contend for the Muscovite throne until one of his own followers fatally wounded him in 1610.

In 1611, a third Pretender Dmitri, who has been identified as a deacon called Sidorka, appeared at Ivangorod. He gained the allegiance of the Cossacks who were ravaging the environs of Moscow, and of the inhabitants of Pskov, thus acquiring the nickname Thief of Pskov. In May 1612 he was betrayed and later executed in Moscow. Tsar Shuisky was determined to avoid challenges from future pretenders. He ordered the remains of Dmitri brought to Moscow and had the late Tsarevich canonized. He also proclaimed his intentions to rule justly and in accord with the boyar Duma.

Nevertheless, opposition to Shuisky's regime intensified. Although he was supported by the wealthy merchant class and the boyars, his rule was weakened by a series of peasant rebellions. Poland, now at war with Russia, threatened to advance on Moscow. The disappointed Muscovites rioted, and an assembly that consisted of both aristocratic and commoners deposed Shuisky and he took monastic vows and entered a retreat.

The Polish king, Sigismund, now united with the boyars, named Władysław (son of the Polish king) tsar-elect, and the Polish troops were welcomed into Moscow. Sigismund demanded direct personal control of Russia and continued Polish invasions into Russia, but that only stimulated the Russians to rally and unite against the invaders.

Ultimately resistance to the Polish advance was thwarted through alliances of the army, the clergy, small landholders, cossacks, and merchants. In 1613, a widely representative assembly elected a new tsar, Michael Romanov, establishing the dynasty that ruled Russia for the next three centuries.

In 1868, Mussorgsky began his masterpiece, *Boris Godunov*; he wrote his own libretto which represented a synthesis of Karamzin's *History of the Russian Empire* and Pushkin's drama, the latter partly based on Karamzin and ancient Russian chronicles.

The historical scope of the story is immense, a classic example of the necessity for the opera composer to condense the text for practical and esthetic purposes. Most often, many sequences in an underlying story are quite acceptable when read or presented on the spoken stage, but because it takes longer to sing than to speak, certain elements of the text can become cumbersome and unsuitable for musico-dramatic purposes. The opera composer has less time available to present the necessary details and information of his story; thus, he generally concedes to aesthetic demands by omitting certain details that existed in a source play or a novel, and he is often obliged to limit the libretto to a certain number of situations which must suffice to convey the entire continuity of the drama. As such, the composer normally selects incidents which he considers fitting for operatic treatment, but in the process, he may omit the explanation of important details of the story, and his opera libretto may become sacrificed to a tableau of scenes rather than to a faithful dramatic exposition.

There were 23 episodes in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*: Mussorgsky considerably compressed and rearranged the original Pushkin, initially choosing ten scenes. At the 1874

premiere of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, the St. Petersburg audience had no difficulty following the story: the historical background and all the leading characters were well known to them, and educated Russians were intimately familiar with Pushkin's *Boris*: "Boris, Boris, everything trembles before you."

After these necessary excisions, the original libretto became a series of pageants, all held together by the tremendous figure of Boris; it represented an inexorable sweep of history that incorporated the intrigue of Tsar Boris's court as well as the despairing life of the Russian people. Nevertheless, the character of Boris Godunov — in the opera or in the actual history — transcends any one figure: the entire opera represents a panorama of historical Russia, an integral portrait of tsar, boyar, priest, intriguer, and peasant.

The action of the opera covers a time-period of some seven years: the first two scenes — the Prologue — takes place in early 1598; in Scene 1 the populace awaits Boris's decision to accept or decline the throne of Russia; Scene 2 is Boris's coronation. Five years elapse before Act I: the old monk Pimen's cell in the monastery, and Dmitri's confrontation at the inn. The second act, taking place in Boris's apartments in the Kremlin, occurs several months later. The third and fourth acts — the Polish act and Dmitri's subsequent march into Russia — takes place even later: in 1605. During this seven-year chronicle, many momentous historical events occur, and in each sequence — and practically in each scene — new characters appear.

Mussorgsky composed the music for the original *Boris Godunov* between October 1868 and May 1869, the score completed in December 1869. In 1870, the Directorate of the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg rejected the opera; they considered its story harsh and grim, and in particular, that it lacked a major love interest and female role.

Between 1870 and 1872, Mussorgsky proceeded to overhaul the opera, making extensive alterations, abridgements, and additions to his original score and scenario: excisions in the St. Basil's Square and other scenes, many new arias, and the entirely new Polish act (Act III), which provides a prominent role for soprano (Marina), the intrigue of the sinister Jesuit priest (Rangoni), and the Marina-Dmitri love duet. Other additions were: Boris's Kremlin monologue, the Forest of Kromy scene, and the conclusion of the opera with the song of the Simpleton. Three scenes from this version were performed at the Maryinski Theatre on Feb. 3, 1873. The world premiere took place in January 1874 at the Imperial Opera House in St. Petersburg; a week before the world premiere Mussorgsky decided to call the first act a Prologue.

Boris Godunov was a decided success with the public, and less of a success with the critics, who attacked its feeble libretto, its crude tone painting, and much of what they considered Mussorgsky's immature musical technique. Mussorgsky was crushed, yet the truth was that he was the first of the "Mighty Five" to produce a musico-dramatic masterpiece that incorporated the entire essence of Russian history and culture.

In 1881, shortly after Mussorgsky's death, there was much criticism of Mussorgsky's original harmonic and instrumental style, causing Rimsky-Korsakov to lead the vanguard to purge his friend's work of what he considered to be its awkward melodies, eccentric harmonic progressions, and instrumental weaknesses. Rimsky took it upon himself to edit, change, re-harmonize, reorchestrate, add key signatures, and alter the sequence of some scenes.

Rimsky Korsakov's revisions have evoked much controversy. He was a skilled composer, a devoted and honest musician, and a loyal friend of Mussorgsky, but he also had traditional approaches to music drama, and certain elements within *Boris*'s operatic structure appalled him: "I worship *Boris Godunov* and hate it. I worship it for its originality, power, boldness, independence and beauty. I hate it for its shortcomings, the roughness of its harmonies, the incoherence of its music." He knew there would be opposition: "Although I know I shall be cursed for so doing, I will revise *Boris*. There are countless absurdities in its harmonies, and at times in its melodies."

The Rimsky-Korsakov revisions of *Boris Godunov* have become standard in opera houses the world over, despite protests by musicologists and critics. Nevertheless, there are many productions that attempt to recapture Mussorgsky's original score, as well as productions that combine the original score with the Rimsky-Korsakov revisions.

In opera, the composer of music, not the playwright, is the dramatist of the story. Tsar Boris — whether in the Karamzin, Pushkin, or Mussorgsky portraits — was a dramatically complex personality. He was an ambivalent man: a murderer who sent assassins to kill the Tsarevich Dmitri, the rightful heir to the throne, and at the same time, he was a man of strength, wisdom, and kindness, who sought progress for his people. He was a sympathetic and loving father: he grieved with compassion over the death of his daughter Xenia's fiancé, and with his son Feodor, he devoted genuine loving concern, pouring over maps of Russia and approving of his son's intelligence and education.

Boris Godunov is a grand tragedy; it is a double tragedy that portrays a fallen ruler as well as a despairing nation. Boris committed one single misdeed, a crime that destroyed his soul: his remorse and guilty conscience dominate the opera, and there is scarcely a moment in the opera in which he does not grieve and suffer from guilt.

The Russian people are the principal protagonists of the opera; they are both the tsar's chief antagonist and his chief proponent. Boris expresses sincere concern for their welfare, but he fails to achieve his goals, the chance misfortunes of the "Times of Troubles" controlling the people's destiny, not the will of Boris. The Russian people's antagonism and anger pervades the entire opera; they comment like a Greek chorus about the tragic state of their beloved Mother Russia and the failures of their leader. It is also central to Boris's defeat that the Russian people feel that they were orphaned: Boris was not a Rurik, and the Godunovs were not royalty. In effect, Boris destroyed divine succession; he was a leader not ordained by God.

Nevertheless, Boris is energetic in combating his enemies, relentless and imperious with his subservient and deceitful counselors, particularly the intriguing Prince Shuisky. But all of these characteristics are nullified by his pervasive guilt. The real tragedy of Boris — described by many as the “Russian Macbeth” — is that he cannot free himself from the haunting guilt of the crime he committed.

Karamzin’s *History* and Pushkin’s drama were written in the early nineteenth century, a time when Boris’s crime had acquired what may be called official sanction: the Romanov’s were the ruling tsars, and if truth is the coefficient of power, they were determined to portray Boris as an evil criminal. Nevertheless, the historical Boris was rational and moderate, unable to believe in the power of a pretender to unite a superstitious nation against him. He was not known to have governed by brutality like his predecessor, Ivan the Terrible, who exterminated his enemies in a reign of terror: Boris Godunov merely banished most of his enemies to the provinces, in retrospect a faulty policy that backfired when they united and agitated against him.

Mussorgsky’s opera presupposes that Boris killed Dmitri: it becomes the essence of the tragedy, Boris’s suffering guilt that overpowers and destroys him. But Boris’s presumed crime is not necessarily the historical truth.

The character of Boris Godunov has often been compared to Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Like Shakespeare, Pushkin used his characterization to hold a mirror up to humanity by laying bare his protagonist’s soul; like Shakespeare, Pushkin’s character inventions were truthful representations of the human experience, taking human nature to its limits, and forcing one to turn inward and discover new modes of awareness and consciousness. Pushkin’s ultimate legacy, like that of Shakespeare, was to provide the wheel of the Russian soul, teaching them whether they were fools of time, of love, of fortune, or even of themselves.

Underlying Pushkin drama and Mussorgsky’s opera is a profound political pessimism, a sense of despair that has historically pervaded the Russian soul. Like Macbeth, Boris Godunov was overcome and motivated by ambition and power. He became susceptible, vulnerable, and ultimately the self-inflicted victim of his Machiavellian exaggerations and power obsessions; his lust for power and fiery ambition for the throne made him a victim of his own desire. Despotism and terror became compulsions to protect his crown: scruples vanished and were replaced by irrational forces. But like Macbeth, Boris’s inner demons, and his unconscious imagination overwhelmed and contaminated him, the guilt within his soul transforming him into utter despair.

Boris’s murder of the Tsarevich dominates the entire dramatic action of the story: the core of the drama concerns Boris’s guilt and his fear for the damnation of his Christian soul. Those fears lead him into an abyss of guilt: demons conquer him, and he transforms into torment and agony. Macbeth faced the horror of his guilt by compounding his crimes: “It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood.”

But Boris must face his day of judgment, and he seeks penitence and redemption from his sins.

Shakespeare traditionally evaded Christian morality: he was not a spiritual dramatist, and he wrote no holy sonnets exposing the divine, or suggested a path to redemption of the soul. Shakespeare's high tragedies provide no spiritual comfort, but rather, a pragmatic nihilism, an instinctive form of survival rather than redemption through the path of theological metaphysics. In Shakespeare's world, there is only grief and death, but no spiritual solace. But in Boris Godunov, there is a yearning for redeeming grace, expiation, and forgiveness; Boris seeks the path to the eternal salvation of his soul, not a nihilistic finality.

The specter of the murdered Tsarevich dominates Boris, overpowering his mind by evoking his guilt. Boris is the true tragic hero, a man destroyed not from without by the pretender Dmitri, but from within by the gnawing of his conscience. Boris's guilt becomes the true plot of the drama.

In Pushkin, there are no characters corresponding to the Polish Princess, Marina Mnischek, or the Jesuit Priest, Rangoni, though there are a few lines of dialogue at one point between Dmitri and a Catholic priest, in which the Pretender promises that in two years time the Russian people and the Eastern Church will submit themselves to the Holy Father in Rome.

Historically, a Pretender Dmitri is alleged to have been the writer of a letter to the Pope — written in Polish, but later translated into Latin — in which he professes to be zealous for the salvation not only of his own soul, but of all Muscovy; then he embraces the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and declares himself willing, if God approves of his cause, to use all his powers once he has ascended his hereditary throne to assist the Russian people to see the light of Roman Catholicism as he has been fortunate enough to experience it.

It is a great pity that in many productions certain elements of the Rangoni-Marina and Rangoni-Dmitri scenes of Act III are omitted: their presence highlights an important subplot of the drama and unites the opera coherently: the Great Schism (1054) between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. In Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, the Roman Catholic Church is portrayed as the arch enemy of Russia, highlighting the historical religious conflict between the Eastern and Roman Catholic Churches.

Rangoni's intrigues with both Marina and Dmitri provide coherence to the entire drama, as well as moments for exploding operatic passions. No one of the Polish nobility believes Dmitri to be anything but an adventurer, and he is regarded merely as a renegade monk of questionable character. In the garden scene of Act III, Dmitri becomes annoyed by Marina's declaration that politics and ambition are more important to her than love. And Marina frankly condemns Dmitri as an impostor, shamed that she has lowered herself by allying with him in order to succeed in her ambitions. It is only when Dmitri's fighting spirit revives and he swears he will drive Boris from his throne that

Marina's respect for him is reborn. Nevertheless, Marina's motivations are ambition, not love: another analogy to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but this time Lady Macbeth, although the real catalyst of these ambitions is Rangoni.

Marina frankly tells Dmitri that he can send for her when he is tsar, but not beforehand; then, she abruptly leaves him. Alone, Dmitri comments cynically that women are more treacherous than tsars or Jesuits. He distrusts Marina and regrets the power she wields over him. But he has become energized by dreams of her love, ready to leave Poland and march against Boris.

It was only after revisions that Mussorgsky added this scene, primarily to satisfy the Directorate's demand for a female lead and a love interest in the opera. Nevertheless, the passions of this scene serve to unite the entire drama: the ideal grist for the operatic mill.

Mussorgsky found the most impressive, precise, and graphic musical means to illuminate and emphasize Boris Godunov's complex personality: Boris the ruler, Boris the father, and Boris the sinner. Mussorgsky's music provides appropriate characterization through its expressionistic sensations, at times moody, harsh, exotic, and eerie.

Certain musical phrases are always connected with Boris's deep concern for the tribulations of his homeland: the famines, foreign invasions and epidemics that beset Russia during his reign; the "Times of Troubles." Two basic themes characterize Boris as father: one motive accompanies his angry outburst against the duplicitous and treacherous Prince Shuisky, when he admonishes his son not to trust false and selfish counsel, a theme that is recalled when Boris suffers a fatal attack in the last act and calls for his son; the other, the tender phrases associated with his love for his daughter, Xenia.

The central emotion of the drama is Boris the sinner, and Mussorgsky's most effective musical images portray his guilt and remorse: a phrase keeps recurring in his great monologue of the second act that suggests that Russia's troubles are punishment for Boris's crime. Another passage refers to Boris's inability to sleep, a poetic concept that Pushkin borrowed from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, who also "murdered sleep": the phrase deals with sleeplessness and leads directly to Boris's vision of the blood-splattered, murdered child, an emotional and dramatic climax of the score. And the musical portrait of the guilty tsar would be incomplete without quoting Boris's pathetic appeal for forgiveness in the inspired prayer that precedes his death.

At the end of Boris's death scene, there is a sense of deep compassion for the tortured, repentant spirit of the despairing tsar of all the Russia's. To end this scene, Mussorgsky fashioned a uniquely touching postlude: two melodic lines, one descending from the highest treble, the other moving up from the deepest bass, that seem to form a huge musical curtain that slowly and solemnly closes over the corpse of Tsar Boris.

Mussorgsky was a musical impressionist, using his musical language to capture visual images. He loved to

imitate sounds, like the ticking of the clock and the whirring of its unwinding spring, the tones from church bells, and the alarms that appear in the Forest Scene. In the Coronation scene, one of the Kremlin's bells has a slight imperfection, an authentic detail which Mussorgsky delighted in portraying.

But Mussorgsky also translated motions and gestures into musical imagery: in the monastery scene, the old monk, Pimen, works at his desk, and Mussorgsky's music describes the motion of his writing: the movements of the hands is described by the music starting and stopping as Pimen pauses and then resumes his writing. In Grigori's first act dream, the novitiate relates how he climbed the great tower and then looked down at Moscow, the music rising and then falling to suggest his tumble into the jeering crowd.

The idea of two roads to Lithuania is uncannily illustrated in the music. In Act I - Scene 2, the hostess of the inn explains to Grigori that although the direct road to Lithuania has been closed, there is a detour: harmonic progressions simulate travelling the route.

In the Prologue - Scene 1, the wielding of whips symbolize police brutality: the oppression of the Russian people, which is the central theme of the opera.

And to portray the suffering soul of Russia, Mussorgsky chose the Simpleton as his metaphor; a harmless, innocent half-wit, but a figure regarded with religious awe in olden times. His strange and very moving lament for the people of Russia again expresses the core theme of the opera.

Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, and to a lesser extent *Khovantchina*, display a bold style; a dramatic technique that portrays sharply characterized individuals set against the background of country, history, and culture. His powerful musical portrayal, his strong characterizations, and the importance he assigned to the role of the chorus are all expressions of his anti-Romantic convictions.

Mussorgsky's music describe scenes of Russian life with great vividness and insight. He realistically reproduces the inflections of the spoken Russian language with a sense of naturalism, his overt intention to "tug at the heartstrings" by catching the "intonations of the human voice." His goal was to make the characters speak on stage exactly as they do in real life, without exaggeration or distortion: his mission was "musical prose," or sung speech in its most realistic form.

Allied to Mussorgsky's concept of sung speech was a strong nationalism. He wanted to express the soul and spirit of the Russian people in his opera: "When I sleep I see them, when I eat I think of them, when I drink, I can visualize them: integral, big, unpainted, and without any tinsel."

Indeed Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* celebrates the spirit of the Russian people; it is a pageant of their cultural soul that could only be achieved through the marriage of a musical genius and the opera art form.