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HOW NOT TO WRITE AN OPERA

Borodin Balked At "Prince Igor"

AS regularly as midsummer and midwinter arrive, Donizetti wrote two operas per annum for thirty years. Rossini dashed off "The Barber of Seville" in thirteen days.

But Borodin's "Prince Igor," which is to be played from 3YA next Sunday, was no mass-produced piece. It was more like Wagner's "Siegfried," which was composed over a period of 20 years, except that in the case of "Prince Igor" the composition, begun in 1869, was not finished at all when the composer died in 1887.

The story of "Prince Igor" is the story of how not to write an opera. Intending composers please note.

Borodin started enthusiastically, then balked. Result: "Prince Igor" was only a scattered collection of melodies and libretto when he died. Fortunately, for much of the music was very well worth preservation. Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazounov had been taking an interest in the progress of the work and when Borodin died they collected the broken pieces, glued them together, and turned the opera out complete at last. The main themes are still Borodin's, but it is known that a great deal of the music was composed by his friends to fill the gaps left by his own inconsequential treatment of the work.

Stassov Delivered the Goods

When he began "Prince Igor," Borodin had already had success with symphonic compositions. But he still wanted to see his music put to an opera, to hear himself interpreted in terms of the stage. It became his ambition to write a Russian epic into opera.

With a friend, Stassov, he at last found a suitable scenario. Stassov, by the way, showed a good deal more application to the work than his friend. Borodin wanted a scenario. Stassov sat down one morning to write it and delivered it later in the day.

It was, briefly, the story of Igor's attack on the Polovetzky, his defeat and capture, the love story of his son, and his own final reunion with his wife.

Borodin spent some time studying atmosphere, and then set about writing just those numbers which most appealed to him. When he tired of these, or found himself too occupied with his profession, which was chemistry of all things, he used up other of his works which had been begun and abandoned.

In His Odd Moments

The years went by with nothing really constructive completed. In 1872 he was commissioned to write the fourth act of "Mlada." For this he started by using some of the "Prince Igor" music. But he did not finish it, and later retaliated upon himself by writing some of the "Mlada" music into "Prince Igor."

Odd bits and pieces were added from time to time. He wrote, he admitted, when he was too unwell to do his ordinary work or else, as in 1876, when he was held up on a journey by a river in flood.

Korsakov despairingly tried to egg him on, and finally, with Lyadov, sat all through one night working on the score

of the dances with Borodin. Six more years went by. Borodin suddenly died. Korsakov and Glazounov, remarkably faithful to the memory of their friend, set to work to finish and score the opera. They were able to find only about eight completed numbers. The rest consisted of partly completed sections in piano score, partly of rough sketches. Some of the numbers were not written down at

who handled each section. But that will be difficult, for Korsakov, Glazounov and, to a lesser extent, Lyadov, all followed Borodin's style with great care.

Another private competition for musicians will be the study of Borodin's Oriental dances. It is suggested that "Scheherezade" was in Korsakov's mind while he worked on Borodin's themes.

In spite of its strange history, "Prince Igor" will repay listeners' attention. Borodin had the unusual gift of poetry as well as musical inspiration. He found

DANCE OF THE POLOVETZKY



Borodin's opera "Prince Igor," which contains the famous "Dance of the Polovetzky," will be featured by 3YA, Christchurch, at 9.15 p.m. on Sunday, July 7, in the "Music from the Theatre" series

all. They had to put them on paper from memories of Borodin's playing of them.

Test for Listeners

When the opera is broadcast on July 7, at 9.15 p.m., musicians may find some interest in detecting, if they can, where the style of the composition varies according to the method of the composer

exactly the right words for his music. The result, as found in this opera, is many very lovely lyrics.

In the performance to be broadcast are included the Leeds Festival Choir, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Sorokin Russian Choir, Feodor Chaliapin (bass), Alexander Draeff (bass), and Charles Kullman (tenor).

MUSIC AND FOOD Composer's Strange Mixtures

HOW many of those who listened to Suppé's "Boccaccio Overture" a week or two ago knew that the composer was the author of a cookery book? Music and asparagus may seem a strange mixture—in spite of Dinner Music—but Suppé was quite as much interested in one as in the other, and this clash of interests led him at times into strange situations.

But the biggest mess he ever got into was the result of his interest in gardening. Early in 1878 two librettists, F. Zell and Richard Genée, completed the text of a comic opera and asked Suppé to produce the music. The libretto was in fact "Boccaccio," and Suppé returned to

the country to compose without distractions. But summer and the balmy air of his estate were too much for him. He had just bought this place, and there was much to be done about the house and grounds, especially in the asparagus plots. Day after day went past and music was completely forgotten.

Food, however, was not. He neglected "Boccaccio," as well as another libretto committed to him about the same time, but he found time to compose a cookery book with menus for the whole year, and then, feeling a little ashamed of himself, placed his wife Sofie's name on the cover as author. He returned to the city without writing a note.

To complete the story it is necessary to add that this lover of good food died, by the irony of fate, of cancer of the stomach, and literally starved to death.