



## **BORIS GODOUNOV**

Modeste Moussorgski

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Opera in a prologue & 3 acts

*Sung in Russian*

Libretto by Modeste Moussorgski

### **Opéra national de Paris**

LIVE June 7, 2018 at 8pm Paris time

Approximate Running Time: 2h10 with no intermission

### **CREATIVE TEAM**

Conductor	Vladimir Jurowski
Director	Ivo Van Hove
Sets & Lighting Design	Jan Versweyveld
Costume Design	An D'Huys
Dramaturgy	Jan Vandenhouwe
Chorus Master	José Luis Basso
Orchestra & Chorus	Orchestra & Chorus of Opéra national de Paris

### **ARTISTIC TEAM**

Boris Godounov	Ildar Abdrazakov
Fiodor	Evdokia Malevskaya
Xenia	Ruzan Mantashyan
La nourrice	Alexandra Durseneva
Le prince Chouiski	Maxim Paster
Andrei Chtchelkalov	Boris Pinkhasovich
Pimen	Ain Anger
Grigori Otrepiev	Dmitry Golovin
Vaarlam	Evgeny Nikitin
L'aubergiste	Elena Manistina
L'innocent	Vasily Efimov
Mitioukha	Mikhail Timoshenko
Police Officer	Maxim Mikhailov
A boyar, voice in the crowd	Francisco Simonet
Misail	Peter Bronder

## PRESENTATION

**“Living power is unbearable for the people. They can love only the dead.” - Boris, *Boris Godounov*, Alexandre Pushkin**

In 1824, when Pushkin turned to Boris Godounov for his first historical drama, he knew well the colossus he was tackling. Armed with his reading of Shakespeare, Pushkin retold the epic history of the dazzling reign of the Tzar of Russia (1598-1605). Indeed, elements of *Macbeth* appear throughout this political fable, in which an imposter with ambitions for the throne haunts Boris, pretending to return as the child that Boris had once killed in order to seize power. Adapting this epic poem, Mussorgsky composed a meditation on the solitude of power, a populist drama in which the real protagonist is the Russian people with its burden of eternal suffering.

Ivo Van Hove is no stranger to grand political frescos, having previously staged *Tragédies Romaines* and *Kings of War*, both based on plays by Shakespeare. This is his first production for the Paris Opera.

The production stars Ildar Abdrazakov, “one of the most sought-after young basses in the operatic world” (*Vanity Fair*) and “one of the most exciting Russian singers to emerge on the international scene in the past decade” (*Opera News*).

## SYNOPSIS

### *PART I / PROLOGUE*

The curtain opens on a crowd in the courtyard of the monastery, where the weary regent Boris Godounov has temporarily retired. Nikitich the police officer orders the assembled people to kneel. He goads them to clamor for Boris to accept the throne. From the porch of the Cathedral of the Dormition, Prince Shuysky exhorts the people to glorify Tsar Boris. As the people sing a great chorus of praise, a solemn procession of boyars exits the cathedral. The people kneel. Boris appears on the porch of the cathedral. The shouts of "Glory!" reach a climax and subside. Boris delivers a brief monologue ("My soul grieves") betraying a feeling of ominous foreboding. He prays for God's blessing, and hopes to be a good and just ruler.

### *PART II*

#### *Scene 1: Night. A Cell in the Chudov Monastery*

Pimen, a venerable monk, writes a chronicle ("Yet one last tale") of Russian history. The young novice Grigori awakes from a horrible (and prophetic) dream, which he relates to Pimen, in which he climbed a high tower, was mocked by the people of Moscow, and fell. Pimen advises him to fast and pray. Grigori regrets that he retired so soon from worldly affairs to become a monk. He envies Pimen's early life of adventure. Pimen speaks approvingly of Ivan the Terrible and his son Fyodor, who both exhibited great spiritual devotion, and draws a contrast with Boris, a regicide.

Upon discovering the similarity in age between himself and the murdered Tsarevich, Grigori conceives the idea of posing as the Pretender. As Pimen departs for Matins, Grigori declares that Boris shall escape neither the judgment of the people, nor that of God.

#### *Scene 2: An Inn on the Lithuanian Border (1603)*

The vagrants Varlaam and Misail are with Grigori at the Lithuanian border. After exchanging greetings, Varlaam requests some wine. When the Hostess returns with a bottle, he drinks and launches into a ferocious song ("So it was in the city of Kazan") of Ivan the Terrible's siege of Kazan. The two monks quickly become tipsy, and soon begin to doze. Grigori quietly asks the Hostess for directions to the Lithuanian border. Policemen appear in search of a fugitive heretic monk (Grigori) who has run off from the Chudov Monastery declaring that he will become Tsar in Moscow. Noticing Varlaam's suspicious appearance and behavior, the lead policeman thinks he has found his man. He cannot read the ukaz

(edict) he is carrying, however, so Grigori volunteers to read it. He does so, but, eyeing Varlaam carefully, he substitutes Varlaam's description for his own. The policemen quickly seize Varlaam, who protests his innocence and asks to read the ukaz. Varlaam is only barely literate, but he manages to haltingly read the description of the suspect, which of course matches Grigori. Grigori brandishes a dagger, and leaps out of the window. The men set off in pursuit.

### *PART III*

Prince Shuysky now enters. Boris insults him, accusing him of conspiring with Pushkin, an ancestor of the poet. However, the prince brings grave tidings. A Pretender has appeared in Lithuania. Boris angrily demands to know his identity. Shuysky fears the Pretender might attract a following bearing the name of Tsarevich Dmitriy. Shaken by this revelation, Boris dismisses Fyodor. He orders Shuysky to seal the border with Lithuania, and, clearly on the edge of madness, asks Shuysky whether he has ever heard of dead children rising from their graves to question Tsars. Boris seeks assurance that the dead child the prince had seen in Uglich was really Dmitriy. He threatens Shuysky, if he dissembles, with a gruesome execution. The Prince describes the ghastly scene of Dmitriy's murder in a brief and beautiful aria ("In Uglich, in the cathedral"). But he gives hints that a miracle (incorruptibility) has occurred. Boris begins choking with guilt and remorse, and gives a sign for Shuysky to depart. Boris hallucinates (Hallucination or 'Clock' Scene). The spectre of the dead Dmitriy reaches out to him. Addressing the apparition, he denies his responsibility for the crime: "Begone, begone child! I am not thy murderer... the will of the people!" He collapses, praying that God will have mercy on his guilty soul.

### *PART IV*

#### *Scene 1: The Square before the Cathedral of Vasilii the Blessed in Moscow (1605)*

A crowd mills about before the Cathedral of the Intercession (the Temple of Vasilii the Blessed) in Red Square. Many are beggars, and policemen occasionally appear. A group of men enters, discussing the anathema the deacon had declared on Grishka (Grigori) Otrepyev in the mass. They identify Grishka as the Tsarevich. With growing excitement they sing of the advance of his forces to Kromĭ, of his intent to retake his father's throne, and of the defeat he will deal to the Godounovs. A yuródiviĭ enters, pursued by urchins. He sings a nonsensical song ("The moon is flying, the kitten is crying"). The urchins greet him and rap on his metal hat. The yuródiviĭ has a kopek, which the urchins promptly steal. He whines pathetically. Boris and his retinue exit the Cathedral. The boyars distribute alms. In a powerful chorus ("Benefactor father... Give us bread!"), the hungry people beg for bread. As the chorus subsides, the yuródiviĭ's cries are heard. Boris asks why he cries. The yuródiviĭ reports the theft of his kopek and asks Boris to order the boys' slaughter, just as he did in the case of the Tsarevich. Shuysky wants the yuródiviĭ seized, but Boris instead asks for the holy man's prayers. As Boris exits, the yuródiviĭ declares that the Mother of God will not allow him to pray for Tsar Herod (see Massacre of the Innocents). The yuródiviĭ then sings his lament ("Flow, flow, bitter tears!") about the fate of Russia. Shishkov's design for the Faceted Palace Scene (1870)

#### *Scene 2: The Faceted Palace in the Moscow Kremlin (1605)*

A session of the Duma is in progress. The assembled boyars listen as Shchelkalov, reading the Tsar's ukaz (edict), informs them of the Pretender's claim to the throne of Russia, and requests they pass judgment on him. After some arguments, the boyars agree ("Well, let's put it to a vote, boyars"), in a powerful chorus, that the Pretender and his sympathizers should be executed. Shuysky, whom they distrust, arrives with an interesting story. Upon leaving the Tsar's presence, he observed Boris attempting to drive away the ghost of the dead Tsarevich, exclaiming: "Begone, begone child!" The boyars accuse Shuysky of spreading lies. However, a dishevelled Boris now enters, echoing Shuysky: "Begone child!" The boyars are horrified. After Boris comes to his senses, Shuysky informs him that a humble old man craves an audience. Pimen enters and tells the story ("One day, at the evening hour") of a blind man who heard the voice of the Tsarevich in a dream. Dmitry instructed him to go to Uglich and pray at his grave, for he has become a miracle worker in heaven. The man did as instructed and regained his sight. This story is the final blow for Boris. He calls for his son, declares he is dying, gives Fyodor final counsel, and prays for God's blessing on his children, and then dies.