

SARASOTA **OPERA**

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Exploration in Opera

Teacher Resource Guide



The Golden Cockerel By Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

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Community Foundation of Sarasota County



The Cast

Conductor	Ekhart Wycik
Stage Director	Tom Diamond
King Dodon (Bass)	Grigory Soloviev
Prince Guidon (Tenor)	Jon Jurgens*
Prince Afrom (Baritone)	Kenneth Stavert*
Commander Polkan (Bass)	William Roberts*
Housekeeper Amelfa (Mezzo-Soprano)	Daryl Freedman*
The Astrologer (Tenor Altino)	Timur Bekbosunov
Queen of Shemakha (Soprano)	Alexandra Batsios
The Golden Cockerel (Soprano)	Riley Svatos*
Boyars, Soldiers, Warriors, Crowd, Slaves, Guards	Chorus

* *Studio Artist*



Top Row Ekhart Wycik, Tom Diamond, Grigory Soloviev, Jon Jurgens, Kenneth Stavert
Bottom Row William Roberts, Daryl Freedman, Timur Bekbosunov, Alexandra Batsios, Riley Svatos

The Story

Prologue

The Astrologer tells the audience that they will see a fictional tale from long ago which will have a good lesson for them.

Act I

King Dodon, surrounded by his court, complains that while he once was a young and vigorous warrior, now he just wishes to rest. Unfortunately his enemies threaten from the East and he is now anxious and cannot sleep. His son Prince Guidon proposes that the armies be moved from the frontier to the city, where they can restore themselves with good food and drink and wait for an attack there. Everyone applauds this idea except General Polkan who points out that the city is much more difficult to defend, much to Dodon's annoyance. Prince Afron has another plan. He suggests disbanding the army until a month before the attack and reassemble to conquer their foe. Polkan also mocks this plan, since no enemy is likely to give a month's notice of an attack.

The Astrologer appears and offers King Dodon a cockerel that will crow a warning when there is danger. Dodon is delighted and offers the Astrologer any reward. The Astrologer asks for Dodon's promise to fulfill his wish in the future and leaves.

The Cockerel signals that all is safe and Dodon happily prepares for bed, watched over by his housekeeper Amelfa. As he begins to doze off, the Cockerel crows warning of danger. Dodon calls his sons to deal with the enemy. The two Princes reluctantly go off to war and Dodon settles back down to sleep.

As Dodon is again dreaming, the Cockerel crows again and renews the danger warning. Polkan tells the king that they must go to battle. Dodon reluctantly puts on his old armor and awkwardly mounts his horse, going off to war.

Act II

The war has not gone well and King Dodon and General Polkan arrive to survey the damage. Corpses are everywhere including both Princes who have managed to kill each other.

The mist clears to reveal a tent. Polkan is about to give the order to fire a cannon at the tent when it opens to reveal a beautiful woman, the Queen of Shemakha. She sings a hymn to the rising sun. Dodon and Polkan admire her as she approaches. She tells them that she is their enemy who plans to conquer their city with her beauty.

After partaking of a glass of wine, Polkan begins to speak to her but his remarks try her patience and Dodon orders him to withdraw behind the tent.

The Queen then begins to seduce Dodon, who is confused by her attentions. She invites him to sing which he resists until finally succumbing to her entreaties. When he does she laughs at him. She then reflects sadly on her homeland and Dodon promises to make her happy. Breaking from her sadness she encourages Dodon to dance with her. Since he hasn't danced since he was a child, he declines, but again she encourages him and he breaks into a wild dance to the amusement of the Queen and her retainers.

Exhausted Dodon begs her to return with him to his kingdom, where he will give her everything. She asks him to flog Polkan, whom she hates, and he offers to have the general beheaded. The Queen agrees to marry Dodon and preparations are made to depart as the Queen's servants mock the old king.

Act III

Dodon's subjects are concerned about their king and beg Amelfa for news. She tells the crowd that the king was victorious and will bring home a new Queen.

Dodon and the Queen arrive in a procession to the cheers of the crowd. The Astrologer returns and asks the King to fulfill his earlier promise by giving him the hand of the Queen of Shemakha. Dodon finds this ridiculous and offers half his kingdom to the Astrologer, who nevertheless persists. In his frustration, Dodon hits the Astrologer on the head with his sceptre and the old man drops dead.

The Queen is amused but Dodon thinks this is a bad omen for his wedding day. The cockerel begins to crow and lands on the King's head, pecking at it until the King falls dead. The crowd laments their dead King as everything goes dark. When light is restored, the Queen and the cockerel have vanished.

Epilogue

The Astrologer reappears and reassures the audience that this was just a fairy tale and only he and the Queen were real.

The Composer

1844-1908



Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was born on March 18th, 1844 in a small town outside of St Petersburg, Russia. He began taking piano lessons at the age of six and showed a talent for music. His parents encouraged him to pursue a career in military service, and in 1856, at the young age of twelve, Rimsky-Korsakov enrolled in the Russian Naval Academy.

During his time in the Navy, Rimsky-Korsakov traveled the world. He was inspired by the scenery of the places he visited and began to compose what would become his first symphony. Upon returning to Russia in 1865, Rimsky-Korsakov premiered his Symphony No. 1 in E minor. The composition was well received and the audience was surprised that a young naval officer composed the work. Rimsky-Korsakov's military work only took up

two to three hours of the day, which gave him ample time to compose.

In July of 1871, he became a professor of composition at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in addition to a naval officer. Despite his musical talent, Rimsky-Korsakov had no knowledge of music theory so he taught himself. In 1873 he began composing opera, much of which was influenced by Russian folk songs. *Mayskaya noch* (May Night) was premiered at the Mariinsky Theatre, one of the most famous opera houses in Russia, on January 21, 1880.

Rimsky-Korsakov's next opera was *Snegúrochka* (*The Snow Maiden*), which was based on a play written by Alexander Ostrovsky. In 1888 Rimsky-Korsakov composed his famous work orchestral suite *Scheherazade*, based on *One Thousand and One Nights* (also known as *The Arabian Nights*). *Scheherazade* is an excellent example of Rimsky-Korsakov's musical style. The use of non-European melodies (such as Arabian, Siberian, and Chinese) combined with Russian folk tunes is a key component of Rimsky-Korsakov's compositions.

In 1890, Rimsky-Korsakov became depressed after the deaths of his mother and youngest son. No music was composed during this period. In 1893 he began to conduct the Russian Symphony after the death of his friend and fellow composer Tchaikovsky. Conducting inspired Rimsky-Korsakov to start composing again. In 1895, he began work on a one act opera called *Bagdaskiy borodobrey* (*The Barber of Baghdad*). He never finished writing the opera, but the main character's aria later became "The Hymn to the Sun" in *The Golden Cockerel*. Around the same time Rimsky-Korsakov did finish and premiere his opera *Christmas Eve*. The Russian imperial family demanded that the opera be censored. Rimsky-Korsakov was so upset he decided not to attend the first performance.

Throughout his later years, Rimsky-Korsakov was very honest about his political views against Tsar Nicholas II, the absolute monarch of Russia. There were two key events that shaped Rimsky-Korsakov's view of the Russian government.

On Sunday, Jan. 22, 1905, Russian soldiers were ordered to fire on members of the working class petitioning Tsar Nicholas II for equal rights. Called "Bloody Sunday, this event marked the beginning of the 1905 Revolution in Russia. After months of violence and striking, Nicholas II granted the working class equal civil rights (although, these rights were never implemented in

Rimsky-Korsakov's lifetime), ending the 1905 Revolution. Rimsky-Korsakov supported the revolution, which led to the banning and censorship of several of his operas.

In addition to Bloody Sunday, Rimsky-Korsakov was angered by the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Tsar Nicholas II, who wanted to expand Russia into Japanese colonies on the Asian mainland, started the war. The Russian Pacific fleet was destroyed almost immediately and the Atlantic fleet met defeat seven months later during the Battle of Tsushima Strait in May of 1905. The Russo-Japanese War was the first time a European country had lost a war to a non-European nation, resulting in political repercussions in and outside of Russia.

Both Bloody Sunday and the Russo-Japanese War led Rimsky-Korsakov and many other Russian intellectuals to become highly critical of Nicholas II and to separate themselves from the regime.

In 1906, Rimsky-Korsakov took a forced retirement from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Soon after, the remainder of his operas were either heavily censored or banned. In 1907, he began composing his final opera *Zolotoy petushok* (*The Golden Cockerel*). Rimsky-Korsakov wanted the opera to be a commentary on the absolute monarchy and Tsar Nicholas II's failed reign. *The Golden Cockerel* ran into trouble with censor laws and wasn't premiered until after Rimsky-Korsakov's death from heart failure in 1908 at the age of 64. The opera premiered on October 7th, 1909 at the Solodovnikov Theater in Moscow.

Today, Rimsky-Korsakov's classical works like *Scheherazade* are still often performed throughout the world. His operas *The Snow Maiden* (1882), *The Tsar's Bride* (1899), and *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* (1900), are all operatic staples within Russian speaking countries. Sarasota Opera performed the American premiere of Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night* in 1999. His legacy influenced many other famous composers, including Maurice Ravel (French), Claude Debussy (French), Igor Stravinsky (Russian), and Sergei Prokofiev (Russian).

Listening & Viewing

The Golden Cockerel

Act II - Hymn to the Sun

http://youtu.be/gva90C_7NeQ?t=1m35s

As king Dodon calls on his soldiers to avenge the death of his sons, Princes Guidon and Afron, the beautiful Queen of Shemakha appears singing praises to the rising sun:

The flaps of the tent move. The warriors hastily disperse, leaving the cannon. From the tent emerges with an easy but imposing gait a beautiful, bright-eyed woman, accompanied by four female slaves with zimer, rebec, reed, and a drum. She wears a long silk garment of raspberry colour, plentifully adorned with pearls and gold. On her head a white turban with a high feather. The beautiful woman, as if she had noticed nothing, turns towards the bright sun, raising her hands to it in prayer.

Queen of Shemakha. Answer me, bright orb of day! Thou com'st to us from the East—Hast thou visited my native land, The country of fairy dreams? Are the roses still glowing there And the bushes of burning lilies? Do the turquoise dragon-flies kiss the gorgeous leaves? In the evening by the waters, In the shy songs of the women and the maidens is there still that same intoxicating faintness, The passionate dream of forbidden love? Is the unexpected guest still welcomed — Are there gifts prepared for him— A modest feast—a secret look Through the interfering veils? When the blue night darkens, Does the young mistress hasten to him With a sweet avowal on her lips, having forgotten both fear and shame?

The song being ended The Queen turns towards The King and looks for a long time at him in silence.

The Golden Cockerel

Russian Cartoon with English Subtitles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAtAr3UMwkU>

Loosely based on Pushkin's poem, this animated cartoon premiered in the USSR in 1967.

Scheherazade

Orchestral Suite by Rimsky-Korsakov, Premiered 1888

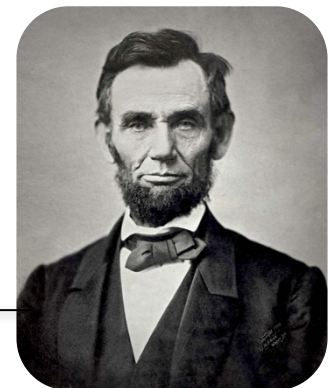
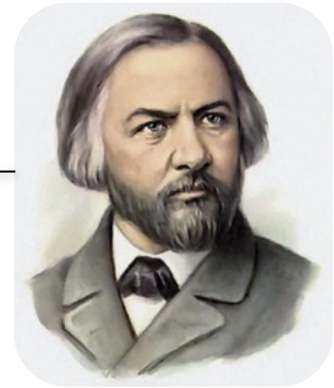
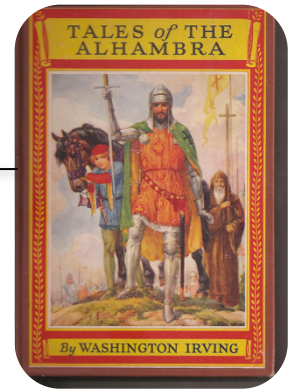
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQNymNaTr-Y>

Based on *One Thousand and One Nights*, also known as *The Arabian Nights*, this work is an excellent example of Rimsky-Korsakov's style and use of oriental and Eastern musical themes. The composer wrote this brief explanation of the piece's title and thematic message:

The Sultan Schariar, convinced that all women are false and faithless, vowed to put to death each of his wives after the first nuptial night. But the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by entertaining her lord with fascinating tales, told seriatim, for a thousand and one nights. The Sultan, consumed with curiosity, postponed from day to day the execution of his wife, and finally repudiated his bloody vow entirely.

Timeline

- 1825** The Erie Canal opens
- 1832** **Washington Irving** publishes *Tales of the Alhambra*
- 1835** Russian Five composer **Alexander Borodin** is born
- 1834** **Alexander Pushkin** writes "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" based on Washington Irving's "Legend of the Arabian Astrologer" from *Tales of the Alhambra*
- 1835** Russian Five composer **César Cui** is born
- 1836** Composer **Mikhail Glinka**'s opera *A Life for a Tsar*, considered the first Russian Opera, premieres in St. Petersburg.
- 1837** Russian Five leader and composer **Mily Balakirev** is born
- 1838** Photography is invented
- 1839** Russian Five composer **Modest Mussorgsky** is born
- 1844** **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov** is born
- 1845** Florida becomes a state
- 1848** Gold is discovered in California sparking the California Gold Rush
- 1852** Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is published
- 1856** **Rimsky-Korsakov** enrolls in the Russian Naval Academy
- 1859** Abolitionist John Brown leads the Rebellion on Harpers Ferry
- 1860** Abraham Lincoln is elected President and South Carolina becomes the first state to secede from the Union
- 1861** The American Civil War begins
- 1862** The Emancipation Proclamation is issued



1865 **Rimsky-Korsakov's** Symphony No. 1 in E Minor premieres

Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, VA.



1867 U.S. acquires Alaska from Russia for the sum of \$7.2 million

The first transcontinental railroad in the U.S. is completed

1870 The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, giving African Americans the right to vote

1871 **Rimsky-Korsakov** becomes a professor of _____ composition at the St. Petersburg Conservatory



1876 Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone

1873 **Rimsky-Korsakov's** opera *Mayskaya noch* (May Night) premieres

1888 **Rimsky-Korsakov's** orchestral suite "Scheherazade" premieres

1890 **Rimsky-Korsakov's** mother and youngest son die

1894 Tsar Alexander III dies. Nicholas II succeeds him.



1895 **Rimsky-Korsakov's** highly censored opera *Christmas Eve* premieres. He does not attend the performance in protest.

1904 The Russo-Japanese War begins between Russia and Japan

1905 Bloody Sunday occurs in Russia sparking a revolution

1873 **Rimsky-Korsakov** is forced to resign his post at the St. Petersburg Conservatory

1907 **Rimsky-Korsakov** finishes composing *The Golden Cockerel*

1908 **Rimsky-Korsakov** dies of heart failure

1909 *The Golden Cockerel* premieres in Moscow, Russia



The Russian Five

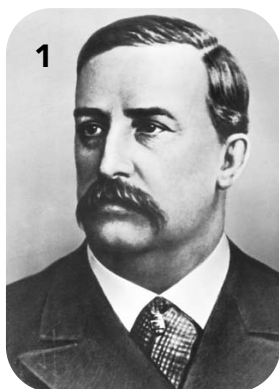
Also called “The Mighty Handful” and “The Mighty Little Heap”, these composers wanted to create a “distinctive nationalist school of Russian music” that reflected the Russian people and their culture.¹ They did this by using Russian folk, Oriental, and Eastern melodies. In doing so, they hoped to distance themselves from western European musical influences.

Although The Five began to meet in the early 1860’s, they did not receive their name until 1867 in a music review by newspaper critic Vladimir Stasov:

“God grant that our Slav guests may never forget today's concert; God grant that they may forever preserve the memory of how much poetry, feeling, talent, and intelligence are possessed by the small but already mighty handful of Russian musicians.”²

All five composers were self-taught musicians without any formal training and each had professions outside of music.

After the deaths of Musorgsky and Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov carried on the ideals of the group with the help of young musicians and the support of wealthy industrialist Mitrofan Belyayev.



1. **Aleksandr Borodin** (1833-1887) | Composer, Chemist, Doctor, and Professor

2. **César Cui** (1835-1918) | Composer, Military Engineer, and Critic

3. **Mily Balakirev** (1837-1910) | Composer and Teacher

4. **Modest Mussorgsky** (1839-1881) | Composer and Army Office

¹ Norris, Geoffrey. "Five, The." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. 1st ed. Vol. 6. London: Macmillan Limited, 1980. 621. Print.

² Calvocoressi, M.D., Abraham, G., *Master Musicians Series: Mussorgsky*, London: J.M.Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1946, pg. 178

Satire & Irony

Satire and irony are used throughout *The Golden Cockerel*. Here is some background on both and their use in the opera.

Definition

1. A way of using humor to show that someone or something is foolish, weak, bad, etc.
2. Humor that shows the weaknesses or bad qualities of a person, government, society, etc.

Origins

Satire comes from the Latin noun *satura* meaning "Mixture".

Forms

Today the two forms of Roman satire are the most common:

Horatian: Criticizes social issues through playful humor

Juvenalian: Addresses social issues through scorn and ridicule using less humor and more sarcasm

Definition

1. The use of words that mean the opposite of what you really think in order to be funny.
2. A situation that is strange or funny because things happen in a way that seems to be the opposite of what you expected

Characters

1. King Dodon is a symbol of Tsar Nicholas II
2. The Astrologer is the voice of reason and intelligence
3. The Golden Cockerel character represents the arbitrary decisions made by Nicholas

Plot Events

1. The Golden Cockerel (powerless) kills King Dodon (powerful).
2. King Dodon is not able to save his sons; they go into battle before he does (fathers are supposed to protect their children)
3. King Dodon is enchanted by the Queen of Shemakha and ends up giving her his kingdom (man falls in love with woman, acts irrationally)
4. Dodon breaks his promise to the Astrologer, and immediately after, the Golden Cockerel pecks King Dodon to death (karma for Dodon not keeping his promise)

Satire

Irony

Examples

The Inspiration

American author **Washington Irving**, Russian poet **Alexander Pushkin**, and Russian visual artist **Ivan Bilibin** all played a role in *The Golden Cockerel*.

Irving's "The Legend of the Arabian Astrologer" from *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832) inspired Pushkin to write "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" (1834) which was later illustrated by Bilibin.

Additionally, in 1906 a political cartoon by Bilibin appeared on the cover of the periodical *Zhupel* depicting a King staring "stupidly at the moon" with a caption indicating "The most illustrious Tsar Dodon, sovereign of the entire earth" was "contemplating the idea of rounding off his dominions by annexing the moon." This cartoon and its criticism of Tsar Nicholas II are believed to have inspired Rimsky-Korsakov to write his opera.¹

Ivan Bilibin



Ivan Bilibin (1844-1908) was a Russian artist and illustrator. He gained renown in 1899 when he released his innovative illustrations of Russian fairy tales including *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel* by Alexander Pushkin. During the Russian Revolution of 1905 he also drew political cartoons demonizing the Tsarist regime.

Bilibin would go on to design the sets and costumes for several of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas. His designs for *The Golden Cockerel* reflected his and Rimsky-Korsakov's love of Russian folk art, fairy tales, and Asian art.

Bilibin later moved to Paris before returning to Russia in 1936. He died in World War II during the German Army's Siege of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg).



"Tsar Dadon meets the Shemakha queen"
(illustration to *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*, 1906)



Cover of *Zhupel*, No 2, 1905

¹ Abraham, Gerald. "Satire and Symbolism in 'The Golden Cockerel'" *Music & Letters* 52.1 (1971): 51. JSTOR. Web. 16 Oct. 2914.



Washington Irving (1783-1859) was a popular 19th century author. He is best known for his fictional stories "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" which brought him international fame. One of 11 children, Irving was named after revolutionary hero and president George Washington and attended his inauguration in 1789.

In 1809 Irving wrote *A History of New York* under the penname Diedrich Knickerbocker. He would later publish "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" under the name Geoffrey Crayon.

While staying with friends in Granada, Spain, Irving conducted research for his book *Tales of the Alhambra*, which included the fictional story "The Legend of the Arabian Astrologer". Irving was inspired by the real and mythical events surrounding Alhambra Palace and was granted access to the fortress due to his celebrity status. Published in 1832, *Tales of the Alhambra* was translated into multiple languages including Russian.

After retiring in 1846, Irving returned to Tarrytown, NY and spent the remainder of his life writing biographical works, including a multi-volume series on George Washington.



Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), considered the father of Russian literature, was born into a noble family. He received an excellent education at the prestigious Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum, publishing his first poem at the age of 15.

Pushkin gradually took on the causes of social reform and was exiled and censored by the Russian government through his life. His play *Boris Godunov* and novel *Eugene Onegin* were written while in exile at his mother's estate from 1824-1826. Both works later became operas by Russian composers Tchaikovsky (*Eugene Onegin*) and Mussorgsky (*Boris Godunov*). Rimsky-Korsakov alone would compose three operas based on Pushkin's works.

Pushkin died in 1837 after challenging his wife's alleged lover to duel.

Costume Design

Costumes provide the audience with important clues about the characters in an opera. Details about the wealth, profession, goals, secrets, and relationships with other characters can all be represented by the clothes a character wears.

The **costume designer** plans or designs the costumes and supervises their construction. Through research and careful planning, they insure that the performer's costumes fit the character as well as the time period and location in which the opera is set. They also take into account any "clues" the composer includes in the score which tell how the character might act or physical actions they might do (for example, hide something on their person).

The Golden Cockerel Costumes

Solodovnikov Theatre, Russia | 1909 | Costume Designs by **Ivan Bilibin**



Queen of Shemakha



King Dodon



Slave Girl

Sarasota Opera | 2015 | Costume Designs by **Howard Tsvi Kaplan**



Queen of Shemakha



King Dodon



Hand Maiden

Scenic Design

The **set designer** plans the sets through careful research and study, making sure that the scenery fits the story. Like the costume designer they take into account the “clues” left by the composer and librettist, making sure to provide the needed set pieces to move the story along. This could include a balcony for a singer to perform from, or a beautiful palace befitting a king or queen.

The Golden Cockerel Sets

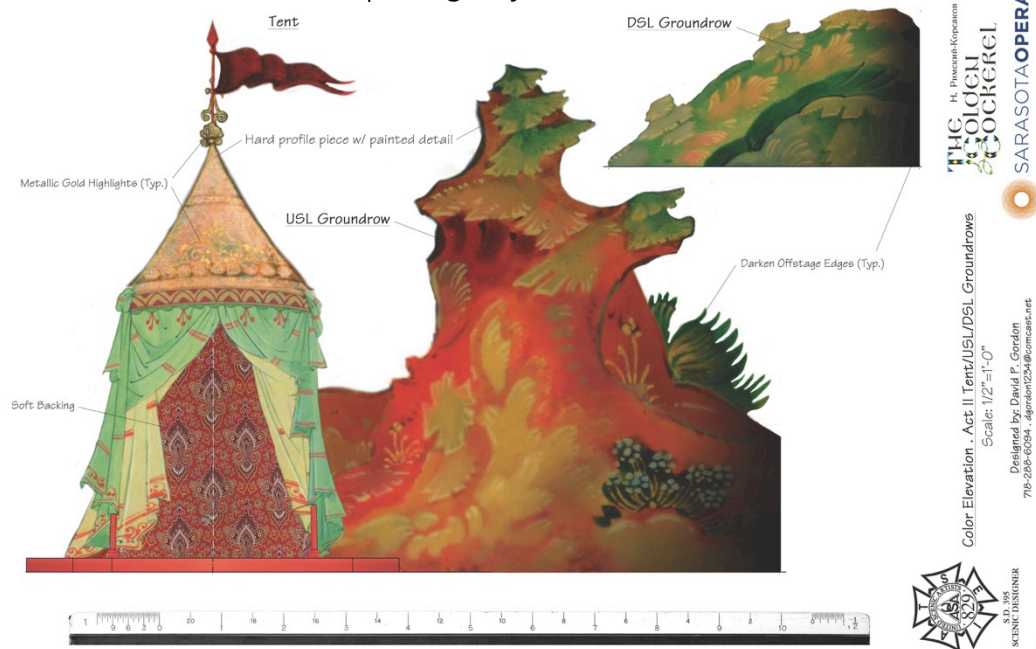
Solodovnikov Theatre, Russia | 1909

Queen Shemakha's Tent | Design by **Ivan Bilibin**



Sarasota Opera | 2015

Queen Shemakha's Tent | Design by **David P. Gordon**



Q&A with the Queen of Shemakha



American soprano, **Alexandra Batsios**, made her professional debut in 2013 as Annina (*La Traviata*), Clorinda (*La Cenerentola*), and Flora (*The Turn of the Screw*) with Palm Beach Opera. While a young artist at PBO, she also premiered the role of Yadviga in the first staged performance of Ben Moore's *Enemies, A Love Story*. In 2014, she made her Sarasota Opera debut to great acclaim as Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

Ms. Batsios holds performance degrees from Millikin University and Westminster Choir College. She has participated in many young artists programs including Palm Beach Opera, Sarasota Opera, Opera North, Green Mountain Opera Festival, and has been an Emerging Artist with the New York Festival of Song.

What drew you to become a singer? Was there a specific "Aha!" moment of clarity?

I was always an entertainer. I would sing along to every Disney movie, make costumes out of household items, and subject my family to my "performances." I wanted to be on Broadway for the longest time! When I began taking voice lessons, I found an appreciation for operatic music and how beautiful and moving it could be. When it was time to choose a major for college, I knew I wanted to perform, and since singing was always something I enjoyed, I pursued voice performance.

Did you have other career aspirations in the works before you decided on singing?

While I was studying chemistry in high school, I had this idea I was going to become a chemist, but that was short-lived!

What do you want the audience to know about the Queen of Shemakha?

The Queen of Shemakha reminds me of Cleopatra in a lot of ways. She's beautiful and charming, but can also overpower everyone with her wit. The difference between the Queen and Cleopatra is that the Queen doesn't need an army to help her dominate because she can do it alone. I think the audience should know that she's not evil, but her intentions are not completely honest.

How do you prepare a role for performance?

It's important to do all the background study first, that way my attention can be focused on the text, music, and emotion. I try to find and read any source material about the opera to get a sense of the storyline. Then I read the libretto to see how my character reacts to other characters and events. Then comes the translating of the score, speaking the text and finding the poetic line, learning the notes, coaching the role musically and sometimes dramatically, all the while trying to memorize it!



Batsios as Berta in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Sarasota Opera 2014)

I also have to make sure I have the stamina to sing the role. The Queen of Shemakha is a very taxing and unforgiving role vocally, and by learning it in sections then putting those sections together, I am giving myself a chance to find the places in the music where I can take a metaphoric "break."

What is your favorite opera?

My favorite opera is *Le nozze di Figaro*. It never gets old for me. The minute the overture starts, I'm excited. Every character goes through the entire range of emotions, and to think the opera takes place in one day! It's amazing.



Batsios as Berta in
The Marriage of Figaro
(Sarasota Opera 2014)

What is your favorite operatic role to play? What makes it so great?

My favorite role to date is Clorinda from *La Cenerentola*. I know the stepsisters from *Cinderella* are often referred to as "ugly," but I think the ugly is more on the inside than outside. The role is so fun because the sisters are absolutely ridiculous and in their own little world. The opera is a great comedy and has a wonderful moral. Plus, singing Rossini is a blast!

How did you learn to sing in Russian?

I grew up in an Eastern Orthodox church, and we frequently sang in church Slavonic, so I had some background in the Russian language. However, I did go to a coach who knows Russian to help refresh my memory and set me on the right track.

Beyond learning the music, what kind of work do you do to prepare a new role?

Understanding a character's motivation for their actions and emotions is another step towards preparing a role. As an audience, we sometimes only see a glimpse in the life of a character, but what about the rest of their life? Does that character have parents? Are they still alive? What's that character's favorite color? What are their passions? Digging into the character's background and emotional world directly affects how I interpret the music and make dramatic choices.

Do you listen to or enjoy any non-opera music or artists?

Besides opera, I like listening to musicals, choral music, and a cappella music, specifically Pentatonix!

Do you have any pre-performance rituals, superstitions, or good luck charms?

The only pre-performance ritual I have is popping Altoids before I go onstage. Got to have fresh breath! The day of a performance I don't set an alarm (unless it's a matinee!), eat a hearty breakfast, go for a walk, and warm up my voice. Keep it simple.

How do you relax in between performances?

While on the road, I enjoy reading, catching up on my TV shows or finding a new show to watch, cooking, baking, and taking in any attractions that are in the area. I am a huge baseball fan (Go Cardinals!), I enjoy playing billiards, trying new restaurants, and the occasional craft beer.

How do you stay connected to family and friends when you are "on the road"?

I update my Facebook fan page with pictures and tidbits about my travels for my family and friends. I also use Skype, FaceTime, and email to keep in touch.

FANTASY RULES AS 'LE COQ D'OR' GITTERS AGAIN AT METROPOLITAN

Review by P.C.R. of The Metropolitan Opera (NYC) January 21, 1924 Performance
Published in *Musical America*

Admirers of Rimsky-Korsakoff's Brilliant Opera Rejoice Over Its Restoration - Amelita Galli-Curci Sing Role of "Princess" -- Alexis Kosloff Makes Debut as "King" - Merle Alcock and Laura Robertson Among New Members of Cast - Rosina Galli, Didur and Diaz in Familiar Parts

When Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Le Coq d'Or" was dropped from the repertoire of the Metropolitan Opera two seasons ago, lamentations were heard in the land. The weeping and wailing continued until Mr. Gatti-Casazza announced a restoration as part of the present season's program. On Monday night of last week the general manager kept his promise. The Golden Cockerel crowed as blithely as of yore, and an immense audience followed the adventures of the doddering King Dodon with very evident delight.

"Le Coq d'Or" was first given at the Metropolitan in the season of 1917-18 and it was a feature of the repertoire up to the season of 1920-21. A mixture of humor and fantasy, it exercises an irresistible charm for many, and its revival was awaited with great expectations. There were defects in the performance last week, defects which will probably be eliminated in the course of a few repetitions, but it seemed from the raptures of the audience that expectations, in the main, were realized.

Much of Rimsky-Korsakoff's sparkling, gaily colored score, is an undiluted delight, for all that the composer's method sometimes makes for monotony. Necessarily there is no room for profound thought in the musical illumination of Pushkin's fantastic satire, but the musician's task is not made any easier because of that fact. "Le Coq d'Or" stands as a tour de force. The sheer cleverness of the music, its scintillating brilliance, sweeps the audience away. Its immediate effect may be dulled by repeated hearings, one may find passages of little appeal, of a superficiality which mere ingenuity cannot hide, but there is a great deal in it that retains its first charm.

The work, as originally planned, demanded a company of so much versatility that any producer might well shake his head in despair, and it does seem that the expedient of the double company, with dancers to mime the story and singers seated at the sides to give the words, is a happy compromise. It is a compromise, however, not without its defects, since it demands unity in expression between vocalist and pantomimist, and this is not easily achieved. The effect of the fantasy would, no doubt, be heightened by the employment of singing actors, but then one would have to do without the expressive mobility of the ballet.

It is a sad thought that suggests "Le Coq d'Or" without Rosina Galli as the Princess. In all the presentations of the work in New York she has moved with enchanting grace, the central figure of the spectacle. Several voices have been fitted to her part, but to the eye the beautiful charmer has remained the same; not actually the same; for last week she seemed more enchanting than ever when she came from her magic pavilion to pose to the delightful phrases of the "Hymn to the Sun." It was Amelita Galli-Curci who sang the music, and thus the celebrated soprano added another role to her long list. Formerly, Maria Barrientos, Mabel Garrison and Evelyn Scotney were heard in the part.

Newcomers in Cast

Mme. Galli-Curci was not the only newcomer in the cast of the revival. Merle Alcock was allotted the music of Amelfa and Laura Robertson supplied the voice of the Golden Cock. There was only one important change in the company of pantomimists: Alexis Kosloff, making his debut at the Metropolitan, appeared as Dodon, succeeding Adolph Bolm, who left the company a few seasons ago.

Some of the new singers evidently found their situation a little strange. The task is not easy when one must hold a position at the side of the stage and suit the vocal line to the actions of another person in the center of the stage. Moreover, the movements of the silent actors did not always synchronize with the music. Doubtless a considerable improvement will be effected in subsequent performances.

Galli-Curci Sings

The part of the Princess is extremely difficult for the singer, but Mme. Galli-Curci is accustomed to vocal difficulties. Before the second act was far advanced she sang with much beauty of voice, sounding the vaulting cadences with clear tone and much in her familiar manner. The exquisite "Hymn to the Sun" affords her many opportunities and it will doubtless become one of the favorite opera arias of her innumerable admirers. After the big scene on the battlefield, she came down from the singers' gallery to join hands with her double in the part, Rosina Galli, and the audience paid her clamorous tribute. Again and again she was recalled, with the other principals, and finally, Giuseppe Bamboschek, who conducted, was brought forward to share in the applause.

Mme. Alcock made a good impression in the part of Amelfa, although the music does not fully exercise her beautiful voice. Laura Robertson sounded the repeated call of the Golden Rooster with excellent effect. Adamo Didur was again successful in his old part of the King, and, of course, Rafaelo Diaz gave voice to the Astrologer. Mr. Diaz was better than ever. Louis D'Angelo as the General, Pietro Audisio as the Prince, and Vincenzo Reschiglian as a Knight were the other singers.

A Comic "Dodon"

On the pantomimic side, a good deal of interest attached to the assumption of Dodon's robes, by Mr. Kosloff. The doddering king was scarcely changed in countenance and figure, and certainly he exhibited a lively appreciation of the grotesque. Mr. Kosloff seemed determined to get the utmost fun out of the fantastic business, and he acted very effectively. He was particularly amusing when he attempted to emulate the Princess in dance. Florence Rudolph was a familiar and charming Amelfa, and Giuseppe Bonfiglio and Ottokar Bartik were also in their accustomed parts of the Astrologer and the General. Isador Swee was the Prince and Domenico Da Re the Knight.

Mr. Bamboschek conducted a sprightly performance in which the orchestra did exceedingly well. The revival again emphasized the fact that the Metropolitan audience owes no little debt to Willy Pogany for his delightful decorations.

IS THIS OPERA A TIMELY WAKE-UP CALL?

Review by Susan Nickalls of Bergen National Opera, Norway, 2014 Performance

Published in *Classical Music Magazine*



The Golden Cockerel Bergen National Opera 2014 | Photo by Magnus Skrede

An ambitious Russian leader nervous about the behaviour of his restless neighbours decides to gain the upper hand by launching a pre-emptive strike. This may sound like President Putin's blink-of-an-eye, bloodless annexation of Crimea to Russia but it also happens to be the story-line for Rimsky-Korsakov's fantastical

1907 opera, *The Golden Cockerel*.

Recently, I attended the Norwegian premiere of Bergen National Opera's sumptuous production sung in Russian - historically most performances outside Russia have been in French or English. This was an ambitious undertaking but since Mary Miller took over the helm of BNO four years ago, the company has developed a well-deserved reputation for its world-class productions. The Scottish artistic director of BNO has the knack of attracting some of the finest talent working in opera to Bergen and this production was no exception. Heading *The Golden Cockerel* creative team was the Emmy and Tony award-winning director Mark Lamos, fresh from his production of Berg's *Wozzeck* at the Met. He was joined by designer George Souglides (his stunning costumes, particularly for Laura Claycomb's Queen Shemakha, were much-coveted by the women in the audience) choreographer Sean Curran, lighting designer Guiseppe di Iorio and conductor Mikhail Tatarnikov.

Onstage the talent was equally stellar with Andrew Shore (Tsar Dodon), Alexander Graf (Astrologer) and a clutch of outstanding Russian singers associated with the Mariinsky Theatre: Oleg Balashov, Dmitry Lavrov, Ilya Bannik, Zlata Bulycheva and Oksana Shilova. All sang impressively, with unforgettable moments coming from Claycomb - her fluttering pianissimo high notes were as impressive as her ability to sing lying upside down on a slope - and Shore who managed to pull off galloping to battle on a rocking horse with magisterial aplomb. As for the chorus, we all thought they were Russian, but it was Bergen's own Edvard Grieg Choir superbly channelling that lusty Russian Orthodox Church sound.

Musically, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra's performance in the pit was every bit as glittering as the action on stage. Rimsky-Korsakov's ravishing score echoes many of his other works, particularly the exotic orientalism of *Scheherazade*, as well as foreshadowing Debussy and Ravel and offering tantalising glimpses of an experimental modernism he might have advanced had he lived longer.

BNO certainly get a lot of bang for their buck. Not only did *The Golden Cockere!* look and sound amazing, but I can't think when I last saw an opera that marshaled such large onstage forces - at least 50 people, including actors and dancers. The production deserves to travel internationally beyond its well-received Bergen premiere. However, it was interesting to note that opera audience apart, there seemed to be little interest, especially from the local media, in the production's topicality or indeed the talented, predominantly Russian, cast. The only reference I heard to recent events in Crimea was made just before the opera began when gazing out of the glass-fronted Grieghallen at a marching band in the distance, someone quipped that perhaps the Russians were coming.

Throughout history composers have used music to make a political point, often with life-threatening consequences: Stalin's pathological persecution of Shostakovich is the most extreme example. Although Rimsky-Korsakov presents his last opera as a fairy tale, the disastrous imperialist foray of daft Tsar Dodon (the similarity of his name to an extinct bird is no accident) was a thinly-veiled criticism of Tsar Nicholas II's ill-conceived 1904/05 war with Japan. Inevitably the palace banned the opera, which wasn't premiered until 1909, a year after the composer's death, and even then in an adapted version.

Today, understandably, few composers are willing to take such risks. Even so, I suspect there will not be a great rush to write an opera about Russia's recent irredentism. Have we all become far too cosy and complacent? At the very least, we need to pay more attention to how art from the past can illuminate and inform our view of contemporary world events.

What To Expect at the Opera

Opera is not a remote art form that only the initiated appreciate. It reflects human conflicts and passions. It has inspired a level of devotion in some people best compared to that of a die-hard sports fan. Just as you do not need to know every statistic to enjoy watching a football game, you do not need to be a music or opera expert to enjoy a performance.



Supertitles - Real-time English translations are above the stage, providing immediate understanding of what is happening, helping you to experience the excitement of the performance no matter what the language.

Theater - With just under 1,200 seats, there are no 'bad' seats in our theater. Most operagoers love attending opera in our theater because of its intimate size.

What to Wear - Dress comfortably, and be yourself. Opera is not the playground of the rich, and we work hard to make sure that everyone feels at home in our theater. At the Sarasota Opera House, "Opera Dress" can be khakis or jeans or evening gowns and tuxedos.

Applause - At the opera, unlike the symphony or other classical music concert, you can applaud when the performance moves you (similar to a solo at a jazz performance). You can also express your appreciation for the performers by yelling bravo, brava, or bravi when the conductor enters the orchestra pit, at the end of a well-sung aria or ensemble, or during the bows.

Eating and drinking - During regular performances, food and drinks are available prior to the show and during intermissions. During dress rehearsals, our concessions are closed.

Restrooms - There are ample restrooms located in the lobby of the theater. We asked that you encourage your students to use the bathroom before the opera begins or during intermissions.

Late Seating - If you arrive after the performance has begun or leave while an act of the opera is in progress, you will need to wait until an intermission to re-enter.

Electronics - Out of consideration to our performances and patrons, we asked that all cellphones and electronic devices be turned off before the performance begins. Just like at your local movie theatre, the use of any recording devices is strictly prohibited.

Opera Terms

The words you hear around an opera house can often be confusing, especially the ITALIAN ones! The following is a list of words you may hear and their definitions.

- ARIA** A solo song in an opera
- BRAVO** The word the audience yells after a great show!
- COLORATURA** A type of singing where the singer sings a lot of notes very quickly
- CONDUCTOR** The person who leads the singers and orchestra
- COMPOSER** A person who writes music
- DUET** A song sung by two people at the same time
- FINALE** Italian for "final", a musical number at the end of an act
- LIBRETTO** The words of the opera that are then set to music by the composer (literally means "little book")
- MAESTRO** Italian for "master" or "teacher", the conductor is often referred to as maestro to show respect
- OPERA**..... A play that is sung rather than spoken
- OVERTURE** The musical introduction
- PIT**..... The place in the theater where the orchestra sits; it is in front of and at a lower level than the stage
- QUARTET** A musical piece involving four singers or instruments
- RECITATIVE**..... A kind of sung speech; many Mozart opera have this type of sung dialogue
- SINGSPIEL**..... A German word for an opera that has spoken dialogue; *The Magic Flute* is an example of this.
- TRIO**..... A musical piece involving three singers or instruments

Opera seems to have fancy words for everything and the singers are no exception. There are a lot of different types of voices. The list below gives the basic voice types for men and women.

- SOPRANO** The highest female voice; they are usually the heroine or female romantic lead in the opera.
- MEZZO-SOPRANO**.. Mezzo is Italian for "middle", so a mezzo-soprano is the middle female voice type; they often play more character- type roles like witches, old ladies, gypsies and even young boys!
- CONTRALTO** The lowest female voice. A real contralto is very rare; the roles written for them are often sung by mezzos who have a strong lower range.
- TENOR** The highest male voice; they are generally the hero or male romantic lead.
- BARITONE**..... The middle male voice; with a warm vocal quality they often play comic roles such as Papageno (in *The Magic Flute*) or fathers.
- BASS**..... The lowest male voice; because of the very low sound they are often villains or the father figure.

Opera Jobs

Administration

Opera requires a huge cast of players both on and off the stage to make everything come together.

Led by the **Executive Director**, members of the administrative staff work to support the artistic mission of the company through fundraising, donor cultivation, community outreach, patron education, and management of the day-to-day needs of the organization. The Development, Marketing, Finance, and Education departments are but some of the areas covered under administration.

Artistic Director - Defines the artistic mission of the company and works with the Executive Director and Artistic Administrator to decide which operas will be performed. In many companies, the artistic director is also a conductor.

Artistic Administrator - Works with the artistic director to cast and plan each production.

Stage Director - Tells the singers where to go, instructs them on how to portray their roles, and works with others to create a vibrant story with lights, costumes, sets, and props.

Stage Manager - Assists the director, singers, and backstage crew during rehearsals and performances with the help of several assistant stage managers.

Set Designer - Plans or designs the sets through careful research and study.

Lighting Designer - Plans or designs the color, intensity, and frequency of the lights onstage.

Costume Designer - Plans or designs the costumes and supervises their construction.

Wig & Makeup Designer - Oversees the design of hairstyles, wigs, and makeup.

Stage Crew - Assists in the construction, installation, and changing of sets, costumes, lighting, and props during rehearsals and performances.

Backstage

Cast - All singers and actors who appear onstage.

Principals - Singers who perform the large roles within the opera.

Comprimario - Singers who perform the supporting roles within the opera, from the Italian meaning "next to the first."

Supernumeraries - "Supers" are actors who participate in the action but do not sing or speak.

Conductor - The person who leads the singers and orchestra.

Orchestra - The musicians who play the instrumental parts within the score of the opera.

On Stage

Sarasota Opera House



house over the next nine decades. Approaching its 90th year in 2016 (the final year of Sarasota Opera's Verdi Cycle), it is still the jewel of downtown Sarasota.

The opening night in 1926 was accorded great fanfare in the local press. The performance included a live band, dancers, and an opera singer (Mr. Edwards' daughter). As a mixed-use venue, it also included the silent movie "Skinner's Dress Suit" accompanied by the Robert Morton orchestral organ. Later bill of fare included Will Rogers, the Ziegfeld Folies, the exotic fan dancer Sally Rand, and touring opera companies. A hurricane in 1929 destroyed the organ and required renovations to the lobby, but performances continued.

Mr. Edwards sold the venue to the Sparks movie theater chain, which renamed it the Florida Theater. Movies became more prominent in future years, especially in 1952 when Cecil B. DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth*, largely filmed in Sarasota, had its world premiere, with many of the stars including Charlton Heston and Mr. DeMille in attendance. Live performances in those years included a young Elvis Presley in 1956 (with a top ticket price of \$1.50).

The years took its toll on the Florida Theater and in 1972 it stopped showing films. The front part of the building continued to house offices and a radio school, but in 1979, a new future was destined for the building.

The Asolo Opera Guild, founded in 1960 to support opera performances at the Asolo Theatre on the grounds of the Ringling Museum, needed a new home and arranged to purchase the Florida Theater for \$150,000. Over the next few years the Guild undertook to renovate the building as it raised funds and in 1984 it was ready to reopen as the Sarasota Opera House.

After a subsequent renovation in 2008, with much of its original beauty restored and enhanced, the Sarasota Opera House was called "one of the finest venues for Opera in America" by *Musical America*. It seats 1,129 and the orchestra pit accommodates over 75 players. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, received the Florida Preservation Award in 2010, and helped spurred the revival of downtown Sarasota.

Sarasota Opera

Recently called “one of American’s leading festivals” by London’s *Opera Now* magazine, **Sarasota Opera** has been a fixture in Sarasota life for 56 consecutive seasons.

Under the guidance of Artistic Director Victor DeRenzi, who is celebrating his 32nd season, and Executive Director Richard Russell, Sarasota Opera is renowned throughout the world for the high quality of its performances and innovative education programs. Maestro DeRenzi’s unique artistic vision, expressed in the Sarasota Opera’s Verdi Cycle has consistently garnered Sarasota Opera international attention as one of the few places to experience rarely performed operatic works. The 2013 Winter Season will mark the final four years of the Verdi Cycle (begun in 1989) and will set Sarasota Opera apart from other opera houses worldwide as having produced all of Verdi’s music (operatic and incidental) upon its completion in 2016.

In 2011, the company initiated the American Classics Series, which brings to the stage some of the finest works by American composers from the 20th Century. Sarasota Opera inaugurated this new series in 2011 with a production of Robert Ward’s opera *The Crucible* based on the play by Arthur Miller. Sarasota Opera has also designed a series of innovative educational events designed to help familiarize our patrons with these musically and dramatically powerful works.



Turandot, 2013 | Rod Millington/Sarasota Opera

In addition to our 2014 Fall production of *Pagliacci*, the 2015 Winter Season, which runs from February 7 – March 28, 2015 will include Puccini’s *Tosca*, Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*, Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Golden Cockerel*, and the original Paris version of Verdi’s *Don Carlos* which will mark the 31st installment in The Verdi Cycle. In an effort to make opera accessible to all, ticket prices start at just \$19. All performances also feature supertitles, which are real-time English translations visible on a screen above the stage, in addition to pre-performance lectures for select performance.

Opera is the ultimate art form combining music, theater, sets, costumes and dance. It has the power to express the full range of human emotions and the human experience. Compelling stories partnered with great music and dazzling productions make a performance at Sarasota Opera an experience that will not be forgotten.

Sarasota Youth Opera

Since 1984, **Sarasota Youth Opera** has given young people age 8 and above an opportunity to experience the magic of opera through participation in choruses, Sarasota Opera's main stage productions, a three-week summer workshop, and the Youth Opera's own full-scale productions.

Accepting all who apply, regardless of skill level or ability to pay, this program is unique in the opera world.



Youth Productions

Sarasota Opera's commitment to youth includes the performing and commissioning of operatic works written specifically for children and young adults. Since 1986, five commissioned world premieres and over 20 additional youth opera productions have been presented. Members take part in the making of each opera complete with professional staging, costumes, lighting, sound, and orchestral accompaniment.

Summer Camp

Summer camp is a three-week, hands-on workshop held at the Sarasota Opera House every June that immerses young people in all aspects of the opera. Under the direction of Sarasota Opera's professional staff participants experience the magic on stage and behind the scenes as they study many facets of opera, from music and acting to opera appreciation and production.



Mainstage Productions

Youth Opera members have opportunities to participate in Sarasota Opera's mainstage productions as children's chorus members, supernumeraries (extras who perform non-singing roles) and in special roles written by the composer for children's voices. In recent seasons these have included roles in *The Magic Flute*, *la Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Carmen*, and *Turandot*.



Singers are involved in the complete production process – from early music and dramatic rehearsals to performing alongside opera professionals.

Critic Worksheet

The Golden Cockerel

Music by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov | Libretto by Vladimir Belsky
Conducted by **Ekhart Wycik** | Directed by **Tom Diamond**

Cast

My Rating

My Comments

Grigory Soloviev
as King Dodon



Jon Jurgens*
as Prince Guidon



Kenneth Stavert*
as Prince Afron



William Roberts*
as Commander Polkan



Daryl Freedman*
As Housekeeper Amelfa



Timur Bekbosunov
as The Astrologer



Alexandra Batsios
as Queen of Shemakha



Riley Svatos
as The Golden Cockerel



The Performance

My Rating

My Comments

Action



Music



Set



Staging



Lights



Costumes



Makeup



General Comments