

PRINCE IGOR

Alexander Borodin

Act I, Scene 1: Prince Galitsky is carousing at a lavish feast with his unruly retainers, headed by Skula and Yerosha; they are gudok players who have deserted from Igor's army and vie for Galitsky's favor. Galitsky dreams of sending Yaroslavna to a convent, deposing Igor, setting himself up as ruler of Putivl, and leading a life of debauchery.

A group of women run into the court in agitation. They ask Galitsky to release a friend, who has been forcibly taken away. But Galitsky throws the women out to the laughter of the drunken rabble.

The drinking session is at its height. Together with their increasingly boisterous fellow revellers, Skula and Yerosha sing the praises of Prince Galitsky and plot treason: "We will oust Igor and enthrone Galitsky! What have we to fear?"

Scene 2: Yaroslavna is downcast. She is haunted day and night by disturbing dreams and dark foreboding -- it has been a long time since she has received news of her husband and son. She is surrounded by feuds and intrigues and Galitsky is fomenting unrest.

Yaroslavna is distracted from her affliction by the unexpected appearance of the young women driven out of court by Galitsky. They want the Princess to protect them from their tormentors and ask for Yaroslavna's help as they seek their friend who has been abducted. Although she is resolute, she is unable to make her brother see reason. His attitude is rebellious, and when she demands an answer from Galitsky he is crudely evasive and makes threats against her and Igor. Boyars arrive with the news that Igor's army has been defeated and the Prince and his son are captives. The Russian princes are at odds and the Polovtsian hordes are invading Russia. Deeply disturbed, the Princess wishes to question the messengers herself about everything in detail, but Galitsky and his retainers are using the opportunity to hatch a revolt. Alarm bells warn of danger - - the Polovtsians are already attacking Putivl.

Act II: Polovtsian girls sing and dance attempting to entertain Konchakovna, daughter of the Khan Konchak. Konchakovna is deep in thought and does not respond. She is waiting impatiently to see once again the imprisoned Vladimir, and plans to confess her love to him. Gradually night is falling over the steppes. Vladimir enters and the reunited lovers make pledges of love, happiness, and marriage.

Konchakovna and Vladimir are interrupted by the entry of Igor. The sleepless Prince is tormented by dark thoughts. It is hard for him to bear the disgrace of the Russian defeat and the shame of his own imprisonment. He also finds it difficult to come to terms with the idea that his homeland has been enslaved. He longs passionately for freedom, so that he may liberate Russia. He thinks with great tenderness of his wife Yaroslavna. Ovlour, a Polovtsian who has been baptized (and is friendly to the Russians), unexpectedly approaches the Prince and offers to help him escape. Igor declines, on the grounds that a secret escape is unbecoming to a Russian prince.

The Polovtsian Khan Konchak treats Prince Igor with the deference due to an honored guest, and promises him freedom if he agrees to never take up his sword against the Polovtsians again. But Igor rejects Konchak's proposal and makes no secret of his intention to raise a new army immediately and fight against the Polovtsians the moment he is freed. Konchak is impressed by

the Russian prince's pride and valor. In order to dispel the gloomy spirits of his prisoner, Konchak orders his retainers to dance for Igor.

Act III: Still held in captivity, Igor is in despair after learning of new defeats of the Russians at the hands of the Polovtsians. His country's misfortune is hard for him to bear and he blames himself for the defeat. Igor calls on the Russian princes to unite because he sees that as the only way to free themselves from their enemy. To save his home he resolves to escape. Ovlour once again offers to help.

Konchakovna is in despair. She has learned that Igor and Vladimir are planning to escape and begs Vladimir to stay with her or to take her with him. Igor also presses him. The prince's son is undecided. In desperation Konchakovna raises the alarm, but Igor and Ovlour manage to escape on horseback.

The Polovtsians come running and they and the Khans demand Vladimir's death. But Khan Konchak decides otherwise; he not only grants Vladimir his life but gives him his daughter's hand, thereby reinforcing his own power. Konchak gives the order to march against Russia.

Act IV: Yaroslavna, who has given up any hope that Igor will return, weeps for her husband and for the fate of her country. She addresses her pleas to the wind, the sun, and the River Dnieper, hoping to learn where Igor is and what has happened to him. Yaroslavna's laments are accompanied by the sorrowful song of the passing peasants, who mourn for their devastated country. Suddenly the Princess notices two riders in the distance. They are Igor and Ovlour. Yaroslavna and Igor recognize each other and embrace. Igor embraces before his people to ask for God's blessing after his long absence.