

Mazeppa

Opera (1881-83) in three acts by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Libretto by Viktor Burenin after Alexander Pushkin's poem *Poltava* (1928/29) (*Poltava and the Ukrainian Foundation Myth/Independence Myth*)

New Version for Soli, Chorus and Orchestra Op. 80 by Eberhard Kloke

Reception history and spectacular re-discovery

Mazeppa was seldom performed outside Russia (the Soviet Union) and the former Eastern Bloc and has never become established in contemporary Europe as a repertoire opera.

In view of recent political events in and at the margins of Europe, the political implications of the material and thus the political machinations and intrigue between *Masepa* (leader of the Cossacks and commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian troops) and Tsar Peter I seem extremely contemporary.

Subject and plot inspired Tchaikovsky to set the sequence of scenes in an skilfully planned and suspenseful scenario and musical-dramatic structure. *Mazeppa* might well move up into the front rank of the great works of music theatre created in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hence *Mazeppa*, in this version, has the potential to be judged a spectacular new discovery.

Historical starting point, literary material and opera libretto

The historically documented person Ivan S. Masepa (1639-1709) was a captain (Hetman) of the Ukrainian Cossacks and fought for the independence of the Ukraine from Peter the Great's Russia. In 1708 he joined forces with Sweden.

The Battle of Poltava on 27 and 28 June 1709 was the decisive battle of the Russian Campaign in the Great Northern War between Russia under Peter I and Sweden under Charles XII. The battle was the turning point of the war in favour of the Russians.

Two literary sources deal with this material: Lord Byron in his epic poem *Mazeppa* based on a literary source by Voltaire (and which inspired Liszt to compose his piano paraphrase); and Alexander Pushkin in his voluminous epic poem *Poltava*, used by Viktor Burenin as source for his libretto for *Mazeppa*. These different literary sources therefore account for the differences between Byron's title figure and Tchaikovsky's (libretto: Burenin).

Although Pushkin's version more closely approximates historical reality, the fact remains however that his epic derives from the spirit of the pro-Russian viewpoint, while the historically based Ukrainian standpoint sees *Masepa* less as a scheming Machiavellian military commander than the founder of Ukraine's strivings for independence.

Tchaikovsky now attempts to structure a logical opera plot on this basis, deviating in some places from the libretto. But his focus tended to be directed onto the human entanglements, less on the political implications. With the use of adjustments, cuts, and music-oriented accents, the emphasis of this new version is placed more on the core of the political conflict.

Objective and New Version

It was the intention of this edition to place the political scheming and intrigues in the centre of the opera scenario – to a certain extent as an equally significant component (see in particular the duet between Mazeppa and Mariya no. 8, score p. 52, bar 284 et seq.: “A plan that I have long been considering ... we are living scorned and inglorious, our heads bowed down before Warsaw’s power. They have oppressed us for so long, indeed, Moscow’s fist is holding us down. Now, what I want is to give the Ukraine golden independence...!”).

Tchaikovsky/Burenin took this passage straight from Pushkin’s original *Masepa* poem.

The central scenario is whittled down into an intimate play between the main protagonists. Since the actual plot takes place independently of the so-called episodic scenes, elements of French Grand Opéra (with choruses, ballet and atmospheric genre scenes) were dispensed with entirely.

This galvanised the dramatic action into a more stringent and dynamic structure; simultaneously it shifted events closer to historical reality. Nevertheless, the confused interaction of times, styles and storyline is retained.

Despite this, the chorus takes on a pivotal role as functional anchor for different groups (people, guests in Kochubey’s house, Mazeppa’s bodyguards).

The symphonic battle portrayal *Poltava* at the start of the third act was fused with the overture and placed at the beginning of the opera as motto.

The action takes place in the early eighteenth century in Little Russia (Ukraine): see link: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kleinrussische_Identit%C3%A4t/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Russia

The Musical Adaptation

The compositional structure in general, the notation of the vocal parts (including the chorus) and the instrumental characteristics of the work are retained in keeping with Tchaikovsky’s original intention. The reduction of the wind section is based on the structural prerequisites of the original score and thus also influences the similarly reduced string section. The tonal configurations, tonal colours and register changes are oriented on the large score and are – wherever possible – transposed into the smaller orchestration. This resulted in a transparent sound with the greatest possible auditory discernment. In order to attain optimal text understanding, a well-balanced treatment of orchestra and vocal parts was needed.

Solo Voices–Sung text

The singer roles/notations are retained faithful to the original. It has already been mentioned that the adapted version allows for a more precise, i.e., more radical realisation of linguistic and sung nuancing. The vocal texts are noted in the score in Russian and German. The German translation (Alfred Simon) was revised by the author of this new version. In transposing the original Russian diction into German the text was painstakingly fitted to the Russian syllables (note to syllable) and to syllable hyphenation in order to retain the individual rhythmic and declamatory character of the melodic diction of the Russian language, and to approximate as closely as possible its euphonic characteristics.

Cast:

| | |
|--|---|
| Mazeppa, baritone | Hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks |
| Vasily Kochubey, bass | A rich landowner |
| Andrei, tenor | Mariya's childhood friend |
| Filipp Orlik, bass | Mazeppa's confidante and secret agent |
| Iskra, tenor | Group captain at Poltava, Kochubey's friend |
| Mariya Vasilyevna, soprano/mezzo soprano | Kochubey's daughter |
| Lyubov, mezzo soprano/contralto | Kochubey's wife |

Mixed Chorus

Orchestra/Instruments

Flute 1 (also Piccolo)

Flute 2 (also Piccolo and Alto Flute in G),

1 Oboe (also Cor Anglais)

Clarinet 1 in B-flat (also Clar. in A)

Clarinet 2 in B-flat (also Clar. in A and Bass Clarinet in B-flat)

Bassoon (also Counter Bassoon)

3 Horns in F

2 Trumpets in B-flat and F (also Cornet/Piston in B-flat and A)

2 Tenor-Bass Trombones (2nd also Cimbasso) = 13 wind instruments

Harp; Timpani/Perc (Xylorimba, Vibraphone, Bells,
Cymbals, Bass Drum (Gran Cassa), Snare Drum, Tamtam) = 4 percussion players

Strings: 8/6/5/4/3 = 26 (alternative strings: 6/4/3/3/2 = 18)

Total: 43 (35) musicians

Mazeppa, Plot, Scene Sequence and Notes

| Structure | Place/Scene | Persons | Notes |
|--|---|---|--|
| Overture | | | The symphonic battle portrayal <i>Poltava</i> at the start of Act III was fused with the overture and placed at the beginning of the opera quasi as motto. |
| Act I, Scene I | Kochubey's estate, house with garden | | |
| No. 1. Arioso, Duet | | Mariya, Andrei | |
| No. 2. Scene | | Mazeppa, Kochubey, Mariya, Lyubov, guests, servants (chorus), retinue of the Hetman (extras) | |
| No. 3. Fight Scene | | Mazeppa, Kochubey, Mariya, Lyubov, Andrei, Iskra, guests, servants (chorus), Hetman's bodyguard (extras) | |
| Act I Scene 2 | Room in Kochubey's house | | |
| No. 4. Chorus and Mother's Lament | | Lyubov and women's chorus | |
| No. 5. Finale | | Kochubey, Lyubov, Andrei, Iskra, Kochubey's supporters (men's chorus) | |
| Act II Scene III | Byeloserkovsk Castle prison | | |
| No. 6. Scene in Prison | | Kochubey, Orlik | |
| Act II Scene 4 | Room in Mazeppa's castle | | |
| No. 7. Mazeppa's Monologue and Scene with Orlik | | Mazeppa, Orlik | |

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|---|---|---|--|
| No. 8. Mazeppa's Scene with Mariya | | Mazeppa, Mariya | Note: To ensure that Mazeppa's not unimportant questions are sufficiently understood, the passage sung by Mariya, bars 408 to 417, can be cut! Cue would then be bar 418, 3/8 time |
| No. 9. Scene, Mother's Appearance | | Mariya, Lyubov | The band can be variously instrumentalised according to need or stage requirement. |
| Interval | | | Interval |
| Act II Scene V | Open field, scaffold | | The band can be variously instrumentalised according to need or stage requirement. |
| No. 10. Finale Scene with the People | | Kochubey, Iskra, Mariya, Lyubov guards, monks, people (chorus) | |
| Interval also possible here! | | | |
| Act III Scene 6 | As Act I, Scene 1: Kochubey's estate now devastated, garden desolate, terrace destroyed. Night | | |
| No. 11. Scene and Aria | | Andrei | |
| No. 12. Scene and Duet | | Andrei, Mazeppa | |
| No. 13. Entrance Scene of the mad Mariya | | Mariya, Mazeppa | |
| No. 14. Finale and Cradle Song | | Mariya, Andrei | |

Total length 1h 30 min (without interval)

Mazeppa, Synopsis

Overture

Act I, Scene I: Kochubey's estate, house with garden

Mazeppa, now an elderly man, Hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks and commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian troops, is a guest in the house of the rich landowner Kochubey. His daughter Mariya is in love with the legendary Mazeppa, despite his advanced years. Thus she rejects the wooing of her childhood friend, the young Andrei, by telling him she had felt drawn to Mazeppa for a long time. During a feast given by Kochubey in honour of his friend and long-time comrade Mazeppa, the latter asks officially for his daughter's hand in marriage. He is brusquely rejected, which develops into an increasingly bitter quarrel. Even threats do not deter Mazeppa and he demands a decision from Mariya. She opts for her love for Mazeppa and decides against the family.

Act 1, Scene 2. Room in Kochubey's house

Lyubov laments the loss of her daughter. She urges her husband to hatch a rebellion against Mazeppa. However, Kochubey has a different plan: as Mazeppa's former close comrade, he gained information that Mazeppa's plans were aiming at a plot against Tsar Peter. Hence he wants to bring a charge against Mazeppa before the Tsar. Andrei announces his readiness to bring this news to the Tsar as a written accusation against Mazeppa.

Act II, Scene 3. Scene: Prison in Byeloserkovsk Castle

The plan fails, for Tsar Peter is loyal to his commander and Mazeppa managed to defend himself credibly. Kochubey is accused of being behind the plot, is tortured, and confesses his guilt. Orlik, Mazeppa's confidante and secret agent, endeavours in vain to force him to reveal where certain riches are hidden. Consequently Kochubey and Iskra are condemned to death, their property confiscated or burned.

Act II, Scene 4. Room in Mazeppa's castle

Mazeppa is sunk into gloomy forebodings and reiterates his resolve to take revenge on Kochubey. Orlik reports the tortures carried out on Kochubey and his refusal to reveal the hiding place of certain riches. Mazeppa orders Kochubey's and Iskra's execution on the following day.

Mariya has no idea of the matters surrounding her father and complains to Mazeppa about the lack of attention and affection. In order to placate her, Mazeppa gives her a detailed description of his plans aspiring towards the independence of Ukraine. He admits to her his desire to free himself from Russia's domination and Tsar Peter through a military alliance with the Swedes. In doing so, he exploits the outrage of the Cossacks, who feel humiliated under the yoke of Tsar Peter I and are yearning to rebel.

Mazeppa once again gives Mariya the choice of choosing between him and her father. She opts for her love for Mazeppa, whom she already sees as the new Tsar. Her mother has meanwhile secreted herself into the castle and informs Mariya of the dramatic events and the forthcoming execution. Both make haste to the place of execution in order to ask for mercy and defer it.

Interval

Act II, Scene 5. Open field, scaffold

The execution ceremony begins. Surrounded by Boyars, Mazeppa rides past without intervening in the event.

When the two women Lyubov and Mariya appear, they realise it is too late for a deferment – the execution is already taking place.

(Interval also possible here)

Act III, Scene 6, as Act I, Scene I: Kochubey's devastated estate, garden desolate, night

Mazeppa had formed an alliance with Charles XII of Sweden, but was annihilated by Tsar Peter's troops in the Battle of *Poltava* (see Overture). Andrei appears and recognises Kochubey's completely devastated estate. He meets Mazeppa, now being hounded by his enemies; Andrei accuses him, but is himself shot before he can strike his mortal enemy down.

Mariya, meanwhile mad, no longer recognises Mazeppa and sends him away. Andrei, mortally wounded, tries to bring Mariya to her senses but dies in her arms, while she sings him a cradle song.

Eberhard Kloke, status: 1 May 2017

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