**The opera The Tsar’s Bride – in all its splendor of music and play**

After thirteen years, the Big Opera is back on the Hong Kong Arts Festival stage with the premiere of The Tsar’s Bride, the opera by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov in the production of Gennadi Rozhdestvensky. Since 1899, the opera has been very popular in Russia, remaining, until recently, unknown to the global audience.

The Tsar’s Bride is a tragic history of fates ruined by envy and passions. The plot is based on the mysterious fate of the third wife of Ivan the Terrible, 19-year-old Marfa Sobakina, who died of an unidentified disease after just several weeks after the wedding.

Lecherous and treacherous Grigory Gryaznoy, one of the Zar’s Oprichniks, representing the secret police in those uncertain times, is fallen in love deeply with innocent Marfa. However, the girl’s heart belongs to just one man, kind Ivan Lykov with whom she is engaged. To get the girl, Gryaznoy gives Marfa a love potion in which, without him knowing, Lyubasha, a spurned lover of the Oprichnik, added a deadly poison. Soon, ironically, the Zar announces his choice of Marfa as his third wife. After a while, the girl dies mysteriously, and in this way, neither Gryaznoy nor Lykov don’t get her.

The Rimsky-Korsakov’s music fits the characters excellently: the innocence and purity of Marfa (soprano) and Lykov (tenor) are engaged in the fight against the cruelty and disgracefulness of Gryaznoy (baritone) and Lyubasha (mezzo-soprano).

With incredible precision, Rozhdestvensky manages to capture the Russian spirit that is emphasized by the complex musical passages being performed by the Orchestra of the Bolshoi.

The actors depict their characters just perfectly, as evidenced by the marvelous singing and convincing playing.

The opera star brilliant tragic actresses such as Olga Kulchinskaya (Marfa) and Agunda Kulaeva (Lyubasha); Alexander Kasyanov (Gryaznoy) and Oleg Tsibulko (Lykov) play equally powerfully.