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RELEASE: January 13, 2012

**Inna Naroditskaya's Book *Bewitching Russian Opera* Published by Oxford
University Press**

EVANSTON, Ill. --- Oxford University Press has published Professor Inna Naroditskaya's book *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage*. This interdisciplinary 416-page book integrates ethnography and history, exploring musical theater as a manifestation of Russian imperial lore.

Delving into the densely intertextual world of Russian literature and opera saturated with veiled codes and allusions, Naroditskaya's "masterpiece of intertextual hermeneutics" (Timothy Rice, ethnomusicologist, UCLA) illuminates uncharted links between eighteenth-century Russian tsarinas and their fairytale counterparts in nineteenth-century nationalist operas, between politics of cultural memory and generational anxiety, between theater in imperial court and court as a theater.

The revisionist, profoundly researched volume weaves two stories. One is *her* story of a female kingdom—an unprecedented chain of female empresses, Catherine I, Anna, Elisabeth, and Catherine the Great, ruling Russian for most of the eighteenth century. Between wars and political coups, the empresses, acting as vulnerable mistresses and as military commanders, fostered theater as an affirmation of absolutism and as a rehearsal space in which they probed their social relations and political aspirations. The other tale is *his* story—of nineteenth-century Russian literati whose efforts to restore patriarchy converged with and masqueraded as nationalism. The dialogue between the two centuries and two stories is traced through operas.

The four empresses invited troupes, built theaters, established the first theatrical schools, and fostered their role as star actress and exemplary spectator. Empress Elisabeth sang in a chorus, dressed actors, and attended theatrical rehearsals via a secret passage from her bedchamber. Catherine the Great wrote and produced

her own operas. Unable to win her second war with Ottoman Turkey, she created an operatic victory with seven hundred people on the stage.

The second half of the book revisits a canonical repertoire of nineteenth-century operas, including *Sadko* and *Mlada* by Rimsky-Korsakov and *Queen of Spades* by Tchaikovsky. How does one explain the proliferation of magical tsarinas defeated by male national heroes? Why do the famous Russian operatic choruses venerate a simple lad as a national hero defeating a fairytale tsarina? Combining literary and musical analysis with archival ethnography, Naroditskaya takes on these rarely addressed questions. She also argues that nineteenth-century nationalist operas, written by males, were built on a foundation laid by the previous century's tsarinas.

Naroditskaya conducted seven years of research, including work in St. Petersburg and Moscow archives, testing her ideas with her Russian colleagues and later giving two presentations at the Moscow Conservatory. She was supported by teaching leaves from Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music and by subvention from Northwestern University Research. She serves on the Humanities Council at the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities. The concept of the book was shaped during a semester at Harvard as a Harvard Davis Senior Fellow. The project also won Naroditskaya a Rockefeller Bellagio Foundation Fellowship that enabled her to finish the draft.

An ethnomusicologist, Naroditskaya pursues a recent path in her field – historical ethnomusicology. Whether applying sociological methods in instigating operatic repertoire or using musical analysis of opera to gain insight into Russian political drama, ultimately the book offers “a tale of feminist revisionism” (Glenn Watkins, Earl V. Moore Professor of Music History, University of Michigan). Gender for Naroditskaya is not as a fashionable pursuit but a theme that emerges from her prose.

For complete information on *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage*, visit the Oxford University Press page about the book at <http://bit.ly/bewitchingrussianopera>.

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