

Opera Attendance & Antonín Dvořák's *Rusalka* (1901)

Hi all,

Here's the details about the opera attendance/response paper for Antonín Dvořák's *Rusalka* (1901)

Logistical Details:

You should attend a live performance of *Rusalka* through the Met Opera's Live in HD broadcast.

The two possible dates are:

1) Saturday, February 25 at 12:55 pm

2) Sunday, February 26, at 6:30pm

- The opera is 3 hours 40 minutes (that's with intermissions—so plan on a longish afternoon or evening—you might want to smuggle in some snacks to the movie theater!).
 - The location of the movie theater is the Roxy Theater, 20 Main Street, Potsdam, NY 13676 <http://www.jscinemas.com> It's walking distance from Crane.
 - You can buy tickets ahead of time at the Community Performance Series box office in the PAC, or at the movie theater, but remember the movie theater is cash only.
 - Tickets are \$12 for students
 - Again, if you cannot make one of these dates, please let me know asap and I will arrange for you to view a DVD performance of the opera.
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Writing assignment:

I'd like for you to take notes on the following four bullet-point topics; after the opera, please compile your ideas into a response paper of approximately **700-1000 words**. This response paper should be submitted to me via email by **11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, March 1**. This does not need to be a research paper, but should be thoughtful and well-written. You do not need to discuss all of the following questions exhaustively—it's fine if you find some more compelling than other—they are intended to help you get started thinking. Make sure that you always think about how this production—its singers, conducting, acting, lighting, etc—helps lead you towards certain interpretations. Feel free to include comments on those staging issues as you write about the following questions:

- This work is roughly contemporaneous with both *Pelléas* and *Tosca*—how does *Rusalka* fit into a spectrum of what “modern” opera looks/sounds like at the turn of the century? What about the general lack of action in this opera—how does that compare to *Pelléas*? What about *Rusalka*'s particular approach to number opera versus through-composed-ness? What role does the orchestra play in this post-Wagnerian work? Specific scoring that stands out? Non-singing sections in the music? Does Dvořák use specifically Wagnerian-sounding harmony? Do specific characters have specific motifs? Does any single element seem to dominate the production, between music, staging, and words?
- How Dvořák's approach to language and the vocal writing strike you? If we accept that early 20th century “modernist” opera is obsessed with the particularity of language, what can we figure out about how Dvořák sets vocal styles, pacing, accent, stress? (I know that most of us aren't conversant with all the intricacies of Czech, but we can think some about it anyway....)

- This is a fairytale opera, not a naturalist one. How does Dvořák depict this atmosphere of magic through his musical setting? How does the production help depict “magic” opera?
- In Russian folklore, the *rusalka* is similar to other characters you may have encountered—sirens, lorelei, naiads, undines, and mermaids. These are all female characters which are connected with water, power, magic, and *vocal* abilities. Sirens are also seen as destructive in some way, as ‘female monsters who tempted sailors to destruction by the sweetness of their songs.’ (You might also think about other famous “water women” in opera—the Rhinemaidens from Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*!) How is the title character of this opera depicted in terms of her gender role (s)? Is she powerful or self-sacrificing? How does her music depict her gender identity? What do we know about her interiority, and how does her music tell us her feelings? How are the male characters in this opera contrasted with her, both dramatically and musically?