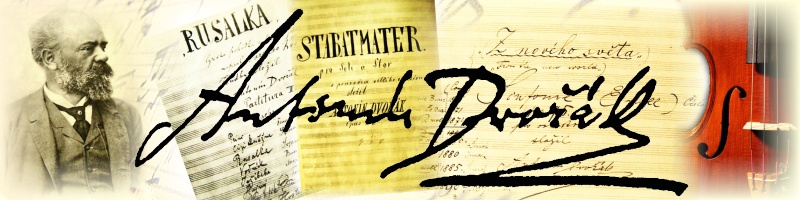
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**RUSALKA**

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| OPUS NUMBER | 114 |
| BURGHAUSER CATALOGUE NUMBER | 203 |
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| COMPOSED | 21 April - 27 November 1900 |
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| PREMIERE - DATE AND PLACE | 31 March 1901, Prague |
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| PREMIERE - PERFORMER(S) | Ruzena Maturova - *Rusalka*,  Vaclav Kliment - *The Water Sprite*,  Bohumil Ptak - *The Prince,*  Ruzena Bradacova - *The Witch*,  Marie Kubatova - *The Foreign Princess*,  Adolf Krossing - *The Gamekeeper*,  Vilemina Hajkova - *The Turnspit*,  Amalie Bobkova, Ella Tvrdkova, Helena Towarnicka - *The wood nymphs*, Frantisek Sir - *The Hunter*,  National Theatre Orchestra and Choir, conductor Karel Kovarovic, director: Robert Polak |
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| FIRST EDITION | Editio Supraphon, 1960, Prague |
| LIBRETTO | Jaroslav Kvapil |
| INSTRUMENTATION | 1 piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 1 English horn, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns,  3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, harp, violins, violas, cellos, double basses + 2 horns and harmonium behind the stage + mixed choir + soloists |
| PARTS / MOVEMENTS | 1st act: A Glade Beside a Lake  2nd act: The Castle Park  3rd act: As in 1st act |
| CHARACTERS | Rusalka, the Naiad - soprano Vodnik The Water Sprite - bass The Prince - tenor The Witch - contralto The Foreign Princess - mezzo-soprano The Three wood nymphs - sopranos, contralto The Gamekeeper - baritone The Turnspit - soprano The Hunter - baritone the naiads, The suite of the Prince, wedding guests |
| DURATION | approx. 2 hr. 40 min. |

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| **composition history**  The composer began writing his opera *Rusalka* in the last stage of his career, at a time he was focusing almost exclusively on fairy-tale or mythical themes. His four symphonic poems inspired by the ballads from [Erben](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/erben)’s *Bouquet* were followed by three operas, [The Devil and Kate](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/devil-and-kate), *Rusalka* and [Armida](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/armida). The successful premiere of The Devil and Kate prompted Dvorak to write a new work for the theatre, and he immediately began searching for an appropriate libretto. At that time he was possibly also entertaining the idea once again of writing a setting for Karel Pippich’s drama [The Death of Vlasta](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/b440), which he had considered previously (it was later set to music by Otakar Ostrcil). At that time he discussed the type of libretto he was after in a newspaper interview for the daily *Politik*, according to which he sought a story from Czech history. Probably during the course of March 1900, through the mediation of National Theatre director Frantisek Adolf Subert, Dvorak was offered a text written by poet [Jaroslav Kvapil](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/kvapil) entitled *Rusalka*. This fairy tale, about a water nymph who pays dearly for the chance to love a human being, struck a strong chord with Dvorak. After consulting music critic [Emanuel Chvala](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/chvala), who also recommended the libretto, the composer accepted the text. Work on the opera took sixth months: he began writing it on 21 April 1900 and he completed Act Three on 27 November of that year. | “Song to the Moon” (detail of the score) |

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| **libretto history**  When Jaroslav Kvapil began writing the libretto for *Rusalka*, he had already penned a series of translations of plays by classical and contemporary authors, several opera librettos (such as *Debora*, set to music by Josef Bohuslav Foerster) and the successful stage fairy tale *Princess Dandelion*. For most of the 20th century it was thought that Kvapil did not write the Rusalka libretto for a specific composer. In an article he published in *Hudebni revue* in 1911, Kvapil himself stated: “*I wrote it not knowing who the recipient would be*.” In the early 1990s, however, musicologist Marketa Hallova unearthed several hitherto unknown letters which suggest that Kvapil was commissioned to write the libretto by Alois Jiranek, a now forgotten Czech composer who lived and worked for many years in Ukraine. Nevertheless, as Kvapil himself stated, during the course of his work he realised that here was an opus he would be loathe to send to “*a doubtful address*”, and so he ultimately never submitted the libretto to Jiranek. Even before he had completed it, the poet offered the libretto to [Oskar Nedbal](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/nedbal), Josef Bohuslav Foerster, [Karel Kovarovic](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/kovarovic) and [Josef Suk](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/suk). But none of them showed any interest in the text, and Kvapil didn’t venture to offer it to Dvorak. It wasn’t until he saw an advertisement issued by the National Theatre that he discovered the composer was looking for a libretto and, through the theatre’s director F. A. Subert, he offered it to Dvorak. |

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| Jaroslav Kvapil | **inspiration for the libretto**  The libretto was inspired by various literary works. The chief source of inspiration was probably the fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen, whose plot outline is, in its main features, identical to that of *Rusalka*; then the tale *Undine* by German poet Friedrich de la Motte Fouque; and Gerhart Hauptmann’s drama *The Sunken Bell*. Yet Kvapil repeatedly placed his libretto more in the context of Czech literary production which looked to the Erbenesque tradition. The foreword to the printed edition of the libretto shows a clear endeavour to have the text universally accepted as a Czech fairy tale: “*Despite various earlier motifs, and these not exclusively from the Czech environment, my fairy tale contains much of the Czech folk element and, through its spirit and form, I deliberately set out to adhere to the indomitable example of our ballad, to Erben*.” We will find a similar assertion in an article the author published later on in *Hudebni revue*, according to which “*the tone of Erben’s ballads, which I sought to recreate in my ‘Rusalka’, captured Dvorak’s imagination more than the libretto itself*.” Kvapil’s ideological interpretation of the libretto is understandable, given the social atmosphere of the time. During the last third of the 19th century (and on into the early 20th century), Czech opera was here regarded as a representative, “national” musical genre, as a means which could be used to set artistic boundaries at a time of nationalistic differences; as such, it evidently was not to be “contaminated” by motifs taken from the German linguistic sphere. |
| Although Kvapil himself never explicitly spoke about it, the influence of Symbolism and Decadence in his libretto *Rusalka*cannot be ignored. These two important and mutually interconnected artistic movements dating from the end of the century were reflected on the one hand in a textual context in the use of a range of concepts and symbols (blood, dumbness), and also in the depiction of the relationship between the two central figures. The Prince is not in love with an actual being, but more with her “vision”, as he calls Rusalka when he first sets eyes on her. Their love relationship is totally unequal and ultimately unattainable. Its inevitable culmination is their final meeting, where the Prince willingly accepts Rusalka’s kiss of death and dies “happy” in her embrace. This association between eroticism and death is typical of the ideology of Symbolism and Decadence. Whatever the impact of the individual inspirational sources on the overall result, Kvapil succeeded in applying them to good purpose and cleverly recasting them into an original libretto, one of the finest in the Czech operatic repertoire. | |

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| **characteristics of the libretto**  The libretto for *Rusalka* is not an isolated work in the context of the author’s oeuvre, the product of a momentary impulse which went beyond the scope of Kvapil’s literary development. In at least two previous works Kvapil was eager to cultivate the theme of two incompatible worlds, at whose boundary stands a heroine who is unable to find her place in either of them. In the drama *The Will o’ the Wisp* a woman vacillates between two different moral imperatives; in *Princess Dandelion* we follow the tale of a king’s daughter who longs for an ordinary life alongside the man she loves, yet, in the end, she finds she is unable to live in an environment for which she was not predestined. The incongruity of two diverse worlds is a theme which Kvapil subsequently developed in *Rusalka* in a more striking way: the human world versus the world of supernatural beings. The fate of the wretched heroine in the case of Rusalka is even more dramatic; it is now no longer merely a case of being caught between two irreconcilable worlds, but between life and death: “*Neither woman nor fairy can I be; I cannot die, and cannot live!*”. This sense of dispossession, rootlessness and existential uncertainty is characteristic for the fin-de-siecle period, which provided a more fertile ground for Kvapil than traditional Romantic sources. The presence of these psychological (or even socio-psychological) aspects nevertheless distanced his text somewhat from the oft-cited Czech character of the libretto; rather than the world of fairy tales portrayed by popular Czech author Bozena Nemcova, Kvapil felt that his *Rusalka* had a greater affinity with the stories of Oscar Wilde. The most distinctive quality of the libretto is its poetic beauty. Using a wealth of linguistic devices, Kvapil avoided all trace of superficiality and, using subtle nuances, he imbued each scene with its own expression and mood. The text is filled with lyricism, which would undoubtedly have inspired Dvorak in his composition of the opera. Moreover, Kvapil’s familiarity with the theatre allowed him to arrange the individual scenes and settings appropriately in order to achieve a natural tempo in his alternation of monologues and dialogues. |

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| **characteristics of the musical setting**  *Rusalka* assumes a special place in the context of the composer’s legacy as a whole. Not only is it universally recognised as Dvorak’s most successful creation for the stage but, according to many, it is his magnum opus. While the same could justifiably be said of a number of Dvorak’s other works, it is without question that this is a product of supreme mastery which ideally combines an unerring compositional technique and exceptional invention (even by Dvorak’s standards). Of Dvorak’s regularly performed operas, *Rusalka* is the “most Wagnerian”. In addition to the intricate work with leitmotifs (see below), this phenomenon is manifested particularly in the way Dvorak treats the orchestral score. The orchestra in *Rusalka* is at least an equal partner to the vocal roles and, on many occasions, it could even be seen to be the chief bearer of the opera’s expression. This is closely associated with the composer’s instrumentation which, in several places, verges on musical Impressionism. Dvorak in principal uses a traditional orchestra but, through a resourceful combination of instruments or their sections, he creates colourful musical effects which evoke the gentle lapping of waves on the surface of the water, the mysterious sounds of the night forest, and even the reflection of the silver moonlight above the lake. | title page of the score |
| One of the typical traits of Dvorak’s compositional style is also applied in *Rusalka*, namely the art of contrast: completely different means of expression are used to depict two opposing worlds (human and supernatural); the scenes featuring the carefree, playful wood nymphs are set apart from the emotional dialogue between Rusalka and the Water Sprite or the Witch; and, using dissimilar vocal lines, the composer creates an effective contrast between the ethereal Rusalka and the fiery Foreign Princess. In this way, Dvorak – perhaps subconsciously – reinforces Kvapil’s intentions to portray the impossibility of uniting two distinct worlds and the destiny of an individual who, for disrupting the natural order of things, is expelled from both.  An important aspect of the musical setting of *Rusalka* is its emphasis on the role of nature. Dvorak’s love of nature is sufficiently documented in the composer’s correspondence and in the memoirs of his contemporaries, and however his admiration of natural beauty had come out in previous works, it is never expressed so eloquently as in *Rusalka*. Here the concept of “nature” is viewed in a highly complex manner: Dvorak does not simply present an image of magnificent scenery as a mere backdrop to the story; he renders it an active participant in the destiny of his characters. The natural surroundings in *Rusalka* are beautiful, mysterious, sinister, terrifying and, above all, powerful in their splendour. The time-honoured laws of nature (and of God), which Rusalka betrays, cannot be defied. Punishment – as in Erben – is inevitable. This idea acquires a concrete form in the lengthy orchestral interludes which often illustrate nature at specific times of day or night (the orchestral intermezzo before the arrival of the Prince in Act One, the intermezzo before the start of the polonaise in Act Two etc.).  What was important for setting the overall tone of the work was the typically Dvorakian sense of catharsis. If Kvapil made a connection between the composer’s approach to *Rusalka* and his position on Erben, he was not far from the truth. We will, in fact, find a link between the music for [The Wild Dove](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/wild-dove) and the setting for *Rusalka*, specifically regarding the tone of the whole work: while Erben’s poem ends with the death of the murderess, Dvorak ends the piece in an expression of conciliation and redemption. Likewise, in *Rusalka*, the composer strives to maximise the cathartic tone of the final scene which, in Kvapil’s case, is only intimated. This is not accidental. The decision to conceive the close of this solemn work in this way unquestionably has much to do with the composer’s profound religious sentiments and his sincere faith in humanity. And this is not the first time Dvorak has chosen to do this: apart from the above-mentioned symphonic poem The Wild Dove, we will encounter a similar resolution in his [Stabat mater](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/stabat-mater) and [Cello Concerto in B minor](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/concerto-for-cello2). In all these examples, the fundamental mood of the work (serious, meditative or even tragic) is ultimately transformed into one of hope and reconciliation.  Dvorak again takes the literary source a step further in another respect: if the text itself essentially lacked a dramatic nerve, the composer used his music successfully to offset what might have been detrimental to the stage impact. An example of this is a scene from Act Two, in which Rusalka, greatly disillusioned, seeks refuge with the Water Sprite. Kvapil’s text at this point has no sense of drama, and is more resigned and plaintive in character:  “*Oh, it’s futile, it’s futile, and my heart is empty. Futile are all my charms, when I’m only half human! Oh, it’s futile, he no longer knows me, Rusalka with her flowing hair*.”  Dvorak, however, on the basis of this text, showed great resourcefulness in his use of musical devices, creating one of the most dramatic and compelling scenes in the entire opera. Moreover, he underlines Kvapil’s key theme – Rusalka’s rejection from both worlds – at the end of this scene with several urgent repetitions of the words “*I cannot die, and cannot live!*”, thus the image of the heroine’s tragic fate culminates with devastating conviction, and the hopelessness of her situation acquires existentially sinister dimensions. Similarly, the composer builds a psychological arc above Kvapil’s text, for instance, in the dialogue between the Gamekeeper and the Turnspit in the introduction to the same act: the moment the pair start making fun of Rusalka, the orchestra strikes up with a severely distorted version of Rusalka’s leitmotif. | |

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| **leitmotifs**  *Rusalka* overturns all previous opinion on Dvorak as a “non-reflective” composer driven by impulse: the structure of this opera is exceptionally well thought-out and, despite the various moods through which the story gradually passes, it is unusually consistent; *Rusalka* could be described as a textbook example of unity in diversity. Dvorak achieves compactness, among others, via his use of leitmotifs. Although he was a great admirer of Wagner, he managed to avoid the negative phenomenon typical of certain works by the Bayreuth master, namely an overabundance of leitmotifs in a single opera. While Wagner might have used several dozen leitmotifs with a series of variants in the thematic fibre of his score – a cognitive challenge for the ordinary spectator by any standards – Dvorak contented himself with far fewer motifs, which he elaborated with astonishing invention. They are always associated with a specific idea, character or environment. | page of the score for Act 3 |
| The universally best known motif is probably the theme linked with the character of Rusalka. Surprisingly, its general outline was not conceived when Dvorak began working on Kvapil’s libretto, but first appeared roughly seven years earlier in the composer’s American sketchbooks as the theme for a [sonata for cello and piano](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/b419) which, however, he ultimately never wrote. (The same applies to the theme of the celebratory polonaise in Act Two. Dvorak originally jotted it down back in 1894 as material for a [piano piece entitled Dithyramb](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/two-piano-pieces), which was also never realised). The Rusalka theme is essentially an enchanting, lyrical melody which uniquely exemplifies the opera’s title character, her fragile beauty and vulnerability yet, in its directness, it also reflects the sincerity and spontaneity of her feelings. To try to trace the transformations of this theme during the course of the opera is something of an adventure, since Dvorak’s creative fantasy is truly staggering: Rusalka’s theme successively appears in more than fifty variants which echo the situation or mood of any given moment, and the composer’s inventiveness in faithfully illustrating them appears to know no bounds.  The general view that the leitmotif associated with the main character ought logically to be the main motif of the opera as well, does not apply in the case of *Rusalka*. What must be considered the chief motif here is the four-note motivic cell which, according to Dvorak’s biographer Otakar Sourek, is traditionally known as the motif of “water magic”, while leading contemporary Dvorak scholar David R. Beveridge proposes the designation “motif of frustrated yearning”. (This shift in the understanding of one and the same element is a testimony to the way in which, more than a century after the premiere, the perspective on Dvorak’s and Kvapil’s work has evolved: the earlier label is derived from the “fairy-tale” aspect, while the new term is more influenced by “psychological” issues. Trends such as this naturally do not arise merely as a result of changes in lexicon usage within a narrow circle of specialists but also, and much more visibly, through the various interpretations of individual productions.) The main motif of the opera appears in countless variants during the course of the opera via a variety of rhythmical, melodic, harmonic and instrumental transformations. It generally appears at times of extreme gravity or at crucial points in the plot, and also plays a fundamental role at the very end of the work: following Rusalka’s great song of forgiveness, after the words “*God have mercy on you!*”, the motif is heard as a retrograde figure in the fortissimo brass as the culmination of this cathartic moment. This passage represents one of the most inspired moments in Dvorak’s entire oeuvre. A little known fact, Dvorak borrowed this motif from an earlier work he wrote thirty-five years previously, namely his [Symphony No. 2 in B flat major](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/symphony2), composed in 1865. | |

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| **premiere**  The staging of *Rusalka* at Prague’s National Theatre was arranged soon after the work was finished. Dvorak’s sixtieth birthday was approaching and chief conductor [Karel Kovarovic](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/kovarovic) planned to present the entire series of Dvorak’s operas, beginning with the world premiere of *Rusalka* (in the event, the complete cycle was never performed). The lead roles were assigned to the fine soprano Ruzena Maturova and one of the greatest tenors of his day, Karel Burian. Nevertheless, the premiere was almost cancelled because of Burian. “*In a moment of good spirits in gay company, he forgot that he was required to keep a clear head for the important and demanding task in the role of the Prince which lay ahead of him that evening*,” was how Otakar Sourek later described his indisposition. This was not the first, or the last, time such an event occurred, as Jaroslav Kvapil’s memoirs tell us: “*In his usual manner, Burian sent his regrets an hour and a half before the start of the premiere and, had it not been for the understudy, the gala premiere, also attended by critics from abroad, would have come to grief*.” The understudy was tenor Bohumil Ptak, who had also studied the role, but was not required until the repeat performances; moreover, on the day of the premiere, he had been recording his voice onto a phonograph cylinder. A delegation from the theatre, headed by Dvorak himself, burst into Ptak’s flat with a plea to save the premiere. Although the artist had not been present at the last few rehearsals and he only had a hazy notion of the director’s vision, he had mastered the part of the Prince and contended well with the difficult task entrusted to him. Not only did he acquit himself honourably, but his performance was ultimately one of the factors which contributed to the success of the premiere.  [**► photos of the performers, costumes and various stage sets**](http://antonin-dvorak.cz/en/rusalka-premiere) | poster announcing the premiere at  the National Theatre |
| The majority of critics present at the premiere were in agreement regarding two main points: Dvorak’s musical setting excels for its uncommonly powerful, broadly arching, lyrical melodies and masterful instrumentation which subtly evoke the “fairy-tale” world and effectively illustrate the environment in which the plot unfolds. Its great appeal also lies in its musical invention which compensates for any imperfections in the libretto and for the absence of marked dramatic conflict. In contrast, Kvapil’s text, today universally regarded as one of the finest librettos in Czech operatic literature, did not enjoy such a positive reception. It was criticised for its uninspired treatment of literary sources, the vague motivation of its characters, and for its fragmented individual motifs. Most of the critics, however, did concede the libretto’s great value as poetry, its lyricism and the “musicality” of its verse. | |

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| **excerpts from Dvorak’s correspondence**  **to his friend Alois Gobl (12. 6. 1900):**  “I am now working on a new opera and I’ve already completed the first act and I also intend to finish the instrumentation this month. My new opera is once more a fairy tale, with words by Jarosl. Kvapil; it is called “Rusalka”. I am filled with enthusiasm and joy that my work is going so well. [...]” | |
| **to Jaroslav Kvapil (Vysoka, 31. 7. 1900):**  “Esteemed Sir, my good friend! I have a little question to ask. In Act Two, when Rusalka leaves, ceremonial dance music begins. Is this to be an ordinary ballet, or should the chorus simply look as if they were dancing? I would not wish the ballet chorus to dance at the same time. I will certainly have a polonaise at this point, and the chorus, and then the guests at the castle, can suggest this, and perhaps this will suffice. And I would also ask whether the Water Sprite, before he begins to sing “Oh poor, pale Rusalka!”, could say a few words, such as those repeated more often in Act One (“Alas! Alas! Alas!”)? Then, when he sings through the first verse, I would again like to have a few bars of the celebratory polonaise, and then he would continue with the second verse and, for the third instance, we would have the music with the chorus “White flowers along the way”. It is such a shame that I am not in Prague, it would indeed have been good if I had been able to consult with you immediately on various matters! So I beseech you to answer my questions directly, by return of post, and let me know if you consent to my proposals. My work is a delight and joy and, as far as the conception is concerned, I already have the entire second act in my head. I also have all the instrumentation completed up to this scene in Act Two. With cordial greetings, your sincere friend and admirer, Antonin Dvorak.” | Dvorak’s letter to Kvapil |
| **to Jaroslav Kvapil (Vysoka, 22. 8. 1900):**  “I would like to request different words where the Princess says “Oh, only now do I realise”, and then perhaps four extra lines or, even better, we could extend the entire sentence from “When my fire has seared you”, and the Princess would cut in only when the Prince sings “And if the whole world should...”. My idea is that, at this point, both would be singing together. I am in principle quite against the two singing together, but I think that here it would be effective.” | |

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| **excerpts from Jaroslav Kvapil’s memoirs**  “[...] The idea [for the libretto] came to me on the island of Bornholm. The fairy tales of Erben and Bozena Nemcova, which I was studying at the time, accompanied me to the sea. And there, merging together, were my impressions from Andersen, which I loved as a child, and the rhythms of Erben’s ballads, the most beautiful of Czech ballads [...]”.  “If I were asked which place appeared in my mind as the setting for Rusalka, I would conjure up the small – if it could thus be called – lake in a forest glade in Zdar, where there was also a bathing pool in my young days, which was later removed, and its surface was covered in water lilies. I used to love spending time in that glade and by the water when I was a student, and some of my early poems came out of that environment. [...] That quiet corner has always seemed to me the perfect place for fairy tales on moonlit nights...”.  “Dvorak frequently came to visit me during that time; and he often came just after seven in the morning, in fact, he sometimes had to have someone wake me up. Sometimes he came burdened with worries and occasionally I was flummoxed by his questions. I remember one conversation like that: In Act Three of Rusalka, the verse uttered by the crazed Prince, “[...] I invoke both heaven and earth, I invoke both God and the demons!”, were entirely unacceptable to Dvorak. He said to me: “Listen here, I am a believer and I simply cannot blaspheme against God in my music!” It took a while to explain to him that to “invoke God and the demons” is not to “blaspheme against God”. He accepted this, went away and composed music to the words that I had written. [...] I think that my love of Erben made our friendship stronger, and the tone of Erben’s ballads, which I sought to recreate in my Rusalka, captured Dvorak’s imagination more than the libretto itself.  **Josef Suk’s recollections of Rusalka (retold by Jan Miroslav Kvet)**  “Dvorak composed Rusalka without using a piano at all. He sat at a table to write it and only occasionally in the evening would he play through something he had written during the day. When the work was finished he played the last part one evening to Suk and his wife. Otilka was moved to tears and Dvorak responded by saying: ‘You see? Imagine how I was feeling when I wrote it!’” |
| **conductor Jiri Belohlavek on Rusalka**  “Personally, I would have serious misgivings if I had to choose between Dvorak’s last three symphonies. But Rusalka, the queen of Dvorak’s operas, I would name without a moment’s hesitation. In terms of the music itself, this work is utterly faultless. It is the product of profound emotion and its impact lies in the power of its truth. It doesn’t try to be something it’s not, there is no attempt at stylisation; this is music from the heart. It touches all aspects of natural human behaviour – love, desire, passion, betrayal, revenge, death, forgiveness and sacrifice – in such a ravishing and spontaneous arc, that it takes your breath away...” |

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| **synopsis**  ACT\_ONE: Wood nymphs are dancing by the lake in the moonlight and teasing the old Water Sprite. The only one not to join in the fun is Rusalka. She longs to become human and have a human soul so that she can awaken feelings of love in an unknown man who comes to swim in the lake while out hunting. Rusalka ignores the Water Sprite’s words of caution and seeks out the Witch. The latter casts a spell to give Rusalka a human soul and a human form, but at great cost: Rusalka has to sacrifice her translucent watery robes and her voice. And there is another condition: if mute Rusalka cannot keep the love of a human, she will be damned and will have to return to the depths of the lake, and her beloved will become a victim of her curse. Rusalka is not discouraged and, when she meets the Prince, he is enchanted by her beauty and falls in love with her. The Prince takes her to his castle.  ACT\_TWO: A wedding feast is being prepared at the castle, but it seems that Rusalka is not welcomed by everyone: the Turnspit and the Gamekeeper sense that she isn’t an ordinary human being like them. A beautiful Foreign Princess has also been invited as a wedding guest, whose obvious sensuality is in direct contrast to Rusalka’s quiet fragility. The Princess does not love the Prince, but her ambition drives her to fight for his favour. The fickle Prince, intoxicated by her beauty, forgets about his bride. The Water Sprite who, fearful of what might happen to Rusalka, moves to the castle lake and observes her grief with forlorn eyes. During the ceremonial ball, the Prince selfishly casts Rusalka aside and completely surrenders to the Princess’s charms. The Water Sprite takes Rusalka back to his lake and casts a curse over the Prince. Terrified, the Prince seeks refuge with the Princess, but she rejects him out of hand.  ACT\_THREE: Alone, Rusalka mourns her fate by the lake. She seeks out the Witch once again, since she wants to return to the other sprites. The Witch could arrange this, but the price is high: Rusalka, who still loves the Prince, can only lift the curse of the elements by taking his life. Yet she would rather suffer a wretched destiny so long as the Prince finds happiness. She doesn’t realise that her sacrifice is futile. The Prince, cursed by the Water Sprite, has fallen ill. The Turnspit and the Gamekeeper, who have come to the Witch in search of a healing potion, are driven away by the Water Sprite. The Prince, a ghost of his former self, returns to the forest where he first set eyes on Rusalka. He desperately calls out to her and begs her to forgive him, seeking death from her fatal kiss. The opera ends with Rusalka’s great song of forgiveness. |