

## DER CZAREWITSCH

Operetta in 3 Acts. Music by Franz Lehár, book and lyrics by Bela Jenbach and Heinz Reichert, English by Adam Carstairs. Based on the play by Gabryela Zapolska.

Deutsches Künstler Theater, Berlin - 21 February, 1927  
Johann Strauss-Theater, Vienna - 18 May, 1928

Among the late-period pieces that Lehár wrote with Richard Tauber's participation in view, this stands out because of its strong Russian flavour, allied to a particularly tender and melodious score. The young Czarevitch must be tricked into overcoming his lack of interest in women, because a dynastic marriage is expected of him. The plan goes wrong when he and Sonia, the 'decoy', fall wildly in love and elope to Naples. Their happiness is abruptly terminated when his father, the Czar, dies and Sonia renounces him when duty calls him back to Russia.



### STORY

#### Act I

Outside the Tsar's palace in St Petersburg, the palace guard is on duty while inside an entertainment featuring Cossack dancers, singers and a balalaika orchestra is taking place. During the interval of the concert, while the Tsarevitch Aljoscha is out of his apartment, his uncle, the Grand Duke, takes the opportunity to show some society ladies around it. They are the first females to cross the threshold of these rooms, because the Tsarevitch has grown up with a hate of women. The visitors discover that his apartment is furnished in the most austere fashion, but with a complete range of keep-fit equipment.

When the Grand Duke and the ladies have returned to the concert, the Tsarevitch's valet, Iwan, finds a handbag that one of the ladies has left behind. While he is having a look at it, he is surprised by the arrival of his wife, Mascha, who has slipped past the guards to get inside the palace. Iwan is alarmed. Not only is she not supposed to be there, but Iwan is not even supposed to be married because of the Tsarevitch's dislike of women. Knowing the Tsarevitch's attitude, Mascha can only suspect her own husband has been up to something when she finds him with a lady's handbag. Iwan has to produce some rapid reassurances of his fidelity and some soothing words of love.

Not surprisingly, the Tsarevitch's views on women are of real concern to his father, the Tsar, and the Prime Minister has been deputed to ensure that Aljoscha gets some experience with women in readiness for his marriage. It seems that an entire dancing group at the day's musical entertainment was made up of girls in male costume and, when the Tsarevitch singled out the athletic prowess of one of these 'boys' for particular mention, it was arranged that 'he' should be brought along to the Tsarevitch's apartments—ostensibly for a gymnastic work-out.

Sonja, the dancer chosen, arrives at the Tsarevitch's apartment dressed in a white Cossack uniform, with a long coat and high, patent leather boots. The Prime Minister warns her to respond to the Tsarevitch with complete obedience and to be prepared for some rough treatment when he discovers that she is a woman. Left alone, Sonja looks round the room and apprehensively sits down to await Aljoscha's arrival.

While Sonja waits in an adjoining room, the Tsarevitch returns and contemplates his lonely existence. He likens his isolation to that of a soldier keeping watch on the vast expanses of the River Volga and begs the Lord above to send him an angel before he dies. A groom enters and tells the Tsarevitch that the Cossack boy is here. Sonja is shown into his presence, and the two are soon chatting freely but, when Aljoscha suggests a work-out, Sonja is reluctantly persuaded to take off her coat, revealing her true sex.

Furious, the Tsarevitch makes as if to strike her but Sonja stops him and pleads with him to let her stay. Openly admitting that she had been planted by the Prime Minister, she begins with her honesty to win his confidence and, finally, she suggests that together they might defeat his uncle. She will visit him every evening, making it look as though she were his lover. The Grand Duke would be satisfied by the appearances and cease to push women on him, while they would simply remain good friends.

The Tsarevitch is tempted and agrees. Then, discovering Sonja is hungry, he orders a fine meal to be brought to them. Sonja, seeking to make their situation look more realistic, adds a request for champagne and is astonished to learn that the Tsarevitch has never touched a drop in his life. She tells him of the wonders it can perform, as they clink glasses and drink together. As Aljoscha mellows, Sonja continues her counselling, but suddenly he tells her she must go... but she may come back the following day. Left alone, his melancholy returns, but he thanks the Lord for having finally sent him one of His angels.

## Act 2

In the Tsarevitch's palace, Aljoscha is sitting at the dinner table with some of his officers. By contrast with the austere surroundings of his apartments in his father's palace, everything here is bright and friendly and a woman's touch is much in evidence. The atmosphere is distinctly merry, with a balalaika orchestra playing on the terrace, but the Tsarevitch is lost in thought, contemplating his beating heart. Is it love at last? Gradually he brightens up and urges his officers to drink up. '

The Grand Duke finds the Tsarevitch's altered demeanour most encouraging, though Aljoscha is still embarrassed by his uncle's references to the traces of feminine influence he sees around him. The Tsarevitch has a speech to learn for the officers' parade later in the day, but this is forgotten when Sonja arrives. It soon transpires that all the signs of feminine presence about the place have been carefully arranged and that the relationship between the two is still purely platonic but now Aljoscha is anxious for Sonja to give up her dancing career and move into the palace with him. Not only has he fallen for a woman's attractions, but he is convinced that Sonja is the only one for him. He tells her that she may bring her friends to see her at the palace, and when she has gone he reaffirms to himself the passion that he now feels. He is determined to make the most of the spring of his life.

When Aljoscha has left for the parade, Sonia returns with her dancing friends. Iwan comes upon two of them, Olga and Vera, and cannot resist a little mild flirtation but, once again, he has the misfortune for Mascha to turn up and catch him. She complains that ever since the novelty of his balalaika playing wore off he has had little to offer her, and he has to do some swift sweet talking to retrieve the situation. Sonja, meanwhile, is revelling in telling her dancing friends of her happiness at her new life.

Now the dark clouds begin to gather over the relationship between the Tsarevitch and Sonja. As far as the Tsar and his Prime Minister are concerned, Sonja has served her usefulness by breaking down the barriers between the Tsarevitch and womankind. Now a royal wife has been found for him and she is to arrive that evening. The Grand Duke takes it upon himself to dispose of Sonja and, separating her from her friends, he tells her that she will have to leave. He will arrange the break-up by telling Aljoscha of all the previous lovers she has had. Sonja obediently goes along with the plan but, when the Tsarevitch returns, she cannot bring herself to say goodbye. All the two can do is reaffirm their love for each other.

The Lord Chamberlain arrives to conduct the Tsarevitch to meet his future wife and Aljoscha instructs the Lord Chamberlain to tell his father that he refuses. He remains at his palace with Sonja, who has arranged a Thousand and One Nights dancing display by all her friends.

Aljoscha is delighted with the dancing and, when the girls crowd round him, he tells them of all that Sonja means to him. Suddenly the Grand Duke appears with four officers in full uniform but, once again, Aljoscha refuses to obey his father's command. The Grand Duke then tells him of Sonja's admission to a string of

previous lovers, and the Tsarevitch is shattered. In such a situation Sonja can no longer hold to the story she had agreed. She swears to Aljoscha that she has belonged to no other man and that she had gone along with the deception only under duress and, the Grand Duke's plan in ruins, they fall into each other's arms.

### Act 3

In a garden in Naples, Sonja and the Tsarevitch are relaxing in front of a villa overlooking the gently lapping sea. Since they fled to Naples they have thought of nothing but each other, and their days consist of nothing but thoughts of love.

Iwan and Mascha have accompanied them to Naples, and Iwan has been finding great delight in the local girls while Mascha has been enjoying the attentions of the Italian men. This time it is Iwan who has to do the pleading, reassuring her that he, no matter what, will always be there when Mascha needs someone.

One day the Grand Duke appears in Naples with a group of army officers. Once more he has come to plead with the Tsarevitch: the Tsar is ill and may die at any time. He must return. Aljoscha declares that he would renounce the throne rather than give up Sonja, but then a telegram is handed to the Tsarevitch: his father has died, and he is already Tsar. The officers swear their allegiance and Aljoscha realises that duty calls him. He kneels before Sonja, kisses her hand and abruptly departs as the broken-hearted Sonja is left helplessly lamenting the workings of fate.

*(Adapted from Book of the Musical Theatre by Kurt Gänzl - ISBN 0-370-31157-4)*

**PRINCIPALS:** 2 female, 3 male

- The Tsarevitch, Aljoscha
  - The Grand Duke, his uncle
  - The Prime Minister
  - The Lord Chamberlain
  - Sonja
  - Iwan, a valet
  - Mascha, his wife
  - A princess
  - A countess
  - Olga
  - Vera
- Ladies of society, officers, dancers, guards, footmen

### MUSICAL NUMBERS

1. Es steht ein Soldat am Wolgastrand - Wir Tscherkessen brauchen weder Gut noch Geld
2. Dich nur allein nenne ich mein - Schauke, Liebchen, Schauke
3. Einer wird kommen, der wird mich begehren
4. Allein, wieder allein - Es steht ein Soldat am Wolgastrand
5. Ein Weib! Du ein Weib! - Champagner ist Feuerwein - Es steht ein Soldat am Wolgastrand
6. Herz, warum schlägst du so bang
7. Bin ein glückseliges Menschenkind - Das Leben ruft
8. Es warten die kleinen Mädchen - Liebe mich, küsse mich
9. Setz dich her! - Wir Tscherkessen brauchen weder Gut noch Geld
10. Berauscht hat mich der heimatliche Tanz - Jetzt weiß ich, was das Leben ist
11. Intermezzo
12. Kosende Wellen - Warum hat jeder Frühling, ach, nur einen Mai

### INSTRUMENTATION:

2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, 3 percussion, harp, strings