

Renee Fleming in 'Rusalka'

Written by Connie Brotzman
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Soprano Renee Fleming returns to Metropolitan Opera in the role that has become one of her signatures in the last 15 years, that of the title character in the Met's revival of Czech composer Antonin Dvorak's *Rusalka* when USCB Center for the Arts presents *The Met:Live in HD* on Saturday, Feb. 8.

In addition to Ms. Fleming, this revival of Otto Schenck's gorgeous production features bass John Relyea as the water gnome, Vodik, Dolora Zajick as the witch, Jezibaba, and tenor Piotr Beczala as the prince. Dynamic young maestro Yannick Nezet-Seguin is on the podium to direct Dvorak's enchanting opera of hauntingly beautiful melodies and daring orchestral harmonies in this dark fairy tale of a love between a water nymph, *Rusalka*, and a human prince that ends tragically.

Fleming mesmerizes the audience with the show-stopping first act aria, "Song to the Moon," when she asks the moon to tell the handsome prince how much she loves him. She is willing to

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give up a life of enchantment and become human and asks the witch Jezibaba to grant her wish. She does, but with the warning that if Rusalka does not find love she will be damned and the man she loves will die.

Dvorak makes a daring and unusual move when his main character is kept on stage but silent for most of the second act after she is granted her wish. She is voiceless when she is with the prince – the price she pays to become human – but she believes their love will overcome the curse. The prince finds her beside the lake the next morning, and even though he is puzzled because she won't speak to him, he has nonetheless fallen in love with her and takes her to his castle to be married.

As the castle prepares for the wedding, a foreign princess who has come for the festivities mocks Rusalka's muteness and woos the prince away from her. Rusalka now sees the ugliness of the longed-for human world and, feeling more and more intimidated, she escapes to a deserted garden where Vodnik appears from the pool. As she tells him that the prince no longer loves her, the prince and princess come into the garden. Even though the prince dallies with the princess, he finally rejects the glittering world of the court and longs for the innocent creature of nature he callously abandoned.

He goes back to the lake and calls out to Rusalka to return to him. Once again a nymph, she appears to him from the water and tells him that a kiss from her would now kill him. He asks for the kiss to give him peace. She does, and he dies in her arms. Rusalka asks for mercy on his soul and vanishes into the water.

During the two intermissions, go behind the scenes with a Met Opera star for interviews with cast members, crew and production team who give Met Live viewers an unprecedented look at what goes into the staging of an opera.

All seats are assigned. For online tickets go to www.uscbcenterforthearts.com . Adults \$22; OLLI members \$18. Tickets are also available at the box office one hour prior to 12:55 p.m. curtain time on Saturday afternoon, or call the box office at 843 521-4145.