

# Opera By a Soviet Composer

The Cleveland Orchestra Will Play Shostakovich's "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk" in New York City on February 5



## Setting for Act I of "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk"

**T**he Cleveland Orchestra, on February 5, with Artur Rodzinski conducting, will introduce to New York "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk," an opera by the twenty-eight-year-old Soviet composer, Dmitri Shostakovich. The first representative musical work to come out of the new Russia, its first production outside of its homeland takes place in Cleveland on January 31 and will be repeated on February 2.

The New York production is for the benefit of the Composers' Fund of the League of Composers and the presentation, at the Metropolitan Opera House, will be under auspices of the League.

Shostakovich completed the work in December, 1932. It is the first of a projected cycle of four operas in which the composer plans to trace the condition of women in Russia. "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk" is based on a novel, "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk District," by Nikolai Leskov, who wrote it in 1864. The action of the opera takes place in the 'forties. The second opera is planned to take place during the Czarist régime of about 1860, the third in the Revolution of 1917, and the capping-piece will present woman in Russia to-day.

### ● Rich Dramatic Material

Shostakovich has cited as his reason for selecting the Leskov novel the rich dramatic and social content of the book, and added that he knew of no other work in Russian literature which so vividly has described the position of women in the ancient Russia before the Revolution.



## Lady Macbeth of Mzensk

He has confessed that he has taken liberties with the novel. He has treated the story differently approaching its events from a modern point of view. Writing in *Modern Music*, he has said:

“Accordingly, the subject has been somewhat altered. In Leskov’s novel *Katerina Lvovna Izmailova*, the heroine, commits three murders before she is sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. She kills her father-in-law, her husband and her nephew. As I proposed to justify the action of *Katerina Lvovna* and create an impression of a definite personality, deserving of sympathy, I omitted the third murder, undertaken solely to make herself the heir of her slain husband.

“Now, to arouse sympathy for *Katerina* was no simple matter. She has committed a number of crimes against accepted moral or ethical laws. Leskov presents her simply as a cruel woman who ‘wallows in fat’ and murders innocent people. But I have conceived *Katerina* as a woman clever, gifted and interesting. Set by fate in gloomy, miserable surroundings, belonging to a merchant class which is hard, greedy, and ‘small,’ her life is sorrowful and pitiable. . . . It is unnecessary for me to relate the action further. For I have justified it chiefly by the musical material. It is my belief that in opera music should play the principal and deciding rôle.”



**Dmitri  
Shostakovich**

Of this stormy young man, Walter Duranty has said: “Shostakovich is regarded as Russia’s most important contemporary musician. His opera is a vital and dramatic work.”

Anna Leskaya will sing the soprano part of the heroine, *Katerina*, for the New York performance. The tenor rôle of the lover will be sung by Ivan Ivantzoff, as the clerk, *Sergei*. The part of the father-in-law, *Boris Timofevich Izmailoff*, will be taken by the basso-cantante, Yasha Davidoff.