

SADKO

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908)

The merchants of Novgorod are a proud lot. As the key players in the prosperity of their society and the wealth of the city's inhabitants, they feel invincible. Only the singer Sadko dares to challenge the self-satisfied citizens. Through his art, he wants to convince others to break through their isolation to open up new worlds. His ideas are not only mockingly dismissed, he is also openly threatened.

Ostracised by the community, Sadko flees into the wilderness and finds a sympathetic ear in Volkhova, the daughter of the Sea King. She is moved by Sadko's music and promises to love and support him. She also promises him three golden fish that will make the singer a wealthy man.

Sadko bets with his life against the merchants' fortune that he can catch golden fish from the lake. He wins the bet, gains respect among the merchants and after bidding farewell to his wife, he sails out with a great fleet to discover new horizons and to gather wealth.

Twelve years later, the fleet returns. Only Sadko's ship is brought to a standstill by strange forces. The Sea King apparently wants to claim his share of the booty. But gold and jewels are useless – the Sea King demands a human sacrifice. Sadko is fated to be this sacrifice, and having plunged overboard, he is reunited with his beloved Volkhova in the depths. The Sea King ultimately agrees to the marriage between Sadko and his daughter.

The union of Sadko and Volkhova ushers in a new era: the Kingdom of the Sea King collapses and Princess Volkhova turns into the river of the same name that grants Novgorod direct access to the sea.

Sadko returns to his earthly wife, Ljoebava, and promises to never leave her again. The singer-conqueror is received in Novgorod as the hero of the community that he tried to change.