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Operatic Account of Russia's Yukos Drama to Premiere in Vienna

By The Moscow Times

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An opera about the decades-long dispute between former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Russia's President Vladimir Putin will premiere at a Vienna opera house on Friday.

The production, titled Khodorkovsky (Chodorkowski in German), will open at the Sirene opera house, and is billed as a "royal drama," according to the theater's website.

Khodorkovsky's website described the production as a "historical drama," an account of his dealings with the Russian president from 1989 to 2013.

Besides the drama between the two protagonists, the libretto by Kristine Tornquist also focuses on the turbulent events and major changes in Russian business and government during that time, according to the Sirene theater website.

Khodorkovsky, the former head of the now defunct Russian oil firm Yukos and once the richest man in Russia, was arrested in 2003 in what was widely viewed as a politically

motivated case. His former oil empire was carved up and sold off while the former tycoon spent a decade in jail, before Putin pardoned him in a surprise announcement in late 2013.

Following his release, Khodorkovsky has worked as an opposition activist, calling for political freedoms and human rights in Russia, while living outside the country. It is widely believed that he would face renewed prosecution should he return to Russia.

Much of the opera's libretto was written in 2013, therefore, Khodorkovsky's release is not included in the production — which "leaves the ending of the story open, but gives hope for the future," the Khodorkovsky website said.

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