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# RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

**Sheherazade**  
**The Tale of Tsar Saltan**  
**Flight of the Bumble-bee**

**BALAKIREV: Russia**

Philharmonia Orchestra, London  
CSR Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava)  
Russian State Symphony Orchestra  
Enrique Bátiz • Anthony Bramall • Igor Golovschin



## **Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 - 1908)**

*Sheherazade, Symphonic Suite, Op. 35*

*The Tale of Tsar Saltan, Musical Pictures, Op. 57*

*Flight of the Bumble-bee*

## **Mily Alexeyevich Balakirev (1837 - 1910)**

Russia

Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov originally intended a naval career, following the example of his elder brother. He showed some musical ability even as a very small child, but at the age of fourteen he entered the Naval Cadet College in St Petersburg in pursuit of a more immediately attractive ambition. The city, in any case, offered musical opportunities. He continued piano lessons, but, more important than this, he was able to enjoy the opera and attend his first concerts.

It was in 1861, the year before he completed his course at the Naval College, that Rimsky-Korsakov met Balakirev, a musician who was to become an important influence on him, as he was on the young army officers Mussorgsky and Cui, who already formed part of his circle. The meeting had a far-reaching effect on Rimsky-Korsakov's career, although in 1862 he set sail as a midshipman on a cruise that was to keep him away from Russia for the next two and a half years.

On his return in 1865 Rimsky-Korsakov fell again under the influence of Balakirev. On shore there was more time for music and the encouragement he needed for a serious application to music that resulted in compositions in which he showed his early ability as an orchestrator and his deftness in the use of Russian themes, a gift that Balakirev did much to encourage as part of his campaign to create a truly Russian form of music. In 1871 he took a position as professor of instrumentation and composition at St Petersburg Conservatory and the following year he resigned his commission in the navy, to become a civilian inspector of Naval Bands, a position created for him through personal and family influence.

Rimsky-Korsakov's subsequent career was a distinguished one. At the same time he accepted the duty of completing and often orchestrating works left unfinished by other composers of the new Russian school. As early as 1869

Dargomizhsky had left him the task of completing the opera *The Stone Guest*. Twenty years later he was to perform similar tasks for the music of Mussorgsky and for Borodin, both of whom had left much undone at the time of their deaths. Relations with Balakirev were not always easy and he was to become associated with Belyayev and his schemes for the publication of new Russian music, a connection that Balakirev could only see as disloyalty. There were other influences on his composition, particularly with his first hearing of Wagner's *Ring* in 1889 and consequent renewed attention to opera, after a brief period of depression and silence, the result of illness and death in his family.

Rimsky-Korsakov was involved in the disturbances of 1905, when he sided with the Conservatory students, joining with some colleagues in a public demand for political reform, an action that brought his dismissal from the institution, to which he was able to return when his pupil and friend Glazunov became director the following year. He died in 1908.

The symphonic suite *Sheherazade* was composed by Rimsky-Korsakov in the winter of 1887 - 1888, taking as its literary inspiration excerpts from *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, the fascinating series of stories told by the beautiful Sheherazade in an effort to postpone her execution at the orders of her royal master. The choice of subject exemplifies the attraction that the neighbouring cultures of Islam has had over Russian composers in search of exotic material. In his own description of *Sheherazade* Rimsky-Korsakov rebuts the notion that his themes are, in general, connected solely to particular events in the *Arabian Nights*, although the sinuous oriental solo violin melody is associated with the story-teller herself. The thematic material, however, appears in different forms to convey differing moods and pictures. Other ideas had been suggested by the sea, Sinbad's ship, Prince Kalender, the Prince and Princess, the Festival in Baghdad and the ship dashed against the rock with the bronze rider on it. The composer himself described the suite as a kaleidoscope of fairy-tale images and designs of Oriental character. The musical material, whatever its narrative significance, is, in any case, worked out symphonically. His original intention had been to give the movements the uninformative titles *Prelude, Ballade, Adagio* and *Finale*. He was later persuaded to add programmatic titles, which he later regretted and withdrew.

Rimsky-Korsakov wrote his opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* largely during the summer of 1899, the libretto based by Vladimir Ivanovich Byelsky on the poem by Pushkin, the centenary of whose birth it celebrates. The work was first performed in Moscow by a private opera company, a successor to the company established by Mamontov, who had been imprisoned for debts incurred in the construction of railways. It was well received, although a later private production in St Petersburg proved unsatisfactory.

*The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, a stylised fairy-tale, tells the story of the marriage of Tsar Saltan to the youngest of three sisters, who bears him a son, Prince Guidon. Saltan, absent at the wars, is told by the Tsarina's jealous sisters, that she has borne him a monster, and commands that she and the child be put in a barrel and sent out to sea. Mother and son are eventually stranded on a desert island, where Guidon, now coming to manhood, saves a swan from attack by a kite, breaking the power of a sorcerer. As the Tsarina and Guidon sleep, the city of Ledenets appears on the island, and Guidon is welcomed by the people, released from enchantment, as their prince. The city has three wonders, a magic squirrel that eats nuts of gold and sings, thirty-three magic knights, who emerge sometimes from the sea, and the Swan-Princess, whom Guidon had rescued and who eventually reveals herself to him in human form. Saltan, hearing of these wonders, sails to the island and is amazed to find there his beloved wife and a prince who greets him as father. The famous *Flight of the Bumble-bee* is heard in Act III of the opera, when Guidon, transformed with the help of the Swan-Princess into a bee, stings his wicked aunts and the old witch who has helped them. *The Musical Pictures* from the opera, which were performed before the first performance of the opera itself, include the music for the departure of Tsar Saltan, an introduction to Act I, music from later in the Act, as the Tsarina and her baby are sent out to sea in a barrel, and the musical picture of the three wonders of Ledenets.

Balakirev occupies an important if equivocal position in the history of Russian music of the later part of the nineteenth century. He was born in Nizhny-Novgorod in 1837 and had his first piano lessons from his mother, who later arranged some lessons for him with Alexander Dubuque, a pupil of John Field. Through a later teacher, the German Karl Eisrich, he was introduced to the circle of Alexander Ulibishev, an enthusiastic amateur, author of books on Mozart and

Beethoven and owner of a useful music library. At Ul'ibishev's house he was able to hear chamber music and occasionally orchestral works, the inspiration for his own early compositions. It was through the agency of this patron that Balakirev was able in 1855 to travel to St Petersburg, where he met Glinka and other well known musicians and made his own *début* as a pianist and composer.

Supporting himself with difficulty by giving piano lessons and private performances, Balakirev managed to survive in St Petersburg, where he met two young army officers, César Cui and Modest Mussorgsky, both keen amateur composers, over whom he began to exercise some influence. He had, at the same time, formed a friendship with Dmitry and Vladimir Stasov, the latter an important figure in the intellectual support of Russian musical nationalism. In 1861 he met Rimsky-Korsakov and the following year Borodin, completing the group of five Russian nationalists described by Vladimir Stasov as the Mighty Handful, the Five who would follow Glinka's example in the creation of a distinctively Russian musical tradition. At the same time Balakirev had increasing involvement with the Free School of Music in St. Petersburg, set up in opposition to the 'German' Conservatory established by Anton Rubinstein, with the encouragement of the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, who did her best to remove Balakirev from the conductorship of the Russian Music Society concerts, which were under her patronage. Balakirev's own character, obstinate and tactless, did much to increase the division between the Conservatory and his own followers, castigated by Anton Rubinstein as amateurs, a charge that could never have been levelled at him. Balakirev's later relationship with Nikolay Rubinstein and the Moscow Conservatory, where Tchaikovsky taught, was more satisfactory, and it was Nikolay Rubinstein who introduced the oriental fantasy for piano, *Islamey*, to the St Petersburg public in 1869.

Religious conversion led to a brief retirement from musical life and from familiar society between 1871 and 1874, but gradually thereafter Balakirev resumed something of his old activities, particularly, in 1881, the direction of the Free School, which he had surrendered to Rimsky-Korsakov in 1874. In 1883 his friends found for him a position as director of the Imperial Court Chapel, where he was assisted by Rimsky-Korsakov. A breach with the latter came in 1890, as Belyayev, an important patron and publisher of Russian music, gradually seemed

to usurp his place as leader of the Russian nationalist composers. A measure of friendship was restored, to be destroyed completely and finally by Rimsky-Korsakov's behaviour at the first performance of Balakirev's *First Symphony* at a Free School Concert in 1898. Balakirev had retired from the Imperial Chapel in 1895 and thereafter had devoted himself more fully to composition, to his continuing task of editing the music of Glinka and to the encouragement of a new group of young Russian composers, including his always loyal disciple Sergey Lyapunov, who later orchestrated *Islamey*. Freedom from other activity allowed the completion of a symphony he had started many years before and the completion of a second in 1908. In this final period of his life he attracted little attention from the musical public and expressed some bitterness at the neglect of his work. Russian music, nevertheless, owed him a considerable debt. Combative by temperament, he had fought for his own conception of truly Russian music, which found future expression in a synthesis of the technique of the Conservatories and the spirit that he had engendered and nurtured.

The symphonic poem *Rus*, the ancient name of Russia, was originally planned as a four movement work. This scheme was rejected in favour of a second Overture on *Russian Themes*, which was first performed at a Free School concert in April 1864. The publisher Johansen issued the work, now revised, in 1869, under the title *Musical Picture, 1000 Years*. In the 1880s Balakirev revised the work again, giving it the title *Rus*. Three Russian themes are used. The work is introduced by a wedding-song, *It Was Not The Wind*, a *Larghetto* opening. This B flat minor melody is followed by an *Allegro moderato* in D major, the song *I'll Go Up*, stated first by clarinets and bassoons. The return of the first theme is followed by the third folk-song, *Jolly Katya In The Fields*, and a fourth, apparently from the Caucasus, played by the clarinet with harp accompaniment. The material is developed, use being made of the first three themes. The fourth theme leads to the return of the first song, as it was originally heard, with a conclusion that makes brief and subtle reference to the second theme. *Rus* belongs to a period in Balakirev's creative career when such complete reliance on folk material seemed a possible course to pursue. In the symphonies this attitude has been modified.



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STEREO

Nikolay Andreyevich  
RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

(1844 - 1908)

Mily Alexeyevich  
BALAKIREV

(1837 - 1910)

DDD

Playing  
Time:  
79'02"

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV:  
Sheherazade, Symphonic Suite,  
Op. 35

- |   |  |         |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | The Sea and Sinbad's Ship  | (9:15)  |
| 2 | The Kalender Prince  | (11:20) |
| 3 | The Young Prince and the Young Princess  | (9:53)  |
| 4 | Festival at Baghdad - The Sea<br>(David Nolan, Violin /<br>Philharmonia Orchestra, London / Enrique Bátiz) | (11:20) |

The Tale of Tsar Saltan,  
Musical Pictures, Op. 57

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|---|--|--------|
| 5 | The Tsar's Farewell and Departure  | (4:34) |
| 6 | The Tsarina in a Barrel at Sea   | (7:19) |
| 7 | The Three Wonders<br>(Philharmonia Orchestra, London / Enrique Bátiz)                  | (7:05) |
| 8 | Flight of the Bumble-bee<br>(CSR Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava) /<br>Anthony Bramall) | (1:31) |

## BALAKIREV:

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|---|---|---------|
| 9 | Russia, Symphonic Poem<br>(Russian State Symphony Orchestra /<br>Igor Golovschin) | (16:15) |
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Recorded in St. Barnabas Church, Mitcham, London, on 20th and 21st August 1992 (Tracks 1 - 7),  
at the Concert Hall of the Czech-Slovak Radio (Bratislava), from 13th to 16th December 1987 (Track 8),  
and at the Musfilm Studio, Moscow, from 2nd to 4th September 1993 (Track 9).

Producers: Brian B. Culverhouse (Tracks 1 - 7) / Günter Appenheimer (Track 8) /  
Edvard Shakhnazarian (Track 9)

Engineers: Brian B. Culverhouse (Tracks 1 - 7) / Vitaly Ivanov (Track 9)

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Cover Painting: Sheherazade by Max Slevogt

