

Prelude

“Inside Masterworks”



HARTFORD
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

LISTENING IN COLOR

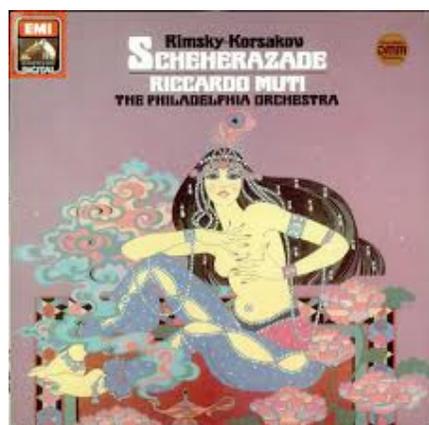
SEPTEMBER 2016

Masterworks #1: Scheherazade! October 7-9, 2016

Do you know which composer began his career as a naval officer and ended as a political activist?



The classical music world abounds with stories of child prodigies. Nine-year-old opera singers, or children who begin composing/performing at age five, create the belief that all great musicians displayed evidence of their unique gifts at a very young age. Such was not the case for Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who achieved extraordinary success and recognition, despite delaying serious music studies until his twenties. Nikolai, a distinguished composer, is proof that age alone does not determine talent or fame.



Rimsky-Korsakov began piano lessons at age six, but his goal was a career in the Russian navy.ⁱ In 1856, at the age of 12, Nikolai followed the footsteps of his older brother Voin (22 years his senior) and enrolled in the

naval academy.ⁱⁱ But with a persistent interest in music, Nikolai continued piano lessons in school against his brother's wishes, eventually studying with Theodore Kanille, an inspirational teacher. Kanille introduced his young and impressionable 18-year old student to Mily Balakirev, one of a group of Russian composers that included Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Alexander Borodin. With Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov, the five composers became known as "The Mighty Five,"ⁱⁱⁱ who grew to become a powerful and influential force in Russian music.

Typical of young naval officers, eighteen-year-old Nikolai planned an around-the-world voyage in 1862.^{iv} Before his departure, Rimsky-Korsakov shared with Balakirev the beginnings of his Symphony in E-flat, and Balakirev encouraged Nikolai to work on the piece during his voyage.^v While at sea, Nikolai completed the composition, and upon his return, revised it with Balakirev's help.^{vi} Balakirev conducted the premiere of the piece to an audience astonished to learn that the composer was a 21-year old navy officer!^{vii}

In 1871, now 27 years old, Rimsky-Korsakov became a professor at the renowned St. Petersburg Conservatory, simultaneously retaining his position as an active naval officer.^{viii} But keenly aware of his minimal music theory knowledge and lack of a formal music education, Nikolai became a student of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to learn harmony and counterpoint,^{ix} transforming himself into one of the world's foremost music theorists.^x Influenced by Tchaikovsky, Nikolai's music took on distinct a "western European" sound,^{xi} which, when mixed with the "Russian nationalism" sound of the Five,^{xii} made Rimsky-Korsakov's compositions unique, separating him from other Russian composers of the day.^{xiii}

The compositions and techniques of Rimsky-Korsakov and the Five gained momentum; together, they formed a network of audiences, played through the masterpieces, and would "pore over scores and argue about music."^{xiv} Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration skills were greatly respected; at varying points in time, each of the Five separately asked

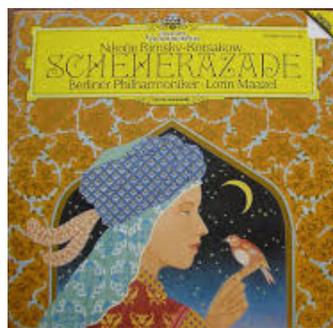
Masterworks #1:

Do you know which composer began his career as a naval officer and ended as a political activist?

him to score or orchestrate their own pieces – in many cases, his editions of their works enjoyed the most widespread use, even today.^{xv}

The first year of the Russian Revolution, 1905, was sparked with uprisings and demonstrations, as workers expressed profound discontent with the government's inability to improve their quality of life. January 22, 1905 was dubbed "Bloody Sunday" after police forces fired on a peaceful demonstration, leaving hundreds dead.^{xvi} When students from the St. Petersburg Conservatory participated in the demonstrations, Rimsky-Korsakov became more than a composer. He became a political activist.

Rimsky-Korsakov, then 61 years old, stepped forward in support of his students.^{xvii} A lifelong political liberal, he personally published an open letter to the director of the Conservatory, boldly supporting the student strikers and attacking the Russian Musical Society, who controlled the institution.^{xviii} He and 29 other prominent musicians publicly endorsed a letter demanding political reforms, but his vocal stance on civil liberties cost him his job: on April 5, 1905, despite his fame and reputation as a leading Russian composer, he was fired from the conservatory.^{xix} In protest, Nikolai's students and colleagues staged a student performance of his opera, *Kashchey the Deathless*, which was followed not by the planned student concert, but by a huge political demonstration.^{xx} Widespread coverage of these events led to the prohibition of his music, a ban that lasted for 2 years.^{xxi} Several faculty members resigned in protest, and more than 300 students walked out of the Conservatory, as a sign of solidarity with Rimsky-Korsakov.



When the St. Petersburg Conservatory reopened in December of 1905, Rimsky-Korsakov was reinstated as professor under a new director, Alexander Glazunov, but the reinstatement was short-lived. In 1906, Nikolai retired and left the Conservatory.^{xxii} He was suffering from heart problems and high levels of censorship from the Russian government made it nearly impossible to publish his opera, *The Golden Cockerel*, which implied criticisms of the monarchy.^{xxiii} In fact, the opera was not performed until 1909, after his death in 1908.^{xxiv}

As one of Russia's most influential composers, Rimsky-Korsakov's late start did not determine his musical achievements. As a political



activist, Rimsky-Korsakov proudly shares the spotlight with other important musicians such as actor/singer Paul Robeson and musician Pete Seeger, whose vocal opposition to the McCarthy hearings of the 1950's caused both artists to be blacklisted. All three used their celebrity, even at risk to their own careers, as a platform for important political statements. Rimsky-Korsakov's larger-than-life achievements are inspirational proof of what is possible: irrespective of age, our best and most profound accomplishments may be ahead of us.

As we open the season on October 7 – 9, 2016, come hear the HSO perform two pieces by this renowned composer: *Scheherazade* (a wonderful composition based on the Tales of the Arabian Nights) and *Capriccio Espagnol*.

Masterworks Series Sponsor

The Edward C. & Ann T.
ROBERTS
FOUNDATION

Masterworks Pre-Concert Talk Sponsor

NEW ENGLAND
PUBLIC RADIO.

Masterworks #1:

Do you know which composer began his career as a naval officer and ended as a political activist?

Wondering How the Music Will Sound?

Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage!

Looking for a way to involve young children in the music? Here's a link to a video with the music of *Scheherazade* and some of the stories from *Tales of the Arabian Nights*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7O1SKrCeu0>

Want to enhance your own enjoyment? Learn to recognize the voice of *Scheherazade* and identify the music of the sea! Try this listening guide for adolescents and older audiences: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjXm2MlrQU0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjXm2MlrQU0>

And a link to the full performance by the Rotterdam Philharmonic:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0R439gPHEE>

A link to *Capriccio Espagnol* with Zubin Mehta and the Berlin Philharmonic:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh6mDL-VwYw>

For the Concerto for guitar and orchestra by Rodrigo, please enjoy this performance by guitarist Pepe Romero:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ye-FvKCZp3s>

The return of Casey's Classics

Recommended recordings
for your listening pleasure!

Masterworks, October 7-9, 2016

Two masterpieces by Rimsky-Korsakov, his *Scheherazade* and *Capriccio Espagnol*, can happily be found together on a really wonderful recording with Sir Charles Mackerras and the London Symphony Orchestra, captured in brilliant digital sound on TELARC. Another favorite recording of *Scheherazade* alone is the classic recording with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in sound that defies its age (RCA).

Rodrigo's charming *Concierto de Aranjuez* is memorably performed by the American guitarist Sharon Isbin accompanied by Jose Serebrier and the New York Philharmonic, recorded in lovely sound on the WARNER label.

- ⁱ Sadie, Stanley, and George Grove. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 16. London: Macmillan, 1980. Print.
- ⁱⁱ Slonimsky, Nicolas, and Richard Taruskin. "Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016. Web. 22 June 2016.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sadie, Stanley, and George Grove. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 16. London: Macmillan, 1980. Print.
- ^{iv} Ibid
- ^v Ibid
- ^{vi} Ibid
- ^{vii} "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)." *Famous Russian People. Russian Celebrities. Russian Poets, Russian Painters, Russian Artists*. Web. 22 June 2016.
- ^{viii} Ibid
- ^{ix} Ibid
- ^x "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)." *Famous Russian People. Russian Celebrities. Russian Poets, Russian Painters, Russian Artists*. Web. 22 June 2016.
- ^{xi} Clements, Andrew. "Rimsky-Korsakov's Musical Revolution in Russia." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 17 Feb. 2005. Web. 22 June 2016.
- ^{xii} "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)." *Famous Russian People. Russian Celebrities. Russian Poets, Russian Painters, Russian Artists*. Web. 22 June 2016.
- ^{xiii} "Prominent Russians - Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov." *Russiopedia*. 2005. Web. 22 June 2016.
- ^{xiv} Grout, Donald Jay., J. Peter Burkholder, and Claude V. Palisca. "Opera and Musical Theater in the Later Nineteenth Century." *A History of Western Music*. 8th ed. New York: Norton, 1960. Print.
- ^{xv} Sadie, Stanley, and George Grove. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 16. London: Macmillan, 1980. Print.
- ^{xvi} The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Russian Revolution of 1905." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 7 July 2015. Web. 22 June 2016.
- ^{xvii} Sadie, Stanley, and George Grove. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 16. London: Macmillan, 1980. Print.
- ^{xviii} Ibid
- ^{xix} Ibid
- ^{xx} Ibid
- ^{xxi} Ibid
- ^{xxii} Ibid
- ^{xxiii} Sadie, Stanley, and George Grove. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 16. London: Macmillan, 1980. Print.
- ^{xxiv} Ibid