



## RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: SCHEHERAZADE

Perusal script

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### Performers, in addition to the orchestra

A male actor, representing Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

A female actor, representing the story-teller

The two actors should be placed on opposite sides of the orchestra and, if possible, on raised platforms placed slightly upstage. This is to enable them to make clear to the audience that they are drawing the musicians of the orchestra into the stories that they are both telling.

Gerard McBurney

May 2013

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## Movement 1

VO 1

### RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Once upon a time there was a King...

a great King... the Sultan Shahriar!

Convinced that all women were perfidious... and faithless...

he vowed every day to marry a new wife....

and then immediately to execute her...

until in the end... no one would be left to be his queen...

ME 1            1-6

16"

VO 2

### STORYTELLER

But the Sultana... Scheherazade<sup>1</sup>... outwitted the cruel Sultan...

and saved her own life and the lives of others...

by fascinating Shahriar

with the tales she told through one thousand and one nights....

at each dawn leaving the story incomplete until night fell again...

Many wonders did the beautiful Scheherazade tell...

ME 2            8-13

28"

VO 3

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced with 5 syllables: She-HE-ra ZAA-da [the name probably means Queen of Freedom]

**STORYTELLER**

For one thousand and one nights,

Scheherazade wove tale into tale and story into story...

with verses of the poets and the words of songs...

**ME 3            14-17**

**42"**

**VO 4**

**STORYTELLER**

And so... day after day...

driven by insatiable curiosity to know the end of every story that she told...

Shahriar continually put off Scheherazade's execution....

until... at the last... he utterly abandoned his cruel plan...

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## RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

I was born in the Russian countryside...

in Tikhvin<sup>2</sup>, a small town not far from St Petersburg...

I was not two years old when I could distinguish

all the tunes my mother sang to me...

and when my father played the piano, I beat my toy drum in perfect time...

In company, I was reserved...

but alone I skylarked, ran about the fields, climbed roofs and trees,

and flew into tantrums whenever I was punished...

My older brother was a lieutenant in the navy...

and he would send us letters telling us of his adventures on the ocean...

And so I fell in love with the seal

I conceived a passion for it without ever having seen it...

and I built a toy ship and played at being a sailor...

and I taught myself to read the stars...

**ME 4**

**18-24**

**Violas, cellos and basses**

**16"**

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<sup>2</sup> Pronounced 'Teekh-veen'

VO 5

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

One day my brother returned from his travels round the world  
and was appointed commander of a local training ship for youngsters...

That summer he took me with him...

and taught me how to sail a boat...

and I lived in his cabin, away from all the other boys...

*[suddenly struck by the memory]*

Once, when I was standing on the ratline under the mizzen top,  
while we were tautening the shrouds, I fell into the sea...

Fortunately into the sea and not on to the deck!

I swam out easily... and was pulled into a boat...

and all I suffered was a fright...

and bruises from the force with which I hit the water...

**ME 5**

**25--29**

**Bassoons, vias, cellos, basses**

**11"**

**VO 6**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

At 18 I graduated as an officer from the School of the Marine Corps  
and was assigned to a clipper... the Almaz<sup>3</sup>... the Diamond...  
to set out on my own voyage round the world for several years...

I did not avoid this path before me....

My uncle was an admiral, my brother an outstanding sailor...

and I from earliest childhood had been swept away

by all the stories and the books of travel that I read...

and by my brother's letters...

The dream of distant lands allured me...

**ME 6            30-35            Clarinets, bns, vlas, cellos, basses            12"**

**VO 7**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[enjoying the names of the foreign countries]*

We started for Germany and thence for foggy England...

As we crossed the North Sea, the rolling of the ship was awful...

But I was never seasick... and on the way

I learned that we were bound across the ocean to New York...

**ME 7            36-38            Cts, bns, vlas, cellos, basses            6"**

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<sup>3</sup> Pronounced AI-MAZ

VO 8

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

As soon as we entered the North Atlantic,  
we encountered gale-force headwinds...

Our ship was under full sail, but for days we made no progress...

The weather was cold and damp,  
and our clipper rolled horribly beneath huge waves.

And then... a fall in the barometer and a closeness in the air...  
and we knew we were entering the path of hurricanes...

The wind grew stronger and stronger, and swung from left to right...

Enormous waves towered over us  
and when night came, lightning flashed...

**ME 8**

**39-43**

**Tutti**

**11"**

VO 9

**STORYTELLER**

*[announcing the tale with a sense of grandeur]*

"The Sea... and Sinbad's Ship"...

Long ago... in the city of Baghdad... there lived a wealthy merchant...

Sinbad the Sailor...

"Know ye, my masters, that when I was still a boy...

I made up my mind to go to sea...

I boarded a ship...

we sailed downriver... and out into the Indian Ocean...

and took our course towards the East...

having the coast of Persia on our left

and on our right Arabia...

At first I was much troubled by the motion of the vessel...

but I soon recovered...

and since that hour I have never more been plagued by seasickness..."

**ME 9**

**44-76**

**Tutti until last bar, when celli only**

**1'13"**



**VO 10a**

**STORYTELLER**

"And so... after many voyages...

fate brought us to a pleasant land...

with trees loaded with ripe fruit...

and scented flowers... singing birds and limpid streams...

And I sat down by a spring of clear cool water...

and I fell fast asleep..."

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[enjoying the sweetness of the moment]*

In my music, you should notice how I use different scales and modes...

*[enjoying the simplicity and the name of the scale]*

like this one... five simple notes... the Pentatonic scale...

*[explaining with a smile and proving his point]*

It reminds us of the East... of music from China or Japan!

**ME 10a Pentatonic scale - oboe**

**15"**

**VO 10b**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[enjoying revealing something his friends don't know]*

Every scale and key in music has a meaning...

but I'll tell you something else...

to me it also has a specific color!

*[with boyish energy and a sense of amazement]*

For example, B minor...

**ME 10b                      Harp - B minor arpeggio                      3"**

**VO 10c**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

I hear that as green, and somewhat stern and cruel...

But E major... the key of 'Scheherazade', by the way...

**ME 10c                      Harp - E major arpeggio                      3"**

**VO 11**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[in delight]*

is a deep and glittering sapphire blue!

...just as I saw it on the ocean when our ship grew nearer to America...

and the water changed from greyish green to the darkest azure...

and the sun grew hot... and we saw flying fish...

and at night the water glistened with a magnificent phosphorescence...

And shortly afterwards the coast of the United States appeared...

and we entered the Hudson River... and dropped anchor in New York...

And there we spent the winter...

and explored the city and the country all around...

The Americans at that time were in the middle of their Civil War...  
so we stayed exclusively within the Northern Territory  
which was fighting under President Lincoln  
for the emancipation of the Negroes...

And then... the following spring... we received orders from St Petersburg  
that we were to sail around Cape Horn... to the Pacific!

And I was overjoyed!

**ME 11a      76-8                      Horn call only                      6"**

**VO 11b**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*pointing to the projected map*

To take advantage of the winds...  
first we voyaged eastwards to the Azores<sup>4</sup>...  
then south to Rio de Janeiro... 65 days on the ocean...  
To start with, fresh and stormy winds accompanied us,  
but as we neared the Equator we felt warmth...  
and the sky and sea grew azure once again...  
and at night we saw new constellations...  
and the dazzling beams of the full moon  
dipping in and out of heaping clouds!...

**ME 11b      82-4                      Horn call only                      6"**

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<sup>4</sup> Pronounced: a-ZOR-es (3 syllables)

**VO 11c**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[in ecstasy]*

In June we arrived in Rio!

*[stressing the names of colors!]*

The green-blue waters of the bay... the gorgeous green-clad mountains...

The city teeming with Negroes of every possible skin color,

from brown to glossy black... some in shirts, others half-naked...

The market filled with oranges, China oranges, and wonderful bananas...

We saw monkeys and parrots...

and waterfalls... and climbed the mountains...

and visited the Botanic Gardens, filled with flowers... and palms...

and plants from Asia...

the clove tree, the cinammon tree, and the camphor laurel...

Humming birds and huge butterflies flew about by day

and in the evening gleaming insects glittered in the air...

*[This is one of the key lines from the show!]*

Everything was different...

Nothing was as it is with us in Russia...

**ME 11c**

**88-90**

**Horn call only**

**6"**

**VO 12**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[suddenly, quietly, changing the tone, going further back in his memories]*

A long time ago, when I was still a schoolboy in St Petersburg,  
I started going to the opera...

*[acknowledging the live orchestra]*

And at first it was the orchestra that fascinated me...  
and most of all that sound of the French horn...

*[he is thrilled by his own boyish love-affair]*

But then I discovered Glinka... our first great Russian composer...

and his 'Ruslan and Ludmila'...

And I fell utterly in love with this fairytale in music...

and that moment in Act 1...

when the beautiful Ludmila is spirited away...

by two monsters sent by the evil Chernomor<sup>5</sup>...

**ME 12      Glinka - Ruslan Act 1      Chernomor's scale      33"**

**Act 1 pp.176 last 2 bars to end of page 177 [bars 2 and 4 silent]**

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<sup>5</sup> Pronounced: Cher-no-MOR [this name means something like 'Black Death!']

**VO 13a** [in bar 2 of ME 12]

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[relieving the excitement of his first discovery of this music and rehearsing Glinka's stage directions in his mind]*

"With a sudden clap of thunder..."

**VO 13b** [in bar 4 of ME 12]

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

"...the stage is plunged in darkness!"

**VO 13c** [after ME 12 ]

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

Glinka!

There are no bounds to my enthusiasm for this great genius!

His music has been my school... and all his methods I have imbibed...

like the famous Glinka scale... descending by whole tones...

**ME 13** Oboe descending scale G F E flat D flat B A G F E flat then words then ascending scale B C sharp E flat F G A B 18"

**VO 13d** [in the middle of ME 13]

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*[proudly]*

This scale has played an important part in many of my compositions...

**VO 14** [after the end of ME 13]

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

And I used that same scale right here in my 'Scheherazade'...

*[in excitement]*

to create a picture of a grandly surging sea...

**ME 14** 130-155 [no cello solo in last bar]

59"

**Movement 2**

**VO 15**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

And so... after two years and eight months on a ship...

my voyaging was over... and I came home...

and as we drew near St Petersburg...

it grew colder... and we met icebergs...

And music? Music had been almost totally forgotten...

My mind was filled with memories of distant lands and oceans...

Until... one day... I was taken by a friend to meet...

*[enjoying the name]*

Mily Balakirev<sup>6</sup>!

*[suddenly picking up energy]*

Here was someone unlike anyone I had ever known...

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<sup>6</sup> Pronounce: Meely Ba-LACKI-reff

a composer... an artist...

with bold and shocking new opinions and ideas...

and a magnificent pianist, who could play everything from memory...

This extraordinary man made an overpowering impression on me!

Through him I found myself plunged suddenly into a whole new world,  
that was completely unfamiliar to me...

Through Balakirev I discovered Oriental music...

For he had recently returned from the high mountains of the Caucasus...

and he'd brought back with him...

the strangest-sounding melodies... and dances...

which he played in the most captivating way...

and he'd begun composing his own music in that style...

**ME 15**

**Balakirev - Georgian Song - oboe solo**

**15"**



VO 16

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

The spell of Balakirev's personality was tremendous...

and his influence on all of us, his admirers,

resembled a magnetic or mesmeric force...

In those days he was still young, with fiery eyes and a handsome beard...

half-Russian half-Tatar... brilliant and aboriginal...

And... most astonishing... he would play to us

from his orchestral fantasy Tamara<sup>7</sup>

which he was still improvising on the piano at that time...

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<sup>7</sup> Pronounced: Ta-MA-ra, with the stress on the second syllable

## STORYTELLER

*[With romantic grandeur - this is a very famous Russian poem!]*

In the deep dark gorges of the Caucasus

Where the river Terek roars

Long ago there stood an ancient tower

Black against the blackness of the cliff.

In that tower lived Queen Tamara<sup>8</sup>

Beautiful as a heavenly angel

Evil and treacherous as a demon.

Through the midnight mist and darkness

Travellers heard Tamara's voice

Singing with passion and desire,

Luring them with magic and strange power...

**ME 16**      **Balakirev - Tamara, p.13 final bar to p.18 end of bar 2 [no  
horns]      1'05"**

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<sup>8</sup> Again, pronounced: Ta-MA-ra, with the stress on the second syllable

## VO 17

### RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

It was through Balakirev that I made friends  
with another young composer of great promise  
who had recently made his appearance in our circle... Alexander Borodin<sup>9</sup>...  
He was not only a musician but a scientist!  
I used to visit him in his laboratory next to his apartment...  
surrounded by glass retorts filled with colourless gas  
which he was distilling from one vessel into another...  
and he and I would talk of music far into the night  
and I discovered he knew far more about the orchestra than I did...

I remember when several of us...  
Borodin, Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky, myself and others...  
were asked to come up with music for a pageant  
to celebrate the Emperor, Alexander II...  
The idea was for each composer to create an 'orchestral picture'  
of a different episode of Russian history...

*[reveling in the beauty of Borodin's contribution]*  
and it was Borodin who wrote by far the finest one...  
on the theme of Central Asia...

a vast territory, filled with half-savage nomad populations,  
which had only recently been conquered by the Russian Army...

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<sup>9</sup> Best pronounced in the Anglophone manner: BO-ro-din

**ME 17**      **Borodin - Steppes of Central Asia, bars 40-71**      **43"**

**VO 18**

**STORYTELLER**

On the eleventh evening of The One Thousand and One Nights...

Scheherazade resumed the story she had broken off at dawn...

"I have heard, auspicious King,

that the first of three one-eyed Dervishes came forward

and spoke to the lady of the household, saying:

'Madam, you should know the reason why I am a wanderer...

and my chin is shaven and my eye plucked out...

I am a prince and many sorrows have befallen me..."

**ME 18**      **Mvt 2 bars 5-26**      **44"**

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