



CHANDOS
CLASSICS

CHAN 10369(2) X

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

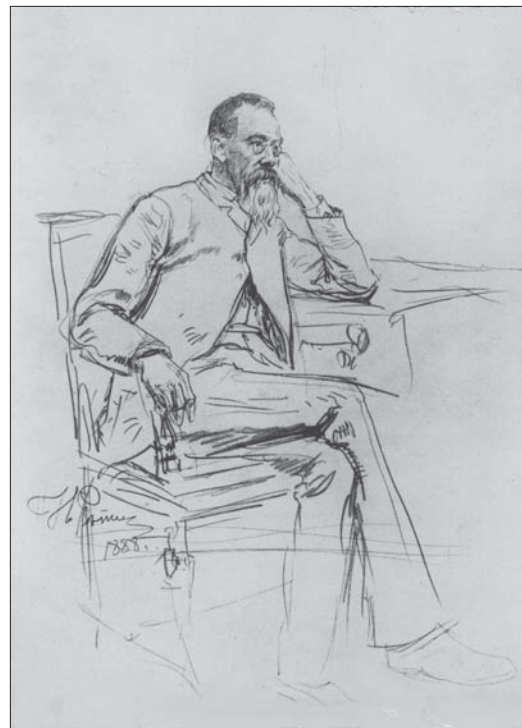
OVERTURE AND SUITES FROM THE OPERAS



Scottish National Orchestra

Neeme Järvi





Drawing by Ilya Repin /AKG Images

Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, 1888

Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

COMPACT DISC ONE

1	Overture to 'May Night'	9:06
Suite from 'The Snow Maiden'		
2	I Beautiful Spring	4:28
3	II Dance of the Birds	3:18
4	III The Procession of Tsar Berendey	1:49
5	IV Dance of the Tumblers	3:40
Suite from 'Mlada'		
6	I Introduction	3:19
7	II Redowa. A Bohemian Dance	3:55
8	III Lithuanian Dance	2:24
9	IV Indian Dance	4:21
10	V Procession of the Nobles	5:18
Suite from 'Christmas Eve'		
11	Christmas Night –	6:15
12	Ballet of the Stars –	5:21
13	Witches' sabbath and ride on the Devil's back –	5:30
14	Polonaise –	5:47
15	Vakula and the slippers	6:23
		TT 71:30



COMPACT DISC TWO

Musical Pictures from 'The Tale of Tsar Saltan'

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Tsar's departure and farewell | 21:29 |
| 2 | II Tsarina adrift at sea in a barrel | 4:57 |
| 3 | III The three wonders | 8:43 |

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|---|---|------|
| 4 | The Flight of the Bumble-bee | 3:22 |
| | Interlude, Act III, from <i>The Tale of Tsar Saltan</i> | |

Suite from 'The Invisible City of Kitezh' 24:33

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 5 | I Prelude. A Hymn to Nature | 4:59 |
| 6 | II Wedding Procession | 3:12 |
| 7 | III Tartar invasion and Battle of Kerzhenets | 4:35 |
| 8 | IV Death of Fevroniya and apotheosis of the Invisible City | 11:47 |

Suite from 'The Golden Cockerel' 27:52
(*Le Coq d'Or*)

- | | | |
|----|--|-------|
| 9 | I Introduction and Dodon's sleep | 10:33 |
| 10 | II King Dodon on the battlefield | 3:46 |
| 11 | III Queen of Shemakha's Dance – King Dodon's Dance | 7:15 |
| 12 | IV Wedding Feast – Death of King Dodon – Finale | 6:17 |

TT 77:47

Scottish National Orchestra

Edwin Paling leader

Neeme Järvi

Rimsky-Korsakov: Overture and Suites from the Operas

Among Russian composers of the same generation as Tchaikovsky, who were prominent in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov is unrivalled in his mastery of orchestral resource. He was the youngest of the group dubbed 'the Mighty Handful' or 'the Five' (they otherwise comprised Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, César Cui and Modest Mussorgsky); in *Sheherazade* and *Spanish Capriccio* he composed two of the most popular orchestral works of the romantic repertoire; he published important textbooks on harmony and orchestration, as well as a fascinating autobiography, and among the pupils much indebted to him were Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

Rimsky-Korsakov was born on 18 March 1844 at Tikhvin, near Novgorod, the son of a retired civil governor in a family also distinguished by its naval connections. Like his elder brother, who became an admiral, he was enrolled at the naval cadet school in St Petersburg, and graduated into the Imperial Russian Navy in 1862. Later that

year he was posted to the clipper *Almaz* on which he sailed on foreign service for almost three years, putting in at Gravesend (with a visit to London), cruising the Atlantic coasts of North and South America, the Cape Verde Islands and the Mediterranean, before returning to Russia in 1865.

The young Nikolai had shown a childish precocity in music, and while at cadet school he came under the spell of Glinka's music, as well as meeting Balakirev, Cui and Mussorgsky. Although he was unschooled in music theory, Balakirev encouraged him to begin a symphony, and on his return from the naval voyage the finished work was performed at a concert in St Petersburg under Balakirev's direction. His shore duties now meant there was more time for music, and Rimsky-Korsakov became increasingly involved in it until he was able to resign his naval commission in 1873.

In spite of his limited knowledge of textbook technique, he had been offered, and accepted, a professorship of practical composition and instrumentation at the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1871. By a



combination of disciplined self-teaching and bluff he managed to keep just ahead of his first pupils, and laid the foundation for his technical expertise. He also began his first opera, *Pskovitianka* (*The Maid of Pskov*, which Sergey Diaghilev renamed 'Ivan the Terrible' when he first brought it to the West), and this was successfully produced at the Maryinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, in 1873.

Later that year, Rimsky-Korsakov having left the Navy, a friendly Minister of Marine created for him the post of Inspector of Naval Bands, and in this capacity he studied exhaustively the construction and technique of orchestral instruments, teaching himself to play a number of them. This led him to formulate the basis for his treatise on orchestration, which was eventually edited for publication only after his death. He succeeded Balakirev as conductor of a concert series at the Free School of Music, but never became more than moderately proficient in this respect; and he edited two collections of Russian folksongs.

From time to time Rimsky-Korsakov was diverted from his own composition by his concern with the unfinished works of others. As early as 1868 he orchestrated part of Cui's opera *William Ratcliffe* and the next year scored Dargomizhsky's unfinished

The Stone Guest after the composer died. He worked with Balakirev in preparing for publication full scores of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, and after Mussorgsky's death he edited in his own way the scores of *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*, versions nowadays looked on with less favour, as is his completion and orchestration of Borodin's *Prince Igor*.

His industriousness in these projects, as well as in his own works, made him the master of an orchestral style distinctively his own. The operas to which he increasingly turned his attention owe more of their musical character to the orchestral colours and textures than to the voices, and his writing of melody, harmony and counterpoint was invariably associated with specific instrumental character, singly or in groups. He used instrumental timbres as a painter uses primary colours, savouring their brilliance and mixing them with an ear to theatrical effect.

The best of Rimsky-Korsakov's talent is probably manifest in the wealth of pictorial suggestion, in terms of timbre and sonority, of ingenious chordal progressions and carefully crafted detail. That talent was, in particular, admirably suited to conveying the sense of fantasy and magic which is an essential ingredient in most of Rimsky-

Korsakov's fifteen operas, as the overture and six orchestral suites recorded here vividly testify.

COMPACT DISC ONE

Overture to 'May Night'

After his work on the collections of Russian folksongs for which he composed piano accompaniments, and on Glinka's operas, Rimsky-Korsakov found his own operatic interest moving in a different direction.

May Night (*Mayskaya noch'*) came from the same collection of Gogol's stories, *Evenings on a Farm at Didanka*, which had already furnished Mussorgsky with *Sorochintsy Fair* and then Tchaikovsky with *Vakula the Smith* (later revised as *Cherevichki*), which Rimsky-Korsakov would himself later use for *Christmas Eve*.

May Night is a fantasy tale of Ukrainian village life, in which the betrothal of Hanna to Levko is fiercely opposed by his father, the Mayor, who has an eye for Hanna himself. After teaching the old man a lesson, Levko wins the favour of Pannochka, Queen of the Russalkas (or water sprites). The reward she offers in return for Levko's identifying the witch responsible for her death as a mortal, is to obtain from the district governor

formal permission for Levko and Hanna to wed, and all ends happily.

The music was quickly composed straight into full score, and the Overture then based on themes from it, mainly Levko's duets with Hanna and Pannochka, and the wedding celebrations of the final scene. Rimsky-Korsakov here abandoned the grand opera manner of his first opera, *The Maid of Pskov*, in favour of the greater translucency of orchestration that he had learned from Glinka, and a style of fantasy comedy in music which became the basis of his most successful theatre works. In the first production of *May Night* at the Maryinsky Theatre, the role of the Mayor was sung by one Fyodor Stravinsky, whose son Igor was born two years later.

Suite from 'The Snow Maiden'

Soon after finishing *May Night*, Rimsky-Korsakov read again Alexander Ostrovsky's fantasy play *The Snow Maiden* (*Snegurochka*), for which Tchaikovsky had composed some incidental music in 1873. Rimsky-Korsakov had not much liked the play before but, attracted to it by a new-found interest in folklore,

suddenly perceived its marvellous poetic beauty. My mild interest in the ancient



Russian customs and heathen pantheism took fire. There seemed no better subject than this, no more poetic figures than Snegurochka, Lel or the Spring Fairy... no better religion and philosophy of life than the worship of the sun-god, Yarilo. In pan-Slavonic mythology the sun-god was associated with carnal love and fecundity, celebrated in spring festivals, often lasting several days, at the time of the first sowing. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote his own libretto, glorifying the life-giving forces of nature, which bring man's happiness, and contrasting the real and the imaginary through the figure of the Snow Maiden, daughter of Frost and Spring, who is irrevocably drawn to the warmth of mortal love only to be destroyed by it.

According to the composer, he spent much time in the summer of 1880, while working on the opera, walking the countryside in a state of heightened excitement, communing with trees and streams, listening to birds and animals, and feeling himself at one with the natural beauty around him:

In obedience to my pantheistic frame of mind I harkened to the voices of folk-creation and Nature, and what they had sung and suggested I made the basis of my creative art.

His music accordingly made use of folk themes and motifs, but he stressed that their working-out was in his own way.

Ostrovsky was delighted by the premiere in St Petersburg:

I could never have imagined anything more appropriate to the subject, expressing with such vitality all the poetry both of the Russian pagan cult and of the heroine, whose heart is at first as cold as snow, but later is filled with unrestrained passion.

The orchestral suite begins with a picture of spring and a 'Dance of the Birds', paints the procession of Tsar Berendey in whose domain the tale is set, and ends with the 'Dance of the Tumblers' from the midsummer festivities of the Berendeyans.

Suite from 'Mlada'

Designated a 'Grand Opera-Ballet', *Mlada* had a curious origin as a composite project in 1871–72 initiated by the Director of the Imperial Theatres at that time, one Gedeonov. He devised a subject for a libretto by Ivan Krylov, and invited Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov each to compose one act, while Léon Minkus was to write the ballet music for choreography by Marius Petipa. The project was abandoned

when Gedeonov lost his post before it could be finished, but nearly twenty years later Rimsky-Korsakov was persuaded to rework the Krylov libretto and compose it alone.

It happened that he had just had his first experience of Wagner when Angelo Neumann's touring 'Richard Wagner Theatre' company visited St Petersburg in 1889 and gave four cycles of the *Ring* operas. Rimsky-Korsakov went to all the rehearsals with his former pupil Alexander Glazunov and was overwhelmed by Wagner's orchestral writing and its effect in the theatre. *Mlada* was composed under this influence, which gave the music a heavier weight of orchestral tone than is found in that of most of the other operas.

A complex subject involves elements of demonology, pagan rites and intrigue in an imaginary kingdom on the shores of the Baltic Sea during the ninth century. Much of the dramatic element, however, is relegated to the background, and even the composer wrote that

the description of old customs and the fantasy element came too prominently to the fore.

An example of the latter is a dream sequence at the court of Cleopatra, from which much of the orchestral suite derives.

This suite was put together in advance of the opera's premiere, and has continued to be heard when the main work is long forgotten. There is a slow Introduction of mood painting, then three dances from the Cleopatra scene: a Redowa, a vigorous and graceful Bohemian dance resembling a mazurka (the score specifies *Tempo di mazurka*); a 'Lithuanian Dance', *Allegro vivo*, and an 'Indian Dance', *Allegretto mosso*. Last is the splendid 'Procession of the Nobles' which opens the opera's second act, the fanfares and drums leading to a march that in its instrumentation includes timpani played chromatically.

Suite from 'Christmas Eve'

The same collection of stories by Gogol which had given Rimsky-Korsakov his *May Night* also provided him with *Christmas Eve* (*Noch' pered Rozhdestvom*). Tchaikovsky had already used it for *Vakula the Smith* (later known as *Cherevichki*), and respect for his colleague made Rimsky-Korsakov hold back until after Tchaikovsky's death in 1893. He faithfully followed the course of Gogol's tale, in which Vakula wins his bride by obtaining for her the Empress's slippers after riding to St Petersburg on the Devil's back, but he added to it more



of the Russian pagan ritual figures and seasonal deities.

Later the composer wrote:

My enthusiasm for myths and my combining them with Gogol's story were, of course, a mistake on my part, but a mistake which offered the opportunity of writing a wealth of interesting music.

The orchestral suite bears him out, starting with an introduction setting the Christmas Eve scene of glittering stars (glockenspiel and violin trills) and snow-covered landscape (murmuring strings). Then follows an astronomical ballet: the stars dancing a mazurka (flute solo), a flight of comets in a round dance or *khoro vod*, and a rain of falling stars in a *csárdás*.

A darkening sky heralds a witches' sabbath while Vakula is seen in flight on the Devil's back, and upon the arrival at the Imperial court the music of the ride changes to a polonaise, transcribed from a choral dance in the opera. Rimsky-Korsakov himself pointed out that his music was often instrumental in conception even when used vocally. In the last 'picture', Vakula returns with the slippers as Christmas Day dawns and church bells are heard. Pictorial brilliance is once more the main quality of the suite, the opera's first performance

having signalled Rimsky-Korsakov's recovery of an instinct for colour which had become somewhat diffused after his discovery of Wagner just before the composition of *Mlada*.

COMPACT DISC TWO

Musical Pictures from 'The Tale of Tsar Saltan'

Among the singers at Moscow's 'Private Russian Opera' (so called because it was financed by a railway magnate) were, in the 1890s, the young Fyodor Chaliapin and Nadezhda Zabela-Vrubel, a lyric coloratura soprano much admired by Rimsky-Korsakov. He composed *The Tsar's Bride* for her in 1898, and also had her in mind for the role of the Swan Princess in his next fantasy opera, *The Tale of Tsar Saltan, of His Son the Famous and Mighty Hero Prince Gvidon Saltanovich, and of the Beautiful Swan Princess*, the libretto by Vladimir Ivanovich Byelsky being based on another story by Pushkin.

The opera's magical adventure concerns the youngest of three sisters, whom Tsar Saltan chooses as his bride. Her wicked older sisters make him think that she has given birth to a monster, and he orders wife and child to be cast adrift in a barrel.

Washed up on a magic island, the grown Prince Gvidon kills a hawk and thereby releases a Swan Princess from an evil spell. With her help the Prince returns to his father's court in the guise of a bee, stings his enemies unmercifully, reunites his father and mother, and himself marries the Swan Princess.

That element of satire which was to be so strongly evident in *The Golden Cockerel* is also apparent in this opera, which shows abundant skill in tone painting with the brightest of instrumental colours. Much of the music for the Swan Princess is more instrumental than vocal in character, and each of the four acts has a lengthy orchestral prelude. Those to Acts I and II form the first two movements of the suite, which the composer assembled and called by the title above.

The mainly martial music of the first movement depicts the Tsar setting off to the wars. The second movement is a vivid sea picture of his wife and son adrift in their barrel, and the 'three wonders' of the third movement refer to a squirrel which cracks golden nuts, to the sea flooding Gvidon's island and leaving behind thirty gold-helmeted warriors, and to the Swan Princess herself. A trumpet fanfare at the start of each movement plays a prominent role in

the last, and the present recording adds to the published suite the famous 'Flight of the Bumble-bee', an interlude from the opera's third act in which Gvidon revenges himself on his wicked aunts.

Suite from 'The Invisible City of Kitezh'

The full title of what in some accounts of the composer is described as the finest of his operas is *Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*, exactly acknowledging the conflation of the two legends that went to its making. These were woven into a semi-religious miracle play as well as a magical fantasy, perhaps reflecting Rimsky-Korsakov's response to the new artistic trends of symbolist poetry and the apocalyptic musical visions of Scriabin; it was to be the last of his operas which he lived to see staged.

Fevroniya of Murom is a strange child of nature and an embodiment of goodness, who is found by Prince Vsevolod. Before they can be married, the city of Little Kitezh falls victim to marauding Tartars. By accepting blame for the city's betrayal (of which she is, in fact, innocent), Fevroniya keeps intact Kitezh the Great, which is opportunely hidden in a cloud. The marauders see only its reflection in a lake, but Vsevolod is killed



in battle with them. His spirit appears to Fevroniya, and she is united with him in the Invisible City, a kind of Sancta Civitas or citadel of the Orthodox faith.

The libretto was, once more, by Byelsky who had previously worked with the composer on *Sadko* and *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, and who was to collaborate with him again on *The Golden Cockerel*. Although Rimsky-Korsakov was not an Orthodox believer, he began to respond to the aesthetic appeal of its doctrine, and this was reflected in a new-found depth of expression in Fevroniya's music. No other operatic profession of faith, or of aspiration, is quite like this in its naive directness, contrasted with barbaric spirit and luminous tone painting.

The orchestral suite comprises the Prelude, subtitled 'A Hymn to Nature', painting a forest scene with Fevroniya sharing the life of the birds and beasts, which is followed by the joyful 'Wedding Procession' in which Prince Vsevolod leads her to Little Kitezh. Then comes a vivid depiction of the Battle of Kerzhenets between the Tartars and the men of Kitezh. Finally, the acceptance by Fevroniya of death in order to reunite with her Prince leads to an apotheosis as they ascend to the Invisible City, a paradise of the spirit.

Suite from 'The Golden Cockerel' (*Le Coq d'Or*)

Rimsky-Korsakov died before *The Golden Cockerel* (*Zolotoy petushok*) could be produced, the official censor having found subversive elements in Pushkin's satire on pompous and ineffectual autocracy, on which Byelsky had based his libretto. It has been suggested that the opera, in the figure of the doddering King Dodon, his fratricidal sons and bumbling courtiers, was thought to reflect adversely on Tsar Nicholas II and the conduct of the Russo-Japanese war at that time. The Golden Cockerel is a present to Dodon from a mysterious Astrologer, a kind of 'early warning' in time of danger, but it also becomes the instrument of Dodon's death.

The orchestral suite was prepared according to Rimsky-Korsakov's intentions by Glazunov and Maximilian Steinberg (the composer's son-in-law). The first movement quickly establishes a fantastic character in the high, muted trumpet that represents the bird's warning call, in a sinuous clarinet theme associated with the Queen of Shemakha (who conquers Dodon's heart and kingdom), and in an off-beat chiming of small bells over shifting harmonies that evoke the Astrologer while Dodon remains asleep, dreaming of the Queen despite the Cockerel's warnings.

The second movement is from the introduction to Act II, depicting a weird, chill battlefield on which the two sons of Dodon have managed to slay each other. He leads a timid army in response to the Cockerel's warning, and discovers only the exotic Queen and her retinue. Dodon is instantly captivated, and the Queen increases her power over him in the seductive dance of the third movement. A change of tempo to *Allegro giocoso* represents the grotesque efforts of Dodon himself to dance, and preparations are made for his return with the Queen as his bride.

They are accompanied by music of barbaric splendour as they return for the wedding feast. This is cut short by the Cockerel's shattering cry, at which the Astrologer reappears to demand the Queen for himself, in return for services rendered. When Dodon refuses and kills the Astrologer, the Cockerel swoops down and with one peck of its golden beak strikes the King dead. The opera has an epilogue in which the Astrologer suggests that perhaps only he and the Queen were 'real', and Rimsky-Korsakov thereby ended his career with an enigmatic question-mark.

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Considered one of Europe's leading symphony orchestras, the **Royal Scottish National Orchestra** (formerly the Scottish National Orchestra) was formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, and was awarded the Royal Patronage in 1991. Many conductors have contributed to its success, including Karl Rankl, Hans Swarowsky, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Bryden Thomson and Neeme Järvi. Currently, Walter Weller is Conductor Emeritus, Alexander Lazarev is Principal Conductor, Marin Alsop is Principal Guest Conductor and Garry Walker is Associate Conductor. The Orchestra gives more than 130 performances each year in Scotland, appears regularly at the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms, and has toured abroad through Austria, Croatia, Slovakia and Spain. It has recorded a varied range of works, including film soundtracks such as *Titanic*, *Superman*, *Star Wars*, *Jaws* and *Vertigo*.

The Orchestra's education programme continues to develop musical talent and appreciation by working with people of all ages and abilities throughout Scotland, and has earned the Orchestra the Royal Philharmonic Society's prestigious Education Award. The Royal Scottish

National Orchestra was recently awarded a Classic FM 'Red F' award for outstanding contribution to classical music in 2002, through its recording, performance, education and outreach work.

Since 2004 **Neeme Järvi** has been Principal Conductor of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. He is also Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Principal Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra since 1982, First Principal Guest Conductor of the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra and Conductor Laureate of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Born in Tallinn, Estonia, he is one of today's busiest conductors, making frequent guest appearances with the foremost orchestras and opera companies of the world, including the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal

Concertgebouw Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, The Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Opéra national de Paris-Bastille and the major orchestras of Scandinavia. He also directs a conductors' master-class in Pärnu, Estonia, for two weeks each July. Neeme Järvi has amassed a distinguished discography of more than 350 discs, and many accolades and awards have been bestowed on him worldwide. He holds honorary degrees from the University of Aberdeen, the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and the University of Michigan, and has been appointed Commander of the Order of the North Star by the King of Sweden.

The Operas of Rimsky-Korsakov

Title	Completed	First performance	
The Maid of Pskov	1872	13 Jan. 1873	P
May Night	1879	21 Jan. 1880	P
The Snow Maiden	1881	10 Feb. 1882	P
Mlada	1890	1 Nov. 1892	P
Christmas Eve	1895	10 Dec. 1895	P
Sadko	1896	7 Jan. 1898	M
Mozart and Salieri	1897	7 Dec. 1898	M
Boyarina Vera Sheloga	1898	27 Dec. 1898	M
The Tsar's Bride	1898	3 Nov. 1899	M
The Tale of Tsar Saltan	1900	3 Nov. 1900	M
Serviliya	1901	14 Oct. 1902	P
Kashchey the Immortal	1902	25 Dec. 1902	M
Pan Voyevoda	1903	16 Oct. 1904	P
The Invisible City of Kitezh	1905	20 Feb. 1907	P
The Golden Cockerel	1907	7 Oct. 1909	M
<i>(Le Coq d'Or)</i>			

Bold type indicates operas represented on this CD set
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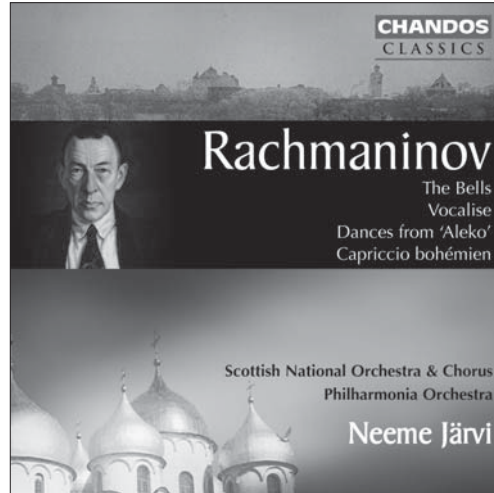
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2-disc set CHAN 10369(2) X

Nikolai Andreyevich
RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844–1908)

OVERTURE AND SUITES FROM THE OPERAS

COMPACT DISC ONE

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|---------|------------------------------|----------|
| 1 | Overture to 'May Night' | 9:06 |
| 2 - 5 | Suite from 'The Snow Maiden' | 13:16 |
| 6 - 10 | Suite from 'Mlada' | 19:18 |
| 11 - 15 | Suite from 'Christmas Eve' | 29:18 |
| | | TT 71:30 |

COMPACT DISC TWO

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| 4 | The Flight of the Bumble-bee | 3:22 |
| Interlude, Act III, from <i>The Tale of Tsar Saltan</i> | | |
| 5 - 8 | Suite from 'The Invisible City of Kitezh' | 24:33 |
| 9 - 12 | Suite from 'The Golden Cockerel' | 27:52 |
| | | TT 77:47 |



Scottish
 National Orchestra
 Edwin Paling leader
 Neeme Järvi

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