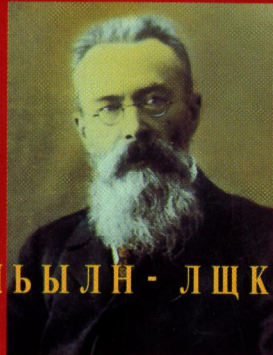


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CHANDOS

7000 SERIES

SYMPHONIES NOS 1-3

PIANO CONCERTO

CAPRICCIO ESPAGNOL

RUSSIAN EASTER OVERTURE

SADKO

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

BERGEN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

GEOFFREY TOZER (*Piano*)

DMITRI KITAJENKO

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

COMPACT DISC ONE

Symphony No. 1, Op. 1* 28:02

in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur

- | | | | |
|---|-----|-----------------------|------|
| 1 | I | Largo assai – Allegro | 8:38 |
| 2 | II | Andante tranquillo | 8:23 |
| 3 | III | Scherzo: Vivace | 5:05 |
| 4 | IV | Allegro assai | 5:44 |

Symphony No. 2 'Antar', Op. 9* 32:30

- | | | | |
|---|-----|------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I | Largo – Allegro giocoso | 13:12 |
| 6 | II | Allegro | 4:54 |
| 7 | III | Allegro risoluto alla marcia | 5:46 |
| 8 | IV | Allegretto vivace | 8:27 |

Capriccio espagnol, Op. 34* 16:18

- | | | | |
|----|-----|------------------------------------|------|
| 9 | I | Alborada. Vivo e strepitoso – | 1:17 |
| 10 | II | Variazioni. Andante con moto – | 4:50 |
| 11 | III | Alborada. Vivo e strepitoso – | 1:20 |
| 12 | IV | Scena e canto gitano. Allegretto – | 5:11 |
| 13 | V | Fandango asturiano. Vivo – Presto | 3:40 |

Lars Erik ter Jung violin solos

TT 77:06

COMPACT DISC TWO

Symphony No. 3, Op. 32* 37:15

in C major • in C-Dur • en ut majeur

(1886 version)

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I | Moderato assai – Allegro | 13:56 |
| 2 | II | Scherzo. Vivo – Trio. Moderato | 7:39 |
| 3 | III | Andante | 9:08 |
| 4 | IV | Allegro con spirito | 6:27 |

Russian Easter Festival, Op. 36† 15:43

Overture

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| 5 | | Lento mistico – Andante lugubre, sempre alla breve | |
|---|--|--|--|

Sadko, Op. 5* 13:12

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 6 | | Moderato assai – Allegro molto – Allegretto –
Poco più vivo – Moderato assai | |
|---|--|---|--|

Piano Concerto, Op. 30† 13:23

in C sharp minor • in cis-Moll • en ut dièse mineur

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| 7 | | Moderato – Allegretto quasi polacca –
Andante mosso – Allegro | |
|---|--|--|--|

TT 79:38

Geoffrey Tozer piano

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra

Lars Erik ter Jung* • Valentin Jouk† leaders

Dmitri Kitajenko

Rimsky-Korsakov: Complete Symphonies etc.

In 1865 the new **Symphony No. 1, Op. 1** in E flat minor of a young naval cadet, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, was hailed by a notable St Petersburg critic as the first true 'Russian' specimen of its kind. The critic was also a composer, César Cui, and – as a fellow-member of the unschooled circle gathered around the brilliant but undisciplined Mily Balakirev that had come to be known (disparagingly) as the 'Mighty Handful' – he had a vested interest in ignoring earlier symphonic achievements by Anton Rubinstein. Rubinstein, director of the St Petersburg Conservatory, was deemed by the group to be its formally-trained arch-enemy. Even at a young age, however, Rimsky-Korsakov was scrupulously fairminded, and had already tried to whittle down Cui's earlier hyperbole in correspondence from his naval post in America, citing the works of Rubinstein and others. In his devastatingly candid autobiography, he was to look back on the whole affair as an unhappy exercise in youthful impudence, set in motion by Balakirev:

...I, who did not know the names of all intervals and chords, to whom harmony meant but the far-famed prohibition of parallel octaves and fifths, who had no idea as to what double counterpoint

was, or the meaning of cadence... I set out to compose a symphony.

Fortunately this naively fashioned Opus 1 begun by a seventeen-year-old is not quite the work we are asked to take seriously. In 1884, thirteen years after having become the Conservatory's best pupil in the guise of its wisest mentor, Rimsky-Korsakov re-cast the symphony for what it was worth – as a repertoire piece for student and amateur orchestras. He made a helpful revision of the orchestration, provided smoother transitions and changed both the keys (the symphony begins now in E minor) and the order of the middle movements. Old-fashioned even for 1865, however, the work could hardly expect a new lease of life when other easy and more nationalistic pieces were beginning to flood the market. It is, if anything, less 'Russian' than the Rubinstein symphonies attacked by Cui. Any spot-the-reference thunder on the listener's part is neatly stolen by the autobiographical composer who unashamedly cites his models. The Glinka works he mentions, *Prince Kholmsky* and *Jota Aragonesa*, may be less familiar to us than the overtures to the operas *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, fleetingly glimpsed in

the outer-movement codas, and Balakirev's *King Lear* is rarer now than performances of the symphony, but Schumann – a popular figure for the 'Mighty Handful' to emulate – sounds very evident to us: his *Manfred Overture* (and perhaps, too, the Fourth Symphony) in the sombre scoring of the first movement; his *Rhenish Symphony* in the briefly good-humoured finale. His example is also an obstacle to the kind of rhythmic vitality we find in the near-contemporary First Symphony of the much older Borodin – in spirit a child of the 1860s rather than the 1840s – and the only evidence of Russian folk idiom is the *Andante tranquillo*. Its melody, infinitely varied along the lines of Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*, is the folksong 'On the Tartar Captivity', and Balakirev sent it to the naval cadet while his ship lay at anchor in England. Thus did Gravesend play host to Rimsky's first truly Russian piece of work.

Despite his lack of formal training, he completed two utterly characteristic works of instinctive genius before going through the academic mill of the Conservatory in 1871. One was the sub-marine fantasy of the tone-poem *Sadko*; the other the **Symphony No. 2, Op. 9 'Antar'**. This might have been a straightforward second symphony – abandoned sketches show an opening clearly modelled on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – but it changed course when Balakirev and

Mussorgsky proposed as subject an Arabian fairy tale, which came from the collection of Senkovsky, St Petersburg University professor and orientalist, who wrote under the penname of 'Baron Brambeus'. Rimsky-Korsakov was clearly bewitched, and no amount of reference-listing in the autobiography can detract from the originality of 'Antar'. According to Rimsky-Korsakov's strict rules, it is not a true symphony at all; when he came to make a second revision in 1897 – of the three versions, the one preferred here – he gave it the label of 'symphonic suite'. His reasons lay in the use of the *idée fixe*, which he claimed was employed far less rigorously than its ancestors in Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* or *Symphonie fantastique*, since 'it has no thematic development whatsoever – only variations and paraphrases': a judgement with which we might beg to differ.

Most of the crucial action is swiftly outlined in the first movement. Antar, world-weary and misanthropic, has fled to the ruins of Palmyra in the desert of Sham; setting the scene are two bassoons, 'borrowed', according to Rimsky, from Wagner's *A Faust Overture*, and a fourth horn, followed by Antar's beautifully disillusioned, all-pervasive motif on violas ('to please Mussorgsky', he wrote). Solo flute arabesques characterise the fairy Gul-Nazar as a gazelle, fiercely pursued by a gigantic bird which Antar strikes with his lance; the bird

flies away and the gazelle vanishes. To a new melody, one of two which Rimsky took from a French collection of Algerian tunes in Borodin's library, Antar is transported to the glittering palace of Gul-Nazar. Gul-Nazar explains that she was the gazelle, and that Antar has saved her from the clutches of the spirit of darkness. In return, he is to enjoy the three great pleasures of life. Antar is then restored to his original setting.

The first two pleasures, vengeance and power, have a movement each. A battlefield seems to swarm with the demons of Mussorgsky's *Night on the Bare Mountain* in Rimsky-Korsakov's arrangement, though powerful transformations of Antar's theme dominate; in the regal cortege that follows, the second theme is another of the Algerian melodies. The last of Antar's pleasures is granted by the fairy herself, after which he forthwith expires. For the love-scene of the finale, Rimsky gratefully took a third Arab melody from another Russian composer, Dargomyzhsky, retaining Dargomyzhsky's original orchestration (cor anglais and two bassoons) in the first statement, though he soon submits it to ever more sensuous orchestral colours before Antar's blissful end.

Tchaikovsky wondered, in 1877, whether Rimsky-Korsakov would emerge from the 'cult of musical technique' which was his Conservatory reaction to Balakirev's *laissez-*

faire. 'It is clear that he is now undergoing a crisis, but what will come out of this crisis is difficult to predict. He will either emerge a great master, or will be for ever bogged down in contrapuntal trifles.' Yet he did, and spectacularly on the orchestral front, by producing in the single season of 1887–88 the three concert works most familiar to audiences today – *Capriccio espagnol*, *Scheherazade* and the *Russian Easter Festival*. In his autobiography, the composer looked back on the *Capriccio espagnol*, Op. 34 as a 'brilliant composition for the orchestra' rather than 'a magnificently orchestrated piece'. By then he had practical knowledge of most of the instruments he was writing for. In the early years of his Conservatory post, he had acquired several woodwind and brass instruments, consulting Borodin on their usage; and in 1885, recently appointed tutor at the Court Chapel, he undertook further instrumental studies alongside the precocious Alexander Glazunov. The violin instructor at the Chapel, Krasnokutsky, explained the intricacies of violin technique to him, and in gratitude he planned a Spanish Fantasy for violin and orchestra.

The violin still plays a central part in the *Capriccio espagnol*, with Rimsky's new-found enthusiasm for the clarinet running a close second. But in the end all the important instruments of the orchestra, collectively and

individually, found a place. The melodies come from the composer's copy of a Spanish song-and-dance collection. The glittering 'Alborada', or shepherd's dawn song, and the 'Danza Prima' which is the subject of the second movement's variations, both hail from Asturias, though the dreamy presentation of four horns and the passionate development of the second tune remove any hint of its ribald origins. For the 'Scena e canto gitano', Rimsky moves south to Andalucia, giving soloists a chance to shine in five cadenzas before the ferocious gypsy dance can hold sway. Castanets only appear on the scene as the action tumbles headlong into a *Fandango asturiano*, with further guitar-like effects that Ravel must have noted, and ever more intoxicated reprises of the other dances before the giddy final Presto.

The *Symphony No. 3*, Op. 32, which Tchaikovsky heard at the one and only performance of its original version in 1875 and fairly criticised for its lack of spontaneity, was revised in 1886, Rimsky-Korsakov pruning excessive counterpoint and brightening the orchestration where necessary. Short of providing new material altogether, he could do little to change the foursquare cut of the last two movements: there is some charm in the gracenoted, old-fashioned pendant to the main theme of the *Andante*, but the melody itself is stiff-jointed and not much improved by

its Schumannesque transformation in the finale. This, too, could certainly do with some of the rhythmic vitality which distinguishes Borodin's first attempt at a symphony (and Borodin knew it when he told Rimsky, according to the latter's candid autobiography, that 'in it [the Third Symphony] I appeared to him as a professor who had put on spectacles and composed *eine grosse Sinfonie in C* as befitted my rank').

The first movement and Scherzo are, however, a different matter, even if Tchaikovsky was overstating the case when he told Rimsky he was 'in raptures' over them. The transformation of a leisurely introductory theme into something livelier in the main *Allegro* was a Russian precedent set by Rimsky himself in the first symphony he had written as a seventeen-year-old naval cadet, and although – again – the metamorphosis is not as ingenious as Borodin's in his First Symphony, both this melody and the more typically Russian folk-style second subject introduced by the clarinet provide attractive company in a dutiful development. Most striking is Rimsky's return to a more reflective mood to close the movement in an unexpected C minor. The chattering outer sections of the Scherzo are in 5/4, the irregular metre beloved of Russian folksongs: supposedly it gave enough trouble to musicians required to deal with the 'limping

waltz' of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony in 1893, so it must have seemed especially daring (and problematic) some twenty years earlier. The chromatically restless Trio, sketched on honeymoon in Italy, is the nearest thing to a familiar Rimskyian exoticism in the symphony but the return of the Scherzo proper brings the greatest surprises – a fleeting glimpse of the 'supernatural' whole-tone scale (an effect to match the Mussorgskyan bell chords that suddenly surface in the *Andante*'s development) and fresh-faced counterpoint as winsome as anything in early Tchaikovsky.

Rimsky succinctly summed up his aims for the *Russian Easter Festival*, Op. 36 in his autobiography: to reproduce 'the legendary and heathen side of the holiday, this transition from the gloomy and mysterious evening of Passion Saturday to the unbridled pagan-religious merry-making on the morn of Easter Sunday'.

Lugubrious unison woodwind and solo cello introduce respectively two ecclesiastical themes, 'Let God arise!' and 'An angel wailed', in an introduction darkly representative of Isaiah's prophecy; the holy sepulchre shines with light as various cadenzas on solo violin and flute foreshadow the theme of 'Christ is arisen' which finally peals out against the bellringing of Easter Sunday. The livelier

music, minor and major, celebrates the merry-making which is the flipside of the Russian Easter and, for all his ritual repetitions of the action, Rimsky somehow manages to save his most brilliant orchestration until the last moment – a clamour of bells and free-flowing chants scored as only he knows how. Without such textbook examples of brilliant orchestration, the garish sonorities of Stravinsky and Prokofiev among the next generation of composers would never have been possible.

Rimsky-Korsakov had hit, 'as by miracle', upon the right orchestral colours in *Sadko*, Op. 5, his tale of the Novgorod merchant and minstrel Sadko summoned by the Sea-King to play for his underwater subjects. The action, outlined by the critic and friend of the 'Mighty Handful' Vladimir Stassov, does indeed pass with astonishing rapidity; for influences behind each of the short sections, we need to look no further than the autobiography. The opening sea-swell, Rimsky wrote, was based on the harmonies and modulations of Liszt's tone poem *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne*; Sadko's rapid plunge overboard and downward descent to the Sea-King's domain pay tribute to the abduction of the heroine in Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. Yet although he claimed Balakirev and Dargomyzhsky as his guides for the gently supernatural feast-melody, Rimsky's own characteristic inspiration

is well to the fore, and the main theme of Sadko's minstrels, prefaced by syncopated Polovtsian style rhythms, is the individual crowning glory. It leads to a bacchanalia before St Nicholas quells the waves and Sadko makes a contemplative return to Novgorod.

Balakirev, and his circle's reverence for the music of Franz Liszt, were back in favour when Rimsky came to write a short, scintillating *Piano Concerto*, Op. 30 in 1883. Like the melody which he had taken for his first truly Russian movement, the *Andante* of his First Symphony, the theme which provides all the material for the Concerto is a folksong suggested by Balakirev – 'Let's gather, lads, at my place' – and it certainly sounds Russian enough in its twofold presentations by bassoon and clarinet. But even the soloist's suitably transcendental elaborations in this introduction hardly prepare us for the Lisztian variations that follow – pure pastiche were it not for the skill involved in the transformations. Rimsky was honest enough about the debt in his autobiography:

In all ways the concerto proved a chip from Liszt's concertos. It must be said that it sounded

beautiful and proved entirely satisfactory in the sense of piano technique and style; this greatly astonished Balakirev, who found my concerto to his liking. He had by no means expected that I, who was not a pianist, should know how to compose anything entirely pianistic.

Certainly the range required of the soloist is authentically Lisztian, from the thundering double octaves which introduce the *Allegretto quasi polacca* to the exquisite undulations of the *Andante mosso*, where the left-hand accompaniment turns out to be a variation on the first half of the folksong and the right-hand a variation on the second half. But self-conscious virtuosity is kept to a minimum, never more so than in the brief, brilliant final *Allegro* after the pianist's singing cadenza. Inevitably, there are pre-echoes of another concerto masterpiece written over sixty years later: the first five notes of the folksong and the Paganini caprice which Rachmaninov took as the basis of his famous *Rhapsody* are the same. It is only a pity that Rimsky's *jeu d'esprit* enjoys nothing like the same popularity.

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CHANDOS

CHANDOS DIGITAL 2-disc set CHAN 7029(2)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

COMPACT DISC ONE

1 - 4	Symphony No. 1, Op. 1*	28:02
5 - 8	Symphony No. 2 'Antar', Op. 9*	32:30
9 - 13	Capriccio espagnol, Op. 34*	16:18
	TT	77:06

COMPACT DISC TWO

1 - 4	Symphony No. 3, Op. 32*	37:15
5	Russian Easter Overture, Op. 36†	15:43
6	Sadko, Op. 5*	13:12
7	Piano Concerto, Op. 30†	13:23
	TT	79:38

(DDD)

Geoffrey Tozer piano

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra

Lars Erik ter Jung* · Valentin Jouk† leaders

Dmitri Kitajenko



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