

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

Sun. October 22, The 897th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Mon. October 23, The 898th Suntory Hall Subscription Concert

Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)

Kamarinskaya

Waltz-fantasia

Krakoviak from "A Life for the Czar (Ivan Susanin)"

Glinka is considered by many to be the father of Russian music given that his operas and orchestral works were based on Russian themes and ultimately became models for other compatriots to incorporate Russian folk music and folk tales into their works. Tchaikovsky even commented that "all of the Russian school of symphonic works is contained in Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*, just as the whole oak tree is in an acorn."

Kamarinskaya incorporates two folks songs which Glinka had encountered separately -- one a wedding song and the other a traditional dance tune. The composer himself described how he came to combine the two for this work: "By chance I discovered a relationship with the wedding song 'From behind the mountains', which I had heard in the country, and the folk dance tune '*Kamarinskaya*', which everyone knows. And suddenly my fantasy ran high; instead of a piano piece I wrote an orchestral piece called 'Wedding Tune and Dance Tune'."

The wedding song called *Izza-gor* opens the work as a kind of introduction which is then repeated and varied before leading into the dance tune. These two tunes alternate throughout the short work, with the dance tune repeated many dozens of times, each time a new variation, highlighting Glinka's creative abilities with orchestral timbres in various combinations and with shifting harmonies throughout.

Glinka's Valse-Fantaisie (*Waltz-fantasia*) was originally composed as a work for piano in 1839. The composer would create an orchestral arrangement for the work in 1845 which was premiered in Paris on a concert of his works conducted by Hector Berlioz, who later commented on this 'scherzo in waltz form' as having been 'warmly applauded by the glittering audience'. A revision was composed in 1856, with additional melodic lines inserted. With its alternating melancholic and passionate phrases, some scholars believe the work to be a reflection of the turmoil going on in Glinka's personal life at the time. Some even referred to the work as the 'Melancholy Waltz'.

Glinka's *Krakoviak* was composed for his opera "A Life for the Czar", which is based on the story of a Russian peasant, Ivan Susanin, who sacrificed himself to protect the Czar. In the Second Act a formal ball is held for the Polish forces who are confident of winning against

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the Russians, so the composer included a lively folk dance from the Krakow region in Poland. The opera premiered in November of 1836 at the Bolshoi Theatre in St. Petersburg. It came to be known as the first Russian opera to be acknowledged outside of its home country, and is said to have influenced future Russian operatic composers, including Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Borodin with its nationalistic themes.

Kamarinskaya

Work composed: 1848 **World premiere:** March 15, 1850, St. Petersburg (Julian calendar)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, timpani, strings

Waltz-fantasia

Work composed: 1845 (orchestra ver. 1845, revision 1856) **World premiere:** unknown

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, timpani, percussion (triangle), strings

Krakoviak from "A Life for the Czar (Ivan Susanin)"

Work composed: 1835-1836 **World premiere:** November 27, 1836, St. Petersburg (entire performance)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, strings

Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)

Symphonic Poem "In the Steppes of Central Asia"

Borodin's main vocation in life was dedicated to research in the sciences. He had studied medicine in school with continuing studies in both chemistry and pathology, becoming a professor at the St. Petersburg Medico-Surgical Academy at the age of 31. Consequently, his work as a composer was a side-job in many ways, and he himself commented: "I do not seek recognition as a composer for I am somehow ashamed of admitting to my compositional activities.... For me this is a relaxation, a pastime, an indulgence that distracts me from my principal work."

In 1880, in response to a commission (as one of twelve composers) to honor the 25th anniversary of Czar Alexander II's reign, Borodin began work on a piece meant to depict a caravan passing through the desert of Turkestan which the Czar had conquered. Although the special event honoring the Czar never took place, Borodin's symphonic poem would become one of his most well-known works since its premiere in April 1880, conducted by none other than Rimsky-Korsakov. Other composers who were impressed with the work would also promote the performance of this symphonic poem, especially Franz Liszt to whom Borodin would dedicate the work. Borodin included his own description at the front of the printed score:

"Out of the silence of the sandy steppes of Central Asia come the sounds of a peaceful Russian song. From a distance, one can also hear the melancholy strains of Oriental melodies and the approaching sounds of horses and camels. A caravan, escorted by Russian soldiers, crosses the immense desert, pursuing its way safely under the protection of the Russian army. The caravan continuously moves forward. The sounds of the Russians and the Asiatic melodies merge into a common harmony, fading as the caravan disappears off in the distance."

Opening with a high single extended intonation, the flutes and violin harmonics suggest the wide expanse of the open desert, and lead into the clarinet solo playing a Russian folk song, which is then repeated by the horn. Next can be heard the plodding footsteps of the camels played by the strings with a pizzicato accompaniment, which leads into the second main theme on the English horn with an Oriental flair. There is a general building of the dynamics as the caravan approaches closer which then leads to a return to the Russian folk melody in C major at a strong fortissimo level.

As the camel train passes by, both themes are intertwined in an impressive musical counterpoint for which Borodin would be praised by fellow composers. Borodin described the moment of both themes being woven together as a depiction of "the peace-loving songs of the conquered and their conquerors joined in harmony." Following this climactic point of the work, both themes begin to fade as they go their separate ways on their respective journeys, leaving the single high E intonation once again representative of the expansive desert left in the wake of the travelers.

Work composed: 1880 **World premiere:** April 8, 1880, St. Petersburg, conducted by Rimsky-Korsakov
Instrumentation: 2 flutes, oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, strings

Anatoly Lyadov (1855-1914)

Symphonic Poem "The Enchanted Lake", op. 62

Symphonic Poem "Kikimora", op. 63

Symphonic Poem "Baba-Yaga", op. 56

Known for his musical miniatures, Lyadov lived much of his life in the shadow of Rimsky-Korsakov. It has been said that this, together with his tendency to procrastinate, as well as his own self-criticism and perfectionist attitude, limited the number and length of the works he produced. Perhaps his most well known procrastination involved losing the commissioning for the *Firebird*, for which Stravinsky later became so famous.

In spite of these difficulties in his life, Lyadov's ability to develop orchestral colourings

and to paint musical pictures based on traditional Russian folk tales, are unmistakable even in these shorter musical forms. In fact, the length of these so-called miniatures is similar to that of many symphonic movements, so one could argue that term, and audiences may appreciate them all the more given that perspective.

The Enchanted Lake is one of three of these works that are based on Russian fables, the other two being *Baba-Yaga* and *Kikimora*. The music for two of these three, *Kikimora* and *The Enchanted Lake*, were originally written for an operatic project, *Zoryushka*, which was never completed. In this work, Lyadov beautifully paints a picture of the stillness of a lake with underlying mystical powers, an evocation that often appears in various Russian folk stories.

The composer himself referred to *The Enchanted Lake* as a ‘fable-tableau’ stating: “How picturesque it is, how clear, the multitude of stars hovering over the mysteries of the deep. But above all no entreaties and no complaints; only nature – cold, malevolent, and fantastic as a fairy tale. One has to feel the change of colors... the incessantly changeable stillness and seeming immobility.” At first serene, then alluding to the mystical atmosphere, there is a shifting between major and minor tonalities amid varying harmonies, with the harp and celesta together with light flute trills adding to the feeling of enchantment and tranquility.

Kikimora is described in the preface of the score in order to provide the appropriate setting for the musical scene:

"Kikimora, was raised by a sorcerer who lived on a rocky mountain. Each day a wise old cat told her fantastic tales of ancient times and faraway places. After seven years she was fully grown, her head as small as a thimble, her body as thin as a straw. During the daylight hours she is noisy; from dusk to midnight she whistles and hisses, and from midnight to dawn she works at spinning hemp, reeling yarn and fitting her silken dress—all the while plotting evil against mortals."

Opening with a slow introduction in the low strings, the English horn breaks through with a melancholy melody. The ominous slow introduction is revisited before the celesta leads into a more magical section. The tempo shifts to presto suggesting *Kikimora* is flitting around creating a commotion. After an accelerando and a crescendo with full orchestra playing, there is a sudden shift, as if *Kikimora* has had enough for the time being and disappears with one last playful tune from the woodwinds and piccolo.

Baba-Yaga may be a familiar figure to some given that Mussorgsky had previously depicted this folkloric creature in his 'Pictures at an Exhibition' under the title "The Hut on Hen's Legs." Lyadov's orchestral 'picture from a Russian folk-tale' was composed prior to Ravel's orchestral transcription of Mussorgsky's piece. Here the witch-like creature is depicted in a

fantastical scherzo flying around in a mortar and pestle whipping up the winds in and around the trees. And although she was known to show some kindnesses, she was more prevalently known for causing trouble — especially in her appetite for eating children. As in *Kikimora*, the music accelerates to a climax with the full orchestra before *Baba-Yaga* makes her way back into the forest, the strings winding down and the woodwinds depicting her sneaking back to her hut.

Symphonic Poem "The Enchanted Lake", op. 62

Work composed: 1908 **World premiere:** February, 1909, St. Petersburg

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, timpani, percussion (bass drum), harp, celesta, strings

Symphonic Poem "Kikimora", op. 63

Work composed: 1909 **World premiere:** December 12, 1909, St. Petersburg

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, percussion (xylophone), celesta, strings

Symphonic Poem "Baba-Yaga", op. 56

Work composed: 1904 **World premiere:** March 18, 1904, St. Petersburg

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, xylophone), strings

Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Suite from "The Snow Maiden"

Suite from "The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya"

Suite from "The Tale of Tsar Saltan"

Rimsky-Korsakov's brilliant orchestration techniques, as well as his ability to orchestrate for a specific ‘programme’ can be heard in these suites. His expansion of the use of timbres, textures and ranges were laid out in his "Principles of Orchestration", which became a standard textbook for music schools teaching students the art of composing and orchestration. Rimsky-Korsakov's 15 operas, though rarely performed outside of his home country, have found a much wider audience in the form of these suites, especially to enjoy his mastery at orchestration.

'*The Snow Maiden*' Suite was described by the composer to be his "best work, not only that but perhaps, on the whole, the best of all contemporary operas." The libretto was based on an 1873 play by Alexander Ostrovsky, which as in many Russian folk tales, have characters that overlap between the supernatural and natural realms. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera was composed in four acts and premiered in 1882 in St. Petersburg. The Suite opens with the

Introduction setting the late-night wintry scene with the full moon reflecting off of the snowy lands. And though it is actually spring, the birth of the Snow Maiden fifteen years earlier has brought an unending winter to the region. The shivering sounds of the violins are contrasted with the warmer intonations in the brass and low strings, representative of Grandfather Frost and Bonny Spring whose union brought about the birth of the Snow Maiden. As the story goes, if she is exposed to heat in the form of the sun or in a love relationship, she will melt and die, which explains the on-going winter scene.

The second section '*Dance of the Birds*' features the various bird-songs led by Bonny Spring, who encourages them to warm themselves by singing and dancing around. Included in the score are cranes, geese, ducks, rooks, magpies, starlings and skylarks. The third section, '*Cortege*' (or Procession of the Tsar), presents a stately march as the villagers assemble to hear the decree from the Tsar. The final section 'Dance of the Tumblers' is a celebration of the spring as the Tsar requests one more dance as part of the festivities.

The Suite from '*The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*' was based on a libretto by Vladimir Bel'sky. The legend's beautiful maiden Fevroniya meets the young Prince Vsevolod (the son of the ruler of Kitezh) when he gets lost in the forest. They fall in love and marry but their ceremony is disrupted when she is abducted by the invading Tartars. She then casts a spell over the city of Kitezh causing it to become invisible. Though both end up dying, their souls are united in what has become the mystical city.

Kitezh is sometimes referred to as the Russian *Parsifal* with strong Wagnerian influences. The ostinato from the Good Friday Spell found in *Parsifal* can be heard, for example. And the opening Introduction has been compared to the Forest Murmurs from Wagner's *Siegfried*. 'In the Praise of Wilderness' sets the magical forest scene complete with bird calls. The second section depicts the wedding procession, while the third musical picture depicts the battle scene. The final section illustrates the transfiguration of Fevroniya's soul as she reunites with her Prince in the now Invisible City. Here the 'forest murmurs' of the opening section return along with mystical sounds of the vibraphone and celesta, highlighting an oboe solo as the music builds to a grand close.

'*The Tale of Tsar Sultan*' is based on a poem by Alexander Pushkin and also includes elements of both the real and fantasy worlds as part of a four-act opera. The story features Prince Gvidon who becomes separated from his father, the Tsar, landing on an island full of magical objects and creatures, one of whom is an enchanted swan that eventually marries the Prince after being transformed into a princess. The orchestral preludes to three of the acts were compiled into a suite which Rimsky-Korsakov called 'The Little Pictures for the Tale of Tsar Sultan'. The Introduction to Act 1, 'Tsar's farewell and departure' is used for the first movement of the suite, while the Introduction to Act 2, 'Tsarina in a barrel at sea' acts as the second movement of the suite. The Introduction to Scene 2 of Act 4, 'The Three Wonders' is

used for the third movement of the suite. Often included in performances of the suite is one of Rimsky-Korsakov's most well-known melodies 'The Flight of the Bumblebee' (from a scene in Act 3 where the Prince is transformed into a bumble bee), as well as a closing 'March'.

Suite from "The Snow Maiden"

Work composed: 1880-1881 / Revision: 1895

World premiere: January 29, 1882, St. Petersburg (entire stage) / Revision: 1898

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes (2nd doubling on English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, triangle, cymbals, tam-tam), strings

Suite from "The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya"

Work composed: 1902-1904 **World premiere:** February 7, 1907, St. Petersburg (entire stage)

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling on bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, triangle, cymbals, sleigh bells, chimes, glockenspiel), 2 harps, celesta, strings

Suite from "The Tale of Tsar Saltan"

Work composed: 1899-1900 **World premiere:** October 21, 1900, Moscow (entire stage)

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling on bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, triangle, cymbals, glockenspiel, xylophone), harp, celesta, strings

April L. Racana / Please refer page 33 for the writer's profile.

Next Subscription Concert in December

December 5, Tue 19:00 at Suntory Hall

The 899th Suntory Hall Subscription Concert

Conductor: Sho Itoh
(International Conducting Competition
NINO ROTA 2016 Winner)

Piano: Michie Koyama*

Kabalevsky: "Colas Breugnon" Overture

Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1*

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4



Sho Itoh
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Michie Koyama
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