



# GLINKA

## *Overture to Ruslan and Lyudmila*

**Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka** (1804-1857) was the first Russian composer to gain wide recognition within his own country, and is often regarded as the fountainhead of Russian classical music. The beginning of a new direction in the development of music in Russia, Glinka's compositions were an important influence on future Russian composers, notably the members of The Five, who took Glinka's lead and produced a distinctive Russian style of music. In Glinka's operas, different historical events were often used in the music, but for the first time they were shown in a realistic veracity. Born in the village of Novospasskoye, in the Russian Empire, Glinka's wealthy father had retired as an army captain, and the family had a strong tradition of loyalty and service to the tsars, while several members of his extended family had also developed a lively interest in culture. Prior to his father's death Glinka travelled extensively; at the urging of his physician he visited Milan, Vienna, and Berlin; while in Milan he realized that his life's calling was return to Russia, write in a Russian manner, and do for Russian music what Donizetti and Bellini had done for Italian music.

***Ruslan and Lyudmila*** is an opera in five acts composed between 1837 and 1842. The opera is based on the 1820 poem of the same name by Alexander Pushkin, although Pushkin's death in the famous duel prevented him from writing the libretto himself as planned. A story of heroic love, Lyudmila is kidnapped by the sorcerer Chernomor on her wedding day. Ruslan her soon-to-be husband strives to rescue her, resisting Chernomor's temptations and ultimately saving his beloved. As with *A Life for the Tsar*, *Ruslan* employs some aspects of Russian folk music; it is also noted for imaginative use of dissonance, chromaticism, and Eastern elements. Of particular consequence is the use of the whole tone scale for the first time in Russian music. It is particularly associated thematically with Chernomor and, as a result, became so popular among Russian composers for suggesting evil or ominous personages or situations, that even today Russian musicians refer to the whole tone scale as *gamma Chernomora*, or "Chernomor's scale". Along with its counterpart *A Life for the Tsar*, this second opera by Glinka confirmed a Russian national operatic foundation that was to be built upon by the next generation of Russian composers. In particular, *Ruslan* served as the model for Russian operatic fairy tales, particularly those of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.