



Nikolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Capriccio Espagnol

Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (18 March 1844 – 21 June 1908) was a Russian composer, and a member of the group of Russian composers known as The Mighty Five (along with Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Alexander Borodin). Before Rimsky-Korsakov began studying music, he had joined the naval academy in St. Petersburg at 12 as a result of his family's involvement in the Russian navy. Under the guidance of Balakirev, he would begin writing his first symphony at 18, and finished the first 3 movements while on board a nearly 3-year long cruise around Europe and the Americas. Upon returning to Russia, Rimsky-Korsakov completed and premiered his first symphony, as well as his *Fantasy on Serbian Themes* (1867), which won him significant public acclaim. Due to his reputation, he began teaching composition at St. Petersburg Conservatory at 27, despite never studying theory systematically. He would embark on a rigorous 3-year education, trying to "catch up to his students." As his popularity grew, Rimsky-Korsakov befriended Russian music patron and industrialist, Mitrofan Belyayev, in 1882. Belyayev would look to Rimsky-Korsakov for direction regarding his publishing enterprise, and Rimsky-Korsakov – alongside Alexander Glazunov and Anatoly Lyadov – would become the head of this project, which was centrally involved with the promotion of certain Russian music and composers. Unfortunately, the stresses of the Russian revolution in 1905 made his chronic angina more severe, and he would pass away shortly after in 1908. Despite the popularity of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas in Russia today – as well as his orchestral pieces "The Flight of the Bumblebee" and "Song of India" – his influence as a teacher is perhaps more profound. Throughout his career, Rimsky-Korsakov taught two generations of Russian composers, including Igor Stravinsky, while his *Practical Manual of Harmony* (1884) and *Fundamentals of Orchestration* (posthumous, 1913) are still used as basic musical textbooks worldwide.

Capriccio Espagnol, Op. 34 (1887) is a 5-movement orchestral suite based on Spanish folk melodies. Rimsky-Korsakov originally intended to write the work for a solo violin with orchestra, but settled on a pure orchestral work to convey the lively melodies. Ever the critic, Rimsky-Korsakov responded to the public's praise of his orchestration – what he was famous for – by saying: "The opinion formed by both critics and the public, that the *Capriccio* is a *magnificently orchestrated piece* — is wrong. The *Capriccio* is a brilliant composition for the orchestra."

The first movement (*Vivo e Strepitoso*) is an **Alborada**, a traditional Asturian morning love song (as opposed to a serenade; an evening love song). Set as a festive dance, this music perhaps portrays the brilliant rise of the morning sun. Traditionally, the melody of an *Alborada* is played by a bagpipe or oboe, but Rimsky-Korsakov opted to use a fluttering clarinet, while the violins mimic the quick picking of a single note on a classical guitar and the castanets add a distinctly Spanish flair.

The second movement (*Andante con moto*) is a **Variazioni**, with the lyrical theme communicated initially by the French horns. The 5 variations continue without pause, circling through different instruments, levels of intensity, as well as both major and minor modes.

The third movement (*Vivo e strepitoso*) cuts of the previous movement abruptly, returning to the **Alborada** that started the work. This movement is nearly identical to the first, except for the new key and slightly different instrumentation, as well as the first "grand ending" of the entire work.

The fourth movement (*Allegretto*) is a **Scena e canto Gitano (Scene and Gypsy Song)**, which opens with 5 cadenzas, rotating between the horns and trumpets, then solo violin, flute, clarinet, and lastly, harp. The gypsy song follows – a boisterous Spanish dance in 3 – and grows in drama and intensity, building to a whirling climax. In parts of this movement, the strings are asked to imitate guitars (marked as "quasi gitara").

The final movement (*Vivace assai – Presto*) is a **Fandango asturiano**, another energetic Asturian dance. This movement is marked by the heavy use of castanets and the series of colorful solo, finally building to a furious coda based on the **Alborada** theme which elevates the piece into its grand finale.