



# Nikolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

## *Scheherazade*

**Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov** was a Russian composer, a member of the group of composers known as The Five. He was a master of orchestration. His best-known orchestral compositions—*Capriccio Espagnol*, the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*, and the symphonic suite *Scheherazade*—are staples of the classical music repertoire, along with suites and excerpts from some of his 15 operas. *Scheherazade* is an example of his frequent use of fairy-tale and folk subjects. Rimsky-Korsakov believed in developing a nationalistic style of classical music, as did his fellow composer Mily Balakirev and the critic Vladimir Stasov. This style employed Russian folk song and lore along with exotic harmonic, melodic and rhythmic elements in a practice known as musical orientalism, and eschewed traditional Western compositional methods. Rimsky-Korsakov appreciated Western musical techniques after he became a professor of musical composition, harmony, and orchestration at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in 1871. He undertook a rigorous three-year program of self-education and became a master of Western methods, incorporating them alongside the influences of Mikhail Glinka and fellow members of The Five. Rimsky-Korsakov's techniques of composition and orchestration were further enriched by his exposure to the works of Richard Wagner. For much of his life, Rimsky-Korsakov combined his composition and teaching with a career in the Russian armed forces—first as an officer in the Imperial Russian Navy, then as the civilian Inspector of Naval Bands. He wrote that he developed a passion for the ocean in childhood from reading books and hearing of his older brother's exploits in the navy. This love of the sea may have influenced him to write two of his best-known orchestral works, the musical tableau *Sadko* (not to be confused with his later opera of the same name) and *Scheherazade*. As Inspector of Naval Bands, Rimsky-Korsakov expanded his knowledge of woodwind and brass playing, which enhanced his abilities in orchestration. He passed this knowledge to his students, and also posthumously through a textbook on orchestration that was completed by his son-in-law Maximilian Steinberg. Rimsky-Korsakov left a considerable body of original Russian nationalist compositions. He prepared works by The Five for performance, which brought them into the active classical repertoire (although there is controversy over his editing of the works of Modest Mussorgsky), and shaped a generation of younger composers and musicians during his decades as an educator. Rimsky-Korsakov is therefore considered "the main architect" of what the classical-music public considers the "Russian style". His influence on younger composers was especially important, as he served as a transitional figure between the autodidacticism exemplified by Glinka and The Five, and professionally trained composers, who became the norm in Russia by the closing years of the 19th century. While Rimsky-Korsakov's style was based on those of Glinka, Balakirev, Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt and, for a brief period, Wagner, he "transmitted this style directly to two generations of Russian composers" and influenced non-Russian composers including Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy, Paul Dukas, and Ottorino Respighi.

***Scheherazade***, also commonly ***Sheherazade***, Op. 35, is a symphonic suite composed by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov in 1888 and based on *One Thousand and One Nights* (also known as *The Arabian Nights*). This orchestral work combines two features typical of Russian music in general and of Rimsky-Korsakov in particular: dazzling, colorful orchestration and an interest in the East, which figured greatly in the history of Imperial Russia, as well as orientalism in general. The name "Scheherazade" refers to the main character Scheherazade of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. It is one of Rimsky-Korsakov's most popular works. During the winter of 1887, as he worked to complete Alexander Borodin's unfinished opera *Prince Igor*, Rimsky-Korsakov decided to compose an orchestral piece based on pictures from *One Thousand and One Nights* as well as separate and unconnected episodes. After formulating musical sketches of his proposed work, he moved with his family to the Glinki-Mavriny dacha, in Nyezhgovitsy along the Cherementets Lake (near present-day Luga, in Leningrad Oblast). The dacha where he stayed was destroyed by the Germans during World War II. During the summer, he finished *Scheherazade* and the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*. Notes in his autograph orchestral score show that the former was completed between June 4 and August 7, 1888. *Scheherazade* consisted of a symphonic suite of four related movements that form a unified theme. It was written to produce a sensation of fantasy narratives from the Orient. Initially, Rimsky-Korsakov intended to name the respective movements in *Scheherazade* "Prelude, Ballade, Adagio and Finale". However, after weighing the opinions of Anatoly Lyadov and others, as well as his own aversion to a too-definitive program, he settled upon thematic headings, based upon the tales from *The Arabian Nights*.