

The Complete Works of

**NICOLAI
RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

1844-1908

SCHEHEREZADE

FOR PIANO DUET

Op. 35

K 5295

FOREWORD

"Sheherezade," a Symphonic Suite, composition No. 35, inspired by the *One Thousand and One Nights*, was written in 1888. The history of the conception and composition of "Sheherazade," with its poetic storyline and an analysis of the work, is provided by Rimsky-Korsakov in *The Chronicle of my Musical Life*. "In the middle of winter, in the midst of work on 'Prince Igor' and others, the idea of an orchestral piece, taken from some episodes of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, sprung up in me. ...During the summer of 1888 in Nezhgovitse, I finished 'Sheherezade' (in four parts) and 'Easter Sunday,' an overture on themes from the daily services. Furthermore, I created a muzurka for violin with small orchestra on Polish themes..."

"Composing 'Sheherezade,' I was guided by separate, unconnected episodes and scenes from the *One Thousand and One Nights*, which are spread through all four parts of the Suite: the sea and Sinbad's ship; the Tsar Kalender's fantastic story; the young Tsar and the young Tsarina; the holiday in Bagdad; and the ship thrown on the rock of the brass horseback rider. The connecting thread between the stories is provided by the short entries to the Ist, IInd, and IVth parts and the intermission in the IIIrd part, which is written for violin solo and portrays Sheherezade herself, as though narrating her marvelous tales to the terrible Sultan. The finale of the IVth part has the same artistic meaning. It is useless to look for leitmotifs that are always firmly connected to one and the same lyric or storyline. On the contrary, in most cases, these presumed leitmotifs are nothing else but clearly musical material, motifs for symphonic development. These motifs are woven and spread through all parts of the Suite, alternating and intertwining among themselves. These same motifs and themes correspond each time to different forms, actions, and scenes, appearing each time in a different light, drawing each time different lines and expressing different moods. For example, the sharply outlined fanfaric motif of muted trombone and trumpet, which appears first in the story of Kalender (B-Minor, 3/4), and the theme of the young Tsarina in the IIIrd part (B-Major, 6/8), both recur in changed appearance and in fast tempo, as side themes of the Bagdad holiday, although among the tales of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, nothing is known about any participation of these persons in the holiday. In another instance, the unison phrase, as if portraying the terrible husband of Sheherezade at the beginning of the Suite, manifests itself in Kalender's narration, in which, however, there could be no reference to the Sultan Shahriar. In this way, developing completely and freely musical givens taken as the basis for the composition, I thought of producing an orchestral suite in four parts, tightly connected by the community of themes and motifs, but presenting itself as the kaleidoscope of fairytale types and scenes of Eastern character. This is the technique I had adopted, to a certain extent, in my 'Fairytale,' in which the musical elements are distinguishable from the poetic ones to the same small degree. Originally, I had even intended to call the Ist part of 'Sheherezade', 'Prelude'; the IInd part, 'Ballade'; the IIIrd part, 'Adagio'; and the IVth part, 'Finale'. But I did not do so, following the advice of Liadov. Later, in a new edition, by not wanting to suggest a definite storyline in the composition, I was constrained to omit even those allusions to it contained in the titles of each part, such as the sea, Sindbad's ship, Kalender's story, etc."

"With these indications, I wanted to direct, however slightly, the listener's fantasy on the path along with my own fantasy went, leaving to each individual's will and mood the more detailed and personal scenes. If the listener appreciates my piece as symphonic music, I wanted him also to feel that it was no doubt as Eastern narrative, about some kind of numerous and various fairytale miracles, and not simply four musical pieces, played one after another and composed on themes common to all four parts. Why then, in such instance, is my suite called specifically 'Sheherezade'? Because everyone associates images of the East and fairytale miracles with this name and its allusion to the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Moreover, some elements of the musical interpretation suggest that these are diverse tales told by one person, Sheherezade entertaining with them her terrible husband."

The first performance of "Sheherezade" took place in St. Petersburg on September 28, 1888, at the first Russian concert, and was directed by the author.

The score and the arrangement of "Sheherezade" for piano four hands was published for the first time in 1889 by Beliaiev.

The location of the author's manuscript of "Sheherezade" for piano four hands is not known. The present edition is based on the printed copy of the arrangement published by Beliaiev and on the printed score, in volume 22 of the *Complete Works*, published by Muzgiz in 1956.

Translated by Dr. Olga Browning

SCHEHEREZADE
SYMPHONIC SUITE
ON 1001 NIGHTS

OP. 35

1888

I

Largo e maestoso $\text{♩} = 48$

ff *trium* mf pp

Lento $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$
Recit.

(Violino solo) espressivo
mf colla parte
pp p

10

Cadenza

p a piacere ten.
p pp