RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
ROMANCES

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Prorok. Op. 49, No. 2

Alexander Pushkin

Dukhovnoï zhazhdoïu tomim
V pustyni mrachnoï ia vladali/a,
I shestikrylyï serafim
Na pereputïe mne ïavils’a;
Perstami l’ogkimi, kak son,
Moikh zenits kosnuls’a on:
Ovzerti’i vesli’ëe zenitsy,
Kak u ispuganoï orlitsy.
Moikh uzhët kosnuls’a on,
I ëkh napolni shum i zvon:
I vn’al ia neba sodroganïe,
I gornii angeli’ev pol’ot,
I gud morskih podvodnyi khod,
I dol’nei losy prët abanis;
I on k uztam moim pritinik
I vyrval greshnyi moi izzyk,
I prazdnoslovnyi, i lukavyi,
I zhalo mydryi’ëa zmei
V usta zamerzshi’ëa moi
Vlozhil desnitse’a krovavoii.
I on k ustam moih vnoi
I serdtse trepetnoi vynul,
I ugl’, pylaush’i’oogn’om,
Vo grud’ orvenstvu vodvinul.
Kak trup, v pustyni ia lezhal.
I Bog’ qlas ko mne vozval:
’Vostran’, prorok, i vazh’d, i vnemi,
Ispolin’i’ voletë moii
I, obkhod’a mot’a i zemli,
Glagolom zhigi serdca l’udei.”

The Prophet

Terminated by spiritual anguish
I dragged myself through a grim desert.
And a six-winged seraphim
Appeared to me at a crossroads;
With his fingers, light as a dream,
He touched my eye;
They burst open wide, all-seeing,
Like those of a startled eagle.
He touched my ear,
And they were filled with clamour and ringing:
I heard the rumbling of the heavens,
The high flight of the angels,
The crawling of the underwater reptilians
And the germinating of the grapevines in the valleys.
He pressed against my lips
And tore out my tongue,
Both exuberant and sly,
And into my frozen lips
The sting of a wise snake
He pushed with his bloody hand.
He cleaned my chest with a sword
And took out my trembling heart,
And thrust into my opened breast
A flaming piece of coal.
I lay in the desert like a corpse.
And God’s voice called to me:
’Arise, my prophet, behold and bark,
Submit to my will,
And, traveling across the seas and lands,
Spark people’s hearts with verse.”
RIMSKY-KORSAKOV ROMANCES

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)

1. The lark’s song is ringing louder (Aleksey Tolstoy)  
2. The wave crushes, splashes and sprays (Aleksey Tolstoy)  
3. In moments to delight devoted (Ivan Kazan after Lord Byron)  
4. Nymph (Apollon Maikov)  
5. The Octave (Apollon Maikov)  
6. The Echo (Sergey Andreevsky after François Coppée)  
7. Summer night’s dream (Apollon Maikov)  
8. When the golden cornfield waves (Mikhail Lermontov)  
9. On Georgian hills (Alexander Pushkin)  
10. A flock of passing clouds (Alexander Pushkin)  
11. Your glance is as radiant as the heavens (Mikhail Lermontov)  
12. Of what I dream in the quiet night (Apollon Maikov)  

23. Ne veter, veia s vysoty Op.43, No.2

Ne veter, veia s vysoty,
Listov kosnuls’a nochïu lunnoï –
Moïeï dushi kosnulas’ty:
Ona trevozhna, kak listy,
Ona, kak gusli, mnogostrunna!

Zhiteïskiï vikhr’ ïeïo terzal,
I sokrushitel’nym nabegom,
Svist’a i voïa struny rval
I zanosil kholodnym snegom;
Tvoïa zhe rech laskaïet slukh,
Tvoïo legko prikosnovenïe,
Kak ot tsvetov let’ash’iï pukh,
Kak maïskoï nochi dunovenïe.

Prizivos on smert'nuïu smolu
Da v’er’ s uv’adshimi listami,
I por po blednomu chelu
Sruša’ a kladadnymi ruchami;
Prizivos i oslabel, i l’og
Pod svodom shalasha na lyki,
I umer bednyï rab u nog
Nepobedimogo vladyki.

A tsar’tem ïadom napital
Svoi poslushlivyïe strely
I s nimi gibel’ razoslal
Sosed’am v chuzhdyïe predely.

Ne veter, veia s vysoty,
Not the wind blowing from on high
Has touched the leaves in the moonlit night –
My soul has been touched by you:
It is afflatus, like the leaves,
It is as sensitive as the lyre’s strings,
The blizzard of life was tearing it apart,
And with the crushing attack,
Whistling and howling, tore the strings,
And covered my soul with icy snow;
But your voice caresses my hearing,
Your touch is as light
As the down flying from the flowers,
Like a breeze of the May night.

He brought back the deadly resin
And a branch with withered leaves;
The sweat across his pale face
Was flowing in cold streams.

He weakened and laid down
Under a tent upon a trestle-bed,
And the poor slave died
By the feet of an unconquerable sovereign.
Meanwhile the Tsar drenched with that poison
His obdurate arrows
And sent around death
to neighbours in foreign lands.
Anchar Op.49, No.1
Alexander Pushkin

V pustyni chakhloï i skupoï,
Na pochve, znoïem raskalennoï,
Anchar, kak groznyï chasovoï,
Stoit odin vo vseï vselennoï.

Priroda zhazhdush'ikh stepeï
lego v den' gneva porodila
I zelen' mertvuïu vetveï,
I korni ïadom napoila.

I ïad kaplet skvoz' ïego koru,
K poludn'u rastop'as' ot znoïu,
I zastyvaïet vvecheru
Gustoï, prozrachnoïu smoloïa.

K nemu i ptitsa ne letit,
I zver' neïd'ot: lish vikhor'chornyï
Na drevo smerti nabezhit –
I mchits'a proch uzhe tletvornyï.

And if a wondering cloud would sprinkle
Upon its dense foliage,
Flows down into the sizzling sand.

But a human sent another human
To the Upas tree with a commanding glance;
And he obediently set off on a journey,
Returning by the morning with the poison.

The Upas Tree

Amid a desert, arid and bare,
In soil, flaming with heat,
The Upas tree, like a fearsome guard,
Stands alone in the entire universe.

The nature of the barren steppes
Created it in the day of wrath
And soaked with deadly poison
Its green branches and its roots.

The poison percolates through its bark
Melting from the midday heat,
And congeals by evening
Into a dense translucent resin.

Birds nor beasts roam not near it:
Only a black whirlwind
Occasionally would fly nearby –
And rush away, but already deadly.

Across the midnight sky (Angel) (Mikhail Lermontov) b
The rose enchants the nightingale (Aleksey Koltsov) a
Sun of the sleepless (Aleksey Tolstoy after Lord Byron) b
The Poet (Alexander Pushkin) a
In the dark grove, the nightingale is silent (Ivan Nikitin) b
Svitez maiden (Les Mots after Adam Mickiewicz) a
Not a sound from the sea (Aleksey Tolstoy) b
Slowly drag my days (Alexander Pushkin) b
The Beauty (Alexander Pushkin) a
The Upas Tree (Alexander Pushkin) b
Not the wind blowing from on high (Aleksey Tolstoy) a
The Prophet (Alexander Pushkin) a

Anush Hovhannisyan soprano a
Yuriy Yurchuk baritone b
Sergey Rybin piano
Krasavitsa Op.51, No.4
Alexander Pushkin

Vs’o v neï garmoniïa, vs’o divo,
Vs’o vyše mira i strasteï,
Ona pokoït’sa stydlivo
V krase torzhestvennoï svoïï;
Ona krugom seb’a vziraïet:
Îeï net sopernits, net pordrug;
Inykh krasavits blednyï krug
V ïeïo siïanïi ischezaïet.

Kuda by ty ne pospeshal,
Khot’ na l’ubovnoïe svidanïe,
Kakoïe b v serdtse ni pital
Ty sokrovennoïe mechtanïe,
No, vtret’as’s neï, smush’onnyï, ty
Vdrug ostanovishs’a nevol’no,
Blagogov’eïa bogomol’no
Pered sv’atyneï krasoty.

The Beauty

Everything in her is harmony, a marvel,
Everything is above the world and passion,
She rests modestly
Within her solemn beauty;
She looks around;
There are no rivals or equals to her,
The usual pale circle of beauties
Disappears in her brilliance.

Wherever you are hurrying,
Even to a love assignation,
Heartsease within your heart
A secret yearning —
Meeting her, you feel perplexed
And stop involuntarily,
Piously revering
The sanctity of beauty.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV ROMANCES

During the Exposition Universelle of 1889 in Paris, famous among other things for adding
the Eiffel Tower to Paris’ skyline, on the opposite side of the Seine, at the Palais du Trocadéro,
on 22 and 29 June, Paris audiences were treated to two concerts of Russian music organized
and financed by prominent arts patron and publisher Mirofan Belyaev. Under the direction
of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov on the conductor’s podium, a comprehensive selection of
Russian music was presented, including Glinka’s Ruslan and Ludmila and Kamarinskaïa
overtures, the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s 1st Piano Concerto, Musorgsky’s Night on a
bare Mountain, Borodin’s Polovtsian Dances from Prince Igor and Rimsky-Korsakov’s own
Piano Concerto, symphonic poem Antar and Capriccio Espagol. The interest towards the
Russian composer’s school, perhaps nurtured by these events, and its increasing influence
in Europe would eventually culminate during the early years of the twentieth century in a huge
creative outburst of Russian Art, closely associated with the name of Sergey Diaghilev. Nearly
eighteen years later, in May 1907, just a few months before his death, Rimsky-Korsakov
returned to Paris to conduct a few of his own compositions as part of five Historic Russian
Concerts. Met with admiration, success and recognition befitting one of the most significant
composers of the turn of the century, Rimsky-Korsakov was venerated by the public and
greeted by Camille Saint-Saëns, Richard Strauss, Rachmaninov, Skryabin and members of
Russian aristocracy during this visit.

Rimsky-Korsakov cuts a towering and extremely diverse figure on the Russian musical
horizon of the second half of the nineteenth century. His career spans from the mid-1860s,
when the Russian composer's school was still in its early youth, to the beginning of the new
century, by which time it has become a fully-fledged and unique phenomenon in European
art. It is hard to think of another person during that time who so consistently
instrumental in nurturing the national composer's school as Rimsky-Korsakov, both in his
own works and as a professor of St Petersburg Conservatoire. Aged 27, in summer 1871, he
began a nearly 37-year career as professor of orchestral class, composition and
instrumentation, and there is hardly any Russian composer of note in that period of time
who did not pass through Rimsky-Korsakov's class – Glazunov, Lyadov, Arensky, Stravinsky,
Grechaninov, Taneyev, Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, to name just a handful.

Following the publication of the first ever Russian Manual of Harmony created by
Tchaikovsky in 1874, Rimsky-Korsakov, on the basis of his own experience of teaching this
subject, followed up in 1886 with his “Practical studybook of Harmony”. A scholar, learned
Ne penits’a more
Aleksey Tolstoy

Not a sound from the sea

The sea doesn’t spume, the wave doesn’t splash,
The leaves don’t move on the trees,
Upon the translucent surface reigns silence,
The world is turned upside down as if in a mirror.

I sit on a stone, the clouds
Hang motionless in the blue suavety;
My soul is serene and profound
Akin to the tranquil sea.

Slowly drag my days

Slowly drag my days,
Every moment amplifies in my withered heart
All woes of unrequited love
And agonizing madness troubles me.
But I am silent; my grumble is not heard;
I shed tears; tears are my consolation.
My soul, consumed by grief,
Finds bitter pleasure in tears.
Oh, illusion of life! Fly by, I don’t value you,
Vanish in darkness, meaningless ghost;
I treasure the torment of my love,
Let me die, but let me die being in love!
Let me die being in love!

Medlitel’no vlekuts’a dni moi
Alexander Pushkin

Medlitel’no vlekuts’a dni moi,
I kazhdyi mig v uv’adshem serdtse mnozhit
Vse goresti neschastlivoï l’ubvi
I t’azhkoïe bezumiïe trevozhit.

No ïa molchu; ne slyshen ropot moï;
Ïa sl’ozy liu; mne sl’ozy uteshenïe.
Moïa dusha, obïataïa toskoï,
V nikh gor’koïe nakhodit naslazhdenïe.
Oh, zhizni son! Leti, ne zhal’teb’a,
Ischezni v t’me, pustoïe prividenïe;
Mne dorogo l’ubvi moïeï muchenïe,
Puskaï umru, no pust’umru l’ub’a!
No pust’umru l’ub’a!

approach to composition technique, diligent attention to all aspects of craft, an urge to tame the musical anarchy and dilettantism, elevating the composer’s skill to an art, were undoubtedly the cornerstones of Rimsky-Korsakov’s professional credo. “Harmony and counterpoint, providing very many sonorities of great variety and complexity, certainly have their boundaries, trespassing which we find ourselves in the area of disharmony and cacophony...”, he wrote. A European in his composing technique, while being firmly rooted in the unmistakably Russian musical tradition, Rimsky-Korsakov actively pushed the confines in the sphere of harmony, in no small part through usage of the whole-tone (consisting of whole tones) and octatone (consisting of alternating tones and semitones) scales – which opens up possibilities for a wider harmonic palette and relations between tonalities. It is widely noted that these harmonic innovations and expansions profoundly influenced the young Ravel, who encountered Russian music as a first year piano student of the Paris Conservatoire during the aforementioned concerts at Exposition Universelle.

There is a curious ironic passage in Ravel’s article in La Revue Musical (1912) in which he defends Debussy against accusations of lacking originality. It reveals a certain opinion in Parisian musical circles at the time: “We have already learnt that in the discovery of his harmonic system he [Debussy] was wholly indebted to Eric Satie; for features of his theatre, to Mussorgsky; for his instrumentation, to Rimsky-Korsakov... Despite of his lack of talent, there is nothing remains to him except being the most significant, most deeply musical amongst modern composers.” As this extract suggests, during his lifetime Rimsky-Korsakov was already admired and revered for his unique talent for orchestration (his studybook “Foundations of Orchestration” was published shortly after his death). Symphonic works like Antar, Russian Easter Festival Overture, Capriccio Espagnol, Sheherazade and, of course the music of his operas, demonstrate, with full flair, his mastery of orchestral colours and textures and had proven to be a great influence on the French school in particular. In his approach to instrumentation (as well as operatic dramaturgy) Rimsky-Korsakov was a self-confessed follower of Michail Glinka, whom he greatly admired: “Working with Glinka’s scores was an unexpected education for me. Before these times I knew and adored his operas, but editing his scores for printing, forced me to go through the textures and instrumentation to the last minute little note. There were no boundaries to my fascination and reverence of such a great man. He does everything with such sophistication, but simple and natural at the same time – and with what knowledge of voices and instruments! I avidly
17 V’tomnoi rosh’e zamolk solovei Op.4, No.3
Ivan Nikitin (1824-1861)

V t’omnoï rosh’e zamolk soloveï,
Prokatilas’ po nebu zvezda;
Mes’ats smotrit skoz’chash’u vetvei,
Zazhigaïet rosu na trave.
Kak pri mes’atse krotok i tikh
U teb’a milyï ocherk litsa!
Etu noch, polnyï gr’oz zolotykh
Ïa b prodlil bez kontsa, bez kontsa!

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18 Svitez’anka Op.7, No.3
Lev Mei (1822-1862) after Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855)

Paren’ prigozhiï moï,
Paren’ krasivyï, kto ty?
Zachem nad Svitezïu burlivoï
Brodish nenastnoï poroïu?
Bross’a k nam v volny
I budem kruzhit’s’a vmeste po zybi
Khrustal’noï so mnoïu.
Khochesh, moï milyï,
I lastochkoï shibkoï
Budesh nad ozerom mchat’s’a,
Ili krasivoï ves’oloïu rybkoï
Tselyï den’budesh ty v struïkakh pleskat’s’a?
Nochïu na lozhe volny serebristoï
Landysheï my nabrosaïem,
Sladko zadremlem pod senïu struistoï,
Divnyïe gr’ozy uznaïem!

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soaked up his methods. I was studying his handling of natural brass instruments, which give
his scores untold transparency and lightness, I was learning from his elegant and natural
voicing. That was a beneficial schooling for me, leading towards the path of modern music,
after the vicissitudes of counterpoint and strict style.”

A rather fecund composer himself – author of 15 operas, 3 symphonies, 79 romances,
numerous symphonic poems and suites, compositions for chorus and solo piano – Rimsky-
Korsakov was also a proactive researcher, editor and champion of the works of many of his
colleagues: preparing new editions of Glinka’s operas; orchestrating Dargomyszky’s opera
The Stone Guest; finishing and partly orchestrating Borodin’s Prince Igor; engaging in the
monumental work of organising, finishing and publishing the complete works of Mussorgsky –
to his tireless and continued altruistic efforts, despite common reproaches for heavy
editorial interference, we owe the preservation and the beginning of a successful performing
life of many fine works.

While Rimsky-Korsakov’s symphonic works remain extremely popular and some of his
operas are also very well known outside Russia, his Romances remain, perhaps, largely
unknown and unfairly neglected. In a letter to a friend, in 1897, Rimsky-Korsakov defined
his approach to the genre this way: “I think that in their requests for melodiousness, sing-
ability and expansiveness, singers and the public at large are right... short melodies,
fragmentation, music departing from harmonies and demand for dissonances – are things in
themselves undesirable... There was a time (I remember it) in the sixties, when the majority
of Chopin’s melodies were considered weak and cheap music... But nevertheless, pure melody,
derived from Mozart, through Chopin and Glinka is alive up till now, and has to remain
alive, for without it the fate of music is decadence.” By his own admission he viewed
Romances, particularly in later life, as an étude, a study for finding and perfecting new ideas
and methods before implementing them in an operatic context. Comparable in volume and
significance to the output of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, Rimsky-Korsakov’s chamber
vocal compositions fully reflect the range of traits and features we find in his larger works.

One of the most prevalent themes we can trace throughout his music is a particular affinity
with the sounds and forces of nature, an inclination towards pantheistic contemplation and
a fusion with creation as a whole – comparisons with Wagner and his outlook upon the world
have often been drawn on that basis. The mythological context of Rimsky-Korsakov’s works

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In the dark, the nightingale is silent

In the dark grove, the nightingale is silent,
A star rolled across the sky;
A crescent moon is peering through the branches
And sparkles the dew upon the grass.

In the moonlight, how angelic and soft
The silhouette of your dear face!

Full of golden dreams, I wish this night
To last forever, forever!

Svitez maiden
Youth, handsome and comely,
Who are you?
Why above the roaring Svitez-lake
Are you wandering in poor weather?
Plunge yourself into the waves
And let us swirl
together in the crystal ripple.
If you would like, my dear,
As a swift swallow
You could fly over the lake,
Or as a beautiful jolly fish
The entire day you could splash in the streams?
At night, the bed of the silvery wave
We’ll cover with lilies of the valley,
In languorous slumber under the streaming cover
We’ll have wondrous dreams!
Alexander Pushkin
Poet
Aleksey Tolstoy after Lord Byron

Nesp’ash’ikh solntse

V shirokoshumnyïe dubrovy...
Na berega pustynnykh voln,
I zvukov, i sm’at’enïa poln,
Bezhit on, dikiï i surovyï,
Ne klonit gordoï golovy;
K nogam narodnogo kumira
L’ u d s k o ï  c h u ï d a ï e t’ a  m o l v y,
To s k u ï e t  o n  v  z a b a va k h  m i r a ,
Kak probudivshiïs’a or’ol.

Dusha poeta vstrepen’ots’a,
Do slukha chutkogo kosn’ots’a,
No chut’ bozhestvennyï glagol
Byt’ mozhet, vsekh nichtozhneï on.
I mezh deteï nichtozhnykh mira,
Dusha vkushaïet khladnyï son,
Molchit ïego sv’ataïa lira;
On malodushno pogruzhon;
V zabotakh suïetnogo sveta
K sv’ash’ennoï zhertve Apollon,
Poka ne trebuïet poeta
Vidna, no daleka, svetla, no kholodna.

Zvezda minuvshego, ty v gore mne vidna,
No uzh ne greïut nas bessil’nyïe luchi,
Tak svetit proshloïe nam v zhiznennoï nochi,
Kak on pokhozh na prizrak prezhnikh dneï!
Kak temnota pri n’om ïesh’o temneï,
Kak sl’ozno luch mertsaïet tvoï vsegda,
Nesp’ash’ikh solntse, gruznovaïa zvezda,
Op.45, No.5

Sun of the sleepless

Sun of the sleepless, sorrowful star,
How tearfully your ray always flickers,
How darkness is gloomier around its light,
How it resembles the ghost of the days long gone?
That way the past radiates for us in the night of life,
But its powerless rays can’t warm us any more,

Star of the past, I can see you in my bitter hour,
Visible, but far away, glowing, but cold.

The Poet

While the poet is not summoned
For a sacred obligation by Apollo,
In the shores of the mundane world
He is submerged carelessly,
His holy fire is silent;
His soul parahetes cold slumber,
And amongst the feeble creatures of the world
He is, probably, the feeblest.
But as soon as Godly accents
Touch the sensitive hearing,
The poet’s soul shudders
Like an awakened eagle.
He is bored amidst worldly gaiety,
His fires society’s blaze,
Before the people’s idol
He does not bow his proud head;
He escapes, wild and rugged,
Fall of sounds and turmoil,
To the shores of desolate waves,
To the ever mourning oakwoods...

(for example Snow-maiden or The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh), invites a global, all-encompassing view of nature and a human being’s place within it, that certainly transport some of his creations from the sphere of pure entertainment closer to Wagnerian musical philosophy. When the golden cornfield waves, a setting of a beautiful poem by Michail Lermontov, is no less that a pantheistic hymn of reconciliation with life’s troubles and difficulties through peace-giving observation of nature, and merging with its simple and timeless beauty. A similar sentiment dominates Not a sound from the sea, in which the piano accompaniment portrays a calm, mirror-like surface of the ocean, inducing a reflective mood in the protagonist. Vivid musical descriptions of the elements are so often found in Rimsky-Korsakov’s compositions – which are, perhaps, enhanced by his well documented synesthetic association between colour and particular tonalities. Water and the sea (The wave crushes, splashes and sprays) are particularly prevalent – the legacy of his years as a sea cadet in his first career, spending nearly 3 years on board the clipper “Almaz” (he sailed as far as Brazil). However, his music, so often depictive and descriptive, when understood in this wider context, reveals a profound aesthetical and ethical vision. The Octave states this view clearly – that Art, poetry and music, is at its best and most graceful when inspired, instigated and in accord with nature herself.

Rimsky-Korsakov is the greatest Russian operatic fabler. Well over half of his operas are set to the stories of Russian fairytales. Never before had the sphere of the fantastical blossomed so richly in Russian music. Anthropomorphic forces of nature and other whimsical beings inhabit his Romances as well. Svitez maiden, a glimpse into the romantic and mysterious world of a ballad by Adam Mickiewicz, is reminiscent of musical passages, associated with underwater happenings, from Sadbo and The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh. The alarming muddled sonority of the introduction eventually brightens to reveal a seductive Rusalka-like creature inviting a late-night wanderer to come and play with her in the rippling waters of the lake Svitez – thus betraying the oath of fidelity, given to his beloved, made of flesh and blood. Another water Nymph appears amongst the reeds to sing of her unrequited love and enchant the passing sailors: the undulating arpeggios in the piano part suggest calm waters, while the plasticity and linear expansiveness of the vocal line depict the appealing silhouette of her body and her flowing tresses.

Through pictures of nature we frequently find a window into the internal sphere of human emotions in Rimsky-Korsakov’s Romances. Against the nocturnal backdrop of Summer
night's dream we witness the amorous languishing of a young girl, very much resembling Pushkin's (and Tchaikovsky's) Tatiana from Eugene Onegin, – whose imagination, spurred on and enflamed by the intoxicating beauty of a summer's night, takes her on quite a journey though to the early hours of the morning. Sun of the sleepless, a poem of George Byron in a Russian version by Count Alexey Tolstoy, is a less blissful account of nocturnal musings, a version of a song to the moon – regretful about the fading memories of the past, which are so alike the moon's cold and distant light.

A thorough fascination and attraction to all things Oriental, so endemic in the Russian psyche, manifested itself in Rimsky-Korsakov's music on a grand scale. It would be fair to call him the most prolific orientalist in the history of Russian music, both by the volume and quality of his oeuvre. The symphonic suite Scheherazade is the finest and most memorable example of this trait in his music, alongside Antar, the opera-ballet Mlada, extended passages in The Golden Cockrel and Sadko and a few Romances. Rimsky-Korsakov's orientalism was nourished to a large extent by the works of the two most significant Russian poets of the nineteenth century – Alexander Pushkin and Michail Lermontov, who both visited the southern regions of Caucasus and Crimea on numerous occasions and produced a wealth of masterpieces of literature reflecting their impressions, forever shrouding that region in a veil of romanticism for the Russians. A flock of passing clouds, describing a locality near the Crimean seaside town of Gurzuf, is an elegy to the evening star (Venus), full of bitter-sweet reminiscences of its opulent surroundings and light enamoured melancholy. The smouldering Caucasian ardour of the poem Your glance is as radiant as the heavens is magnified by a sustained harmonic ellipsis in the piano part as well as by the introduction of a rhythmical figure associated with Georgian male folk dance in the middle section. The rose enchants a nightingale, a wonderfully refined and distilled example of Rimsky-Korsakov's oriental affinity, although being the earliest in our selection (written in 1866), remains one of his most popular Romances. Over the years a performing tradition has emerged for the tune in the piano postlude to be vocalised by the singer – we are following that tradition on our recording.

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11 Kak nebesa tvoi vzor blistaet
Mikhail Lermontov
Kak nebesa, tvoi vzor blistaet
Emaliu goluboi;
Kak potselei, zvuchit i talet
Voi golos molodoi.
Za zvuk odin volshebnoi rechi,
Za tvoi ïedinyi vzl'ad
Ia brosit' rad krasavtsa sechi –
Gruzinskiï moï bulat...
O chom v tishi nochei
Apollon Maikov
O chom v tishi nochei tainstvenno mechtaïu,
O chom pri svete dn'a vsechasno pomyshl'aïu, –
To  b u ñ e  t a ï n o ï  v s e m ,  i  d a z h e  t y,
moï stikh,
Ty, drug moï vetrennyi, uslada dneï moikh,
T e be ne peredam dushi moïeï mechtan'a,
B e c k o m  j e  ï e  m e ī t  v o te mn, i dazhe ty,
moï stikh,
Ty, drug moi vetrennyi, uslada dnei moikh,
Tebe ne peredam dushi moi mechtan'a,
A to raskazhesh ty, chto glas v
vochnom molchanii mne dychits'a, chto lik ia
v'ush'ud nakhozhu,
Chii ochi svet'at mne, chii im'a
ia tverzhii.

Your glance is as radiant as the heavens
Your glance is as radiant as the heavens
With its azure enamel.
Vibrates and melts away.
Just for the sound of your magical accents,
For your single gaze
I'd gladly give up the hero of the battle –
My Georgian dagger...

Zvonche zhavoronka penie
Aleksey Tolstoy (1883-1945)
Zvonche zhavoronka penie,
Íarche vesnosti tsvety,
Serdtse polno vdohnoveniya,
Nebo polno krasoty.
Razorvav toski okovy,
Tsepi poshlyïe razbiv,
Nabegaïet zhizni novoï
Torzhestvuïush'iï priliv,
I zvuchit swet'ho i iuno
Novykh sil moguchiï stroï,
Kak nat'anutyïe struny
Mezhdu nebom i zeml'oï.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV ROMANCES

1 Zvenche zhavoronka penie Op.43, No.1
Aleksey Tolstoy
Zvenche zhavoronka penie,
Íarche vesnosti tsvety,
Serdtse polno vdohnoveninya,
Nebo polno krasoty.
Razorvav toski okovy,
Tsepi poshlyïe razbiv,
Nabegaïet zhizni novoï
Torzhestvuïush'iï priliv,
I zvuchit swet'ho i iuno
Novykh sil moguchiï stroï,
Kak nat'anutyïe struny
Mezhdu nebom i zeml'oï.

2 Drobits'a, i plesh'vet, i bryzzhet volna
Aleksey Tolstoy
Drobits'a, i presh'et, i bryzzhet volna
Mne v ochi sol'onoïu vlagoï;
Nedvizhno na kamne sizhu ia,
Dusha bezotchotnoï otvagoï.
Valy za valami, priboi i otboi,
I pena ikh grebni pokryla.
O more, kogo zhe mne vyzvat'na boï,
Izvedat' voskresshiïe sily?
Pochuïalo serdtse, chto zhizn'khorosha,
Vy, volny, razmykali gore,
Ot groma i pleska prosnulas'dusha –
Srodni ë teï shum'ash'eï more!

Drobis'ta, i plesh'er, i bryzhhet volna
Op.46, No.1
Aleksey Tolstoy
Drobis'ta, i presh'er, i bryzhhet volna
Mne v ochi sol'onoïu vlagoi;
Nedvizhno na kamne szhbu ia, polna
Dusha bezotchotnoi otvagoi.
Valy za valami, priboi i otboi,
I pena ikh grebni pokryla.
O more, kogo zhe mne imgvat'na boi,
Izvedat' voskresshie sily?
Pochuialo serdce, chto zhizn'khoroshia,
Vse, volny, razmykali gore.
Ote groma i pleska prosnulis'sha –
Srodni e xi shum'as'cie more!

The lark's song is ringing louder
The lark's song is ringing louder,
The spring flowers are growing brighter,
The heart is full of inspiration,
The sky is full of splendour.
Destroying the shackles
And the chains of of spleen
Rushes in the triumphant tide
Of a new life.
Youthfully and freshly sounds
The mighty accord of the new forces,
Like the stretched strings
Between heaven and earth.

The wave crushes, splashes and sprays
The wave crushes, splashes and sprays
Into my eyes with salty moisture;
I sit still on the rock;
My soul is full of irrepressible valour.
With after wave, tide and ebb,
All their crests are covered with foam.
Oh, sea — whom can I challenge to a contest
To try out my resurrected spirit?
My heart feels that life is great,
Yes, waves, dispelled the grief.
My soul has awakened from thunder and splashing —
Akin to the roaring sea!
Redeïet oblakov letuchaïa gr’ada
Op.42, No.3
Alexander Pushkin

Zvezda pechal’naïa, vechern’aïa zvezda!
Tvoï luch oserebril uv’adshiïe ravniny
I dreml’ush’iï zaliv, i chornykh skal vershiny.

Life flies towards death like an arrow,
So, caressing me again,
Call me not "life", but "soul",
Immortal, like my love!

Nymph

A flock of passing clouds
disperses;
Sorrowful star, star of the evening!
Your ray silvers the withered plains,
The slumbering bay, and the peaks of the black rocks.
I love your faint light in the Heaven's height;
It awakened thoughts which were dormant within me.
I remember your rising, darling star,
Above a peaceful land, where everything is dear to my heart,
Where slender poplars rise up in the valleys,
Where tender myrtle and dark cypress slumber,
And the midday waves splash languorously.
There in the hills, once upon a time, full of heartfelt thoughts,
Above the sea I dragged out my days in pensive idleness,
When upon the villages the nightly shadow was descending,
And called you by your own name to her girlfriends.
Na kholmakh Gruzii Op.3, No.4
Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)

On Georgian hills

On Georgian hills lies night's darkness;
Aragvi roars before me.
I feel sorrowful and at ease; my sadness is light;
My sadness is full of you,
You, only you...
My gloom is not disturbed or tortured by anything,
And my heart again burns and beats faster because
It cannot renounce love.

Na kholmakh Gruzii lezhit nochnaïa mgla;
Shumit Aragva predo mnoïu.
Mne grustno i lékg; pechal'noïa svela;
Pechal'noïa polna toboïu,
Toboi, toboi ondoï...
Unyala moiogo nichto ne muchit, ne trevozhit,
I serdne vno' gorit i biuesa ototo,
Chto ne 'ubit' ono ne muchet.

5 Oktava Op.45, No.3
Apollon Makov

Garmozii stikha bozhestvennyïe taïny
Ne dumaï razgadat' po knigam mudretsov:
U brega sonnykh vod odin
bro'd, sluchaino,
Prislushaïs'a dushoï k
shepanii tronnikov,
Dubravy govoru; ikh zvuk neobychainyi
Prochuvstvuï i poïmi...V
sozvuchii stikhov
Nevol'no s ust tvoikh razmernyïe octavy
Polïuts'a stroïnyi kak muzyka dubravy.

5 Oktava Op.45, No.3
Apollon Makov

On Georgian hills lies night's darkness;
Aragvi roars before me.
I feel sorrowful and at ease; my sadness is light;
My sadness is full of you,
You, only you...
My gloom is not disturbed or tortured by anything,
And my heart again burns and beats faster because
It cannot renounce love.

The Octave

Divine mysteries of the verse's harmony
Try not to unravel in the wise books:
Instead, wondering ashore by the
sleepy waves, alone,
Gently listen in with your soul to the
whispering of the reeds;
To the bubble of oakwood; their wondrous sounds
Understand and take to heart...Then as
harmonious poetry
Naturally from your lips the rhythmical octaves
Will flow gracefully, like nature's own music.

The Echo

I bitterly lamented amidst the desert:
"Who from now on will be
As close to my heart as You once were?"
The echo responded: "Alas!"
"How will I live on, sick and morose,
Tortured by ever present sorrow
And many onerous years?"
The echo responded: "Alone!"
"But what should I do? The world is a grave,
Meaningless life is abhorrent to me.
Where is former splendour, pleasure and paradise?"
The echo said: "Dye!"
Pod dykhaniem ego obsiliia ia...
Na grudi razomknulis'a ryki...
I zvuchalo v ushakh: “Ty moïa! Ty moïa!”
Tochno arfy da'olkie zvuki...
Protekali chasy... Ia otkryla glaza...
Moï pokoj byl uzh oblit zar'oïu...
Ia odna... vs'a drozhu... Raspustilas' kosa...
Ia ne znaiu, chto bylo so mnoïu...

Kogda volnuïets'a zhelteïush'aïa niva
Kogda volnuïets'a zhelteïush'aïa niva,
And the crimson plum hides in the garden
Under the sweet shade of a green leaf,
Kogda rosoï obryzgannyï dushistoï,
When, sprinkled with fragrant dew,
Rum'anym vecherom il' utra v chas zlatoï,
In a blushing evening or golden morning time,
Iz-pod kusta mne landysh serebristyï
A silvery lily of the valley from under the bush
Privetlivo kivaïet golovoï;
Affably beckons to me with its head;
Kogda stud'onyï kl'uch igraïet po ovragu
When the cold stream glistens in the ravine
I, pogruzhaïa mysl'v kakoï-to
And, submerging my thought into some
smutnyï son,
obscure slumber,
Lepechet mne tainstvennuïu sagu
Murmurs a mysterious saga
Pro mirnyï kraï, otkuda mchits'a on;
About a peaceful land from which it flows;
To g d a  s m i r' a ï e t s' a d u s h i  m o ï e ï  t re g o a ,
Then dissipates my soul’s anxiety,
To g d a  r a s k h o d' a t s' a m o r s h' i n y  n a  c h e l e ,
Then the wrinkles dissolve from my forehead,
I schast'e ïa mogu postignut' na zemle,
And I can comprehend happiness upon the Earth,
I v nebesakh ïa vizhu Boga!
And in the sky I can see God!

When the golden cornfield waves
Under the sweet shade of a green leaf
And the crimson plum hides in the garden
When the golden cornfield waves
And the fresh forest rustles in the wind.
When the crimson plum hides in the garden
And the fresh forest rustles in the wind.

When the golden cornfield waves
Under the sweet shade of a green leaf.
When, sprinkled with fragrant dew,
In a blushing evening or golden morning time,
A silvery lily of the valley from under the bush
Affably beckons to me with its head,
When the cold stream glistens in the ravine
And, submerging my thought into some
obscure slumber,
Murmurs a mysterious saga
About a peaceful land from which it flows;
Then dissipates my soul’s anxiety.
Then the wrinkles dissolve from my forehead,
And I can comprehend happiness upon the Earth,
And in the sky I can see God!

When the golden cornfield waves
Pod dykhaniem ego obsnila ia...  
Na grudi razomnulis'a ryki...  
I zvuchalo v ushakh: "Ty moia! Ty moia!"  
Tochny ary d'al'okie zvuki...  
Protekali chasy...  
Ia otkryla glaza...  
Moia pokoii byl uzh oblit zar'oiiu...  
Ia odna... vs'a drozhu...  
Raspustilas' kosa...  
Ia ne znai', chto bylo so mnooiu...  
Kogda volnuiets'a zhelteiush'aia niva.

Kogda volnuiets'a zhelteiush'aia niva,  
I svezhi' les shumit pri zvuke veterka,  
I pr'achets'a v sadu malinovaia sliva  
Pod tenii sladostnoi zel'onoi listka,  
Kogda rosoi obryzgannoi dushistoii,  
Rum'anym vecherom il' utra v chas zlatoii,  
Iz-pod kusta mne landysh serebristyii  
Privetlivo kivaet golovoii;  
Kogda stud'onyi kl'uch igraet po ovragu  
I, pogruzhaai mysl'v kako-to  
smutnyi son,  
Lepechet mne tainstvennuii sagu  
Pro mirnii kraii, otkuda mchits'a on;  
To g'da smiretei s'adusht' na chel',  
Ia neznai', chto bylo so mnooiu...  
I v nebesakh ia vizhu Boga!
Na kholmakh Gruzii
Op.3, No.4
Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)

On Georgian hills
On Georgian hills lies night’s darkness; 
Agape roars before me. 
I feel sorrowful and at ease; my sadness is light; 
My sadness is full of you, 
You, only you... 
My gloom is not disturbed or tortured by anything, 
And my heart again burns and beats faster because 
It cannot renounce love.

On Georgian hills
On Georgian hills lies night’s darkness; 
Agape roars before me. 
I feel sorrowful and at ease; my sadness is light; 
My sadness is full of you, 
You, only you... 
My gloom is not disturbed or tortured by anything, 
And my heart again burns and beats faster because 
It cannot renounce love.

Garmonii stikha bozhestvennyi tainy
Ne dumaĭ razgadat’ po knigam mudretsov: 
U brega sonnykh vod odin 
brod’a, sluchaino, 
Prislushaĭs’a dushoĭ k 
shpant’i trostnikov, 
Dubravy govoru; ikh zvuk neobychnyi 
Prochuvstvuĭ i poĭmi...V 
sozvuchii stikhov 
Nevol’no s ust tvoikh razmernyi octavy 
Polïuts’a stroĭnyi kak muzyka dubravy.

Divine mysteries of the verse’s harmony 
Try not to unravel in the wise books: 
Instead, wondering ashore by the 
sleepy waves, alone, 
Gently listen in with your soul to the 
whispering of the reeds... 
And harmonious poetry 
Naturally from your lips the rhythmical octaves 
Will flow gracefully, like nature’s own music.

Ia gor’ko setoval v pustyne: 
“Kto budet blizok mne ontyne, 
Kak byli blizki serdzu Vy?” 
Mne ekho vtorilo: “Uvy!” 
“Kak budu zhit’, bol’noi i skuchnyi, 
To m i m  p e c h a l ï u  n e o t l u c h n o ï 
I r’adom t’agostnykh godin?” 
Mne ekho vtorilo: “Odin!” 
“No cho mne dela’, mir – mogla, 
Mne zhizn’ besst’’ia na postyla, 
Gde prezhnii blek, i shum, i rai?” 
Skazalo ekho: “Umrat’!”

I bitterly lamented amidst the desert: 
“Who from now on will be 
As close to my heart as You once were?” 
The echo responded: “Alas!” 
“How will I live on, sick and morose, 
Tortured by ever present sorrow 
And many onerous years?” 
The echo responded: “Alone!” 
“But what should I do? The world is a grave, 
Meaningless life is abhorrent to me. 
Where is former splendour, pleasure and paradise?” 
The echo said: “Die!”
**A flock of passing clouds**

In moments to delight devoted

In an outburst of your heart's passion
You called your friend "My life!"
A precious accolade, if only
Life and youth lasted forever.
Life flies towards death like an arrow,
So, caressing me again,
Call me not "life", but "soul";
Immortal, like my love!

In a flock of passing clouds disperses;
Sorrowful star, star of the evening!
Your ray silvers the withered plains,
The slumbering bay, and the peaks of the black rocks.
I love your faint light in the Heaven's height;
It awakened thoughts which were dormant within me;
I remember your rising, darling star,
Above a peaceful land, where everything is dear to my heart,
Where slender poplars rise in the valleys,
And the midday waves splash languorously.

Passing by in a boat an enchanted sailor
Listening to her song stops rowing;
And, even when she falls silent,
He still imagines for a while the singing above the waters,
And the nymph in the reeds
With flowing tresses.

---

**V porovne nezhnosti serdechnoi** Op.26, No.1

În an outburst of your heart's passion
You called your friend "My life!"
A precious accolade, if only
Life and youth lasted forever.
Life flies towards death like an arrow,
So, caressing me again,
Call me not "life", but "soul";
Immortal, like my love!

In moments to delight devoted

In an outburst of your heart's passion
You called your friend "My life!"
A precious accolade, if only
Life and youth lasted forever.
Life flies towards death like an arrow,
So, caressing me again,
Call me not "life", but "soul";
Immortal, like my love!

**Nimfa** Op.56, No.1

I know the reason why by these shores
A mysterious pensive mood seizes the sailors:
A melancholy nymph with flowing tresses,
Half-hidden by rustling reeds,
Sometimes sings a song there
About the silk of her hair,
The azure of her tearful eyes, the pearls of her teeth,
And a heart full of unrequited love.

Passing by in a boat an enchanted sailor
Listening to her song stops rowing;
And, even when she falls silent,
He still imagines for a while the singing above the waters,
And the nymph in the reeds
With flowing tresses.

---

**Redeïet oblakov letuchaïa gr'ada** Op.42, No.3

In moments to delight devoted

In an outburst of your heart's passion
You called your friend "My life!"
A precious accolade, if only
Life and youth lasted forever.
Life flies towards death like an arrow,
So, caressing me again,
Call me not "life", but "soul";
Immortal, like my love!

In moments to delight devoted

In an outburst of your heart's passion
You called your friend "My life!"
A precious accolade, if only
Life and youth lasted forever.
Life flies towards death like an arrow,
So, caressing me again,
Call me not "life", but "soul";
Immortal, like my love!

**Nymph**

I know the reason why by these shores
A mysterious pensive mood seizes the sailors:
A melancholy nymph with flowing tresses,
Half-hidden by rustling reeds,
Sometimes sings a song there
About the silk of her hair,
The azure of her tearful eyes, the pearls of her teeth,
And a heart full of unrequited love.

Passing by in a boat an enchanted sailor
Listening to her song stops rowing;
And, even when she falls silent,
He still imagines for a while the singing above the waters,
And the nymph in the reeds
With flowing tresses.

---

**Redeïet oblakov letuchaïa gr'ada** Op.42, No.3

A flock of passing clouds disperses;
Sorrowful star, star of the evening!
Your ray silvers the withered plains,
The slumbering bay, and the peaks of the black rocks.
I love your faint light in the Heaven's height;
It awakened thoughts which were dormant within me;
I remember your rising, darling star,
Above a peaceful land, where everything is dear to my heart,
11
*Kak nebesa tvoï vzor blistaïet* Op.7, No.4
*Mikhail Lermontov*
Kak nebesa, tvoï vzor blistaïet
Emalïu goluboï;
Kak potseluï, zvuchit i taïet
Tvoï golos molodoï.
Za zvuk odin volshebnoï rechi,
Za tvoï ïedinyï vzl'ad
Ïa brosit' rad krasavtsa sechi –
Gruzinskiï moï bulat...

*Kak nebesa tvoï vzor blistaïet* Emalïu goluboï; Kak potseluï, zvuchit i taïet Tvoï golos molodoï.

12
*O chom v tishi nocheï* Op.40, No.3
*Apollon Maikov*
O chom v tishi nocheï tainstvenno mechtaïu,
O chom pri svete dn'a vsechasno pomyshl'aïu, –
To  b u ï e  t â i n o ï  v s e m ,  i  d â z h e  t y ,
moï stikh,
Ty, drug moï vetrennyï, uslada dneï moikh,
Ty, drug moï vetrennyï, uslada dneï moikh,
Tebe ne peredam dushi moïeï mechtan'a,
A to raskazhesh ty, cheï glas v
nochnom molchanïe mne slyshits'a,
To you I won't convey the yearnings of my soul,
To you I won't convey the yearnings of my soul,
Because you might reveal whose voice in the
night's silence,
I hear, whose face appears to me in everything,
Whose eyes shine for me, whose name I
dervonam svishche i izven,
nochnom molchanïe mne slyshits'a,
nochnom molchanïe mne slyshits'a,
nochnom molchanïe mne slyshits'a,
endlessly repeat.

18
**Zvonche zhavoronka penïe** Op.43, No.1
*Aleksey Tolstoy (1883-1945)*
Zvonche zhavoronka penïe,
Ïarche veshniïe tsvety,
Serdtse polno vdokhnovenïa,
Nebo polno krasoty.
Razorvav toski okovy,
Tsepi poshlyïe razbiv,
Nabegaïet zhizni novoï
Torzhestvuïush'iï priliv,
I zvuchit svezho i ïuno
Novykh sil moguchiï stroï,
Kak nat'anutyïe struny
Mezhdu nebom i zeml'oï.

2
*Drobï'sâ, i plesh'et, i bryzzhet volna* Op.46, No.1
*Aleksey Tolstoy*
Drobï'sâ, i plesh'et, i bryzzhet volna
Mne v ochi sol'onoïu vlagoï;
Nedvizhno na kamne sizhu ïa, polna
Dusha bezotchotnoï otvagoï.
Valy za valami, priboï i otboï,
I pena ikh grebni pokryla.
O more, kogo zhe mne vyzvat'na boï,
Izvedat'vospreniye sily?
Pochuïalo serdtse, chto zhizn'khorosha,
Vy, volny, razmykali gore,
Ot groma i pleska prosnulas'dusha –
Srodni ïeï shum'ash'eï more!

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV ROMANCES**

1
*Zvonche zhavoronka penïe* Op.43, No.1
*Aleksey Tolstoy (1883-1945)*
Zvonche zhavoronka penïe, larche veshniïe tsvety, Serdtse polno vishchovenia, Nebo polno krasoty.
Razorvav toski okovy, Tsepi poshlyïe razbiv, Nabegaïet zhizni novoï Torzhestvuïush'iï priliv,
I zvuchit svezho i ïuno Novykh sil moguchiï stroï, Kak na'nt'anyie struny Mezhdu nebom i zeml'oï.

2
*The lark's song is ringing louder*
The lark's song is ringing louder, The spring flowers are growing brighter, The heart is full of inspiration, The sky is full of splendour.
Destroying the shackles And the chains of of spleen Rushes in the triumphant tide Of a new life.
Youthfully and freshly sounds The mighty accord of the new forces, Like the stretched strings Between heaven and earth.

**The wave crushes, splashes and sprays**
The wave crushes, splashes and sprays Into my eyes with salty moisture; I sit still on the rock, My soul is full of impressive valour.
Wave after wave, tide and ebb, All their crests are covered with foam. Oh, sea – whom can I challenge to a contest To try out my resurgent spirit?
My heart feels that life is great, Yes, waves, dispelled the grief, My soul has awakened from thunder and splashing – Akin to the roaring sea!
night’s dream we witness the amorous languishing of a young girl, very much resembling Pushkin’s (and Tchaikovsky’s) Tatiana from Eugene Onegin, — whose imagination, spurred on and enflamed by the intoxicating beauty of a summer’s night, takes her on quite a journey though to the early hours of the morning. Sun of the sleepless, a poem of George Byron in a Russian version by Count Alexey Tolstoy, is a less blissful account of nocturnal musings, a version of a song to the moon — regretful about the fading memories of the past, which are so alike the moon’s cold and distant light.

A thorough fascination and attraction to all things Oriental, so endemic in the Russian psyche, manifested itself in Rimsky-Korsakov’s music on a grand scale. It would be fair to call him the most prolific orientalist in the history of Russian music, both by the volume and quality of his oeuvre. The symphonic suite Scheherazade is the finest and most memorable example of this trait in his music, alongside Antar, the opera-ballet Mlada, extended passages in The Golden Cockrel and Sadko and a few Romances. Rimsky-Korsakov’s orientalism was nourished to a large extent by the works of the two most significant Russian poets of the nineteenth century — Alexander Pushkin and Michail Lermontov, who both visited the southern regions of Caucasus and Crimea on numerous occasions and produced a wealth of masterpieces of literature reflecting their impressions, forever shrouding that region in a veil of romanticism for the Russians. A flock of passing clouds, describing a locality near the Crimean seaside town of Gurzuf, is an elegy to the evening star (Venus), full of bitter-sweet reminiscences of its opulent surroundings and light enamoured melancholy. The smouldering Caucasian ardour of the poem Your glance is as radiant as the heavens is magnified by a sustained harmonic ellipsis in the piano part as well as by the introduction of a rhythmical figure associated with Georgian male folk dance in the middle section. The rose enchants a nightingale, a wonderfully refined and distilled example of Rimsky-Korsakov’s oriental affinity, although being the earliest in our selection (written in 1866), remains one of his most popular Romances. Over the years a performing tradition has emerged for the tune in the piano postlude to be vocalised by the singer — we are following that tradition on our recording.

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Sun of the sleepless

Sun of the sleepless, sorrowful star,  
How tearfully your ray always flickers,  
How darkness is glooming around its light,  
How it resembles the ghost of the days long gone!  
That way the past radiates for us in the night of life,  
But its powerless rays can’t warm us any more,  
Star of the past, I can see you in my bitter hour,  
Visible, but far away, glowing, but cold.

The Poet

While the poet is not summoned  
For a sacred oblation by Apollo,  
In the shores of the mundane world  
He is submerged carelessly.  
His holy fire is silent;  
His soul parades cold slumber,  
And amongst the feeble creatures of the world  
He is, probably, the feeblest.

But as soon as Godly accents  
Touch the sensitive hearing,  
The poet’s soul shudders  
Like an awakened eagle.  
He is bored amidst worldly gaiety,  
His flight society’s hustle,  
Before the people’s idol,  
He does not bow his proud head;  
He escapes, wild and rugged,  
Full of sounds and turmoil,  
To the shores of desolate waves,  
To the ever roaring nighthoods...

(for example Snow-maiden or The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh), invites a global, all-encompassing view of nature and a human being’s place within it, that certainly transport some of his creations from the sphere of pure entertainment closer to Wagnerian musical philosophy. When the golden cornfield waves, a setting of a beautiful poem by Michail Lermontov, is no less that a pantheistic hymn of reconciliation with life’s troubles and difficulties through peace-giving observation of nature, and merging with its simple and timeless beauty. A similar sentiment dominates Not a sound from the sea, in which the piano accompaniment portrays a calm, mirror-like surface of the ocean, inducing a reflective mood in the protagonist. Vivid musical descriptions of the elements are so often found in Rimsky-Korsakov’s compositions – which are, perhaps, enhanced by his well-documented synesthetic association between colour and particular tonalities. Water and the sea (The wave crushes, splashes and sprays) are particularly prevalent – the legacy of his years as a sea cadet in his first career, spending nearly 3 years on board the clipper “Almaz” (he sailed as far as Brazil). However, his music, so often depictive and descriptive, when understood in this wider context, reveals a profound aesthetical and ethical vision. The Octave states this view clearly – that Art, poetry and music, is at its best and most graceful when inspired, instigated and in accord with nature herself. Rimsky-Korsakov is the greatest Russian operatic fabler. Well over half of his operas are set to the stories of Russian fairytales. Never before had the sphere of the fantastical blossomed so richly in Russian music. Anthropomorphic forces of nature and other whimsical beings inhabit his Romances as well. Svitez maiden, a glimpse into the romantic and mysterious world of a ballad by Adam Mickiewicz, is reminiscent of musical passages, associated with underwater happenings, from Sadko and The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh. The alarming muddled sonority of the introduction eventually brightens to reveal a seductive Rusalka-like creature inviting a late-night wanderer to come and play with her in the rippling waters of the lake Svitez – thus betraying the oath of fidelity, given to his beloved, made of flesh and blood. Another water nymph appears amongst the reeds to sing of her unrequited love and enchant the passing sailors: the undulating arpeggios in the piano part suggest calm waters, while the plasticity and linear expansiveness of the vocal line depict the appealing silhouette of her body and her flowing tresses.

Through pictures of nature we frequently find a window into the internal sphere of human emotions in Rimsky-Korsakov’s Romances. Against the nocturnal backdrop of Summer
soaked up his methods. I was studying his handling of natural brass instruments, which give his scores untold transparency and lightness, I was learning from his elegant and natural voicing. That was a beneficial schooling for me, leading towards the path of modern music, after the vicissitudes of counterpoint and strict style."

A rather fecund composer himself – author of 15 operas, 3 symphonies, 79 romances, numerous symphonic poems and suites, compositions for chorus and solo piano – Rimsky-Korsakov was also a proactive researcher, editor and champion of the works of many of his colleagues: preparing new editions of Glinka’s operas; orchestrating Dargomizhsky’s opera *The Stone Guest*; finishing and partly orchestrating Borodin’s *Prince Igor*; engaging in the monumental work of organising, finishing and publishing the complete works of Mussorgsky – to his tireless and continued altruistic efforts, despite common reproaches for heavy editorial interference, we owe the preservation and the beginning of a successful performing life of many fine works.

While Rimsky-Korsakov’s symphonic works remain extremely popular and some of his operas are also very well known outside Russia, his Romances remain, perhaps, largely unknown and unfairly neglected. In a letter to a friend, in 1897, Rimsky-Korsakov defined his approach to the genre this way: “I think that in their requests for melodiousness, singability and expansiveness, singers and the public at large are right... short melodies, fragmentation, music departing from harmonies and demand for dissonances – are things in themselves undesirable... There was a time (I remember it) in the sixties, when the majority of Chopin’s melodies were considered weak and cheap music... But nevertheless, pure melody, deriving from Mozart, through Chopin and Glinka is alive up till now, and has to remain alive, for without it the fate of music is decadence.” By his own admission he viewed Romances, particularly in later life, as an étude, a study for finding and perfecting new ideas and methods before implementing them in an operatic context. Comparable in volume and significance to the output of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, Rimsky-Korsakov’s chamber vocal compositions fully reflect the range of traits and features we find in his larger works.

One of the most prevalent themes we can trace throughout his music is a particular affinity with the sounds and forces of nature, an inclination towards pantheistic contemplation and a fusion with creation as a whole – comparisons with Wagner and his outlook upon the world have often been drawn on that basis. The mythological context of Rimsky-Korsakov’s works...

**In the dark grove, the nightingale is silent**

*In the dark grove, the nightingale is silent, A star rolled across the sky; A crescent moon is peering through the branches And sparkles the dew upon the grass. In the moonlight, how angelic and soft The silhouette of your dear face! Full of golden dreams, I wish this night To last forever, forever!*

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**Svitez’anka** Op.7, No.3

*Lev Mei (1822-1862) after Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855)*

*Paren’ prigozhii moï, Paren’ krasivyï, kto ty?*  
*Brodish nenastnoï poroïu?*  
*Bross’a k nam v volny*  
*Khochesh, moï milyï, I lastochki shibkoï*  
*Ii ozerom mchat’s’a, Ili krasivoï ves’oloïu rybkoï*  
*Nochïu na lozhe volny serebristoï Landysheï my nabrosaïem, Sladko zadremlem pod senïu struistoï, Divnyïe gr’ozy uznaïem!*
Ne penits’a more Op.46, No.2
Aleksey Tolstoy

Ne penits’a more, ne plesh’et volna,
Derevïa listami ne dvinut;
Na gladi prozrachnoï tsarit tishina,
Kak v zerkale mir oprokinut.

Sizhu ïa na kanme, vis’at oblaka
Nedvizhnyïe v sinem prostore;
Dusha bezm’atezhna, dusha gluboka,
Srodni ïeï spokoïnoïe more.

Medlitel’no vlekuts’a dni moi
Op.51, No.1
Alexander Pushkin

Medlitel’no vlekuts’a dni moi,
I kazhdyï mig v uv’adshem serdtse mnozhit
Vse goresti neschastlivoï l’ubvi
I t’azhkoïe bezumiïe trevozhit.

But I am silent; my grumble is not heard;
I shed tears; tears are my consolation.
My soul, consumed by grief,
Finds bitter pleasure in tears.

Oh, illusion of life! Fly by, I don’t value you,
Vanish in darkness, meaningless ghost;
I treasure the torment of my love,
Let me die, but let me die being in love!

approach to composition technique, diligent attention to all aspects of craft, an urge to tame the musical anarchy and dilettantism, elevating the composer’s skill to an art, were undoubtedly the cornerstones of Rimsky-Korsakov’s professional credo. “Harmony and counterpoint, providing very many sonorities of great variety and complexity, certainly have their boundaries, trespassing which we find ourselves in the area of disharmony and cacophony...”, he wrote. A European in his composing technique, while being firmly rooted in the unmistakably Russian musical tradition, Rimsky-Korsakov actively pushed the confines in the sphere of harmony, in no small part through usage of the whole-tone (consisting of whole tones) and octatone (consisting of alternating tones and semitones) scales – which opens up possibilities for a wider harmonic palette and relations between tonalities. It is widely noted that these harmonic innovations and expansions profoundly influenced the young Ravel, who encountered Russian music as a first year piano student of the Paris Conservatoire during the aforementioned concerts at Exposition Universelle.

There is a curious ironic passage in Ravel’s article in La Revue Musical (1912) in which he defends Debussy against accusations of lacking originality. It reveals a certain opinion in Parisian musical circles at the time: “We have already learnt that in the discovery of his harmonic system he [Debussy] was wholly indebted to Eric Satie; for features of his theatre, to Mussorgsky; for his instrumentation, to Rimsky-Korsakov... Despite of his lack of talent, there is nothing remains to him except being the most significant, most deeply musical amongst modern composers.” As this extract suggests, during his lifetime Rimsky-Korsakov was already admired and revered for his unique talent for orchestration (his studybook “Foundations of Orchestration” was published shortly after his death). Symphonic works like Antar, Russian Easter Festival Overture, Capriccio Espagnol, Sheherazade and, of course the music of his operas, demonstrate, with full flair, his mastery of orchestral colours and textures and had proven to be a great influence on the French school in particular. In his approach to instrumentation (as well as operatic dramaturgy) Rimsky-Korsakov was a self-confessed follower of Michail Glinka, whom he greatly admired: “Working with Glinka's scores was an unexpected education for me. Before these times I knew and adored his operas, but editing his scores for printing, forced me to go through the textures and instrumentation to the last minute little note. There were no boundaries to my fascination and reverence of such a great man. He does everything with such sophistication, but simple and natural at the same time – and with what knowledge of voices and instruments! I avidly
RIMSKY-KORSAKOV ROMANCES

During the Exposition Universelle of 1889 in Paris, famous among other things for adding the Eiffel Tower to Paris’ skyline, on the opposite side of the Seine, at the Palais du Trocadéro, on 22 and 29 June, Paris audiences were treated to two concerts of Russian music organized and financed by prominent arts patron and publisher Mitrofan Belyaev. Under the direction of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov on the conductor’s podium, a comprehensive selection of Russian music was presented, including Glinka’s Ruslan and Ludmila and Kamarinskaïa overtures, the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s 1st Piano Concerto, Musorgsky’s Night on a bare Mountain, Borodin’s Polovtsian Dances from Prince Igor and Rimsky-Korsakov’s own Piano Concerto, symphonic poem Antar and Capriccio Espagnol. The interest towards the Russian composer’s school, perhaps nurtured by these events, and its increasing influence in Europe would eventually culminate during the early years of the twentieth century in a huge creative outburst of Russian Art, closely associated with the name of Sergei Diaghilev. Nearly eighteen years later, in May 1907, just a few months before his death, Rimsky-Korsakov returned to Paris to conduct a few of his own compositions as part of five Historic Russian Concerts. Met with admiration, success and recognition befitting one of the most significant composers of the turn of the century, Rimsky-Korsakov was venerated by the public and greeted by Camille Saint-Saëns, Richard Strauss, Rachmaninov, Skryabin and members of Russian aristocracy during this visit.

Rimsky-Korsakov cuts a towering and extremely diverse figure on the Russian musical horizon of the second half of the nineteenth century. His career spans from the mid-1860s, when the Russian composer’s school was still in its early youth, to the beginning of the new century, by which time it has become a fully-fledged and unique phenomenon in European art. It is hard to think of another person during that time who was so consistently instrumental in nurturing the national composer’s school as Rimsky-Korsakov, both in his own works and as a professor of St Petersburg Conservatoire. Aged 27, in summer 1871, he began a nearly 37-year career as professor of orchestral class, composition and instrumentation, and there is hardly any Russian composer of note in that period of time who did not pass through Rimsky-Korsakov’s class – Glazunov, Lyadov, Arensky, Stravinsky, Grechaninov, Taneyev, Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, to name just a handful.

Following the publication of the first ever Russian Manual of Harmony created by Tchaikovsky in 1874, Rimsky-Korsakov, on the basis of his own experience of teaching this subject, followed up in 1886 with his “Practical studybook of Harmony”. A scholar, learned

21 Krasavitsa Op.51, No.4
Alexander Pushkin
Vs’o v neï garmoniïa, vs’o divo,
Vs’e vyše mita i strastë,
Ona pokoës’a sydlivo
V kraxe tozhhestvennoï svoïeï;
Ona krugom seb’a vziraiet:
Îíë net sopernits, net pordrug;
Inykh krasavits blednyï krug
V ïeïo siïanïi ischezaïet.
Kuda by ty ne pospeshal,
Khot’ na l’ubovnoïe svidanïe,
Kakoïe b v serdtse ni pital
Ty sokrovennoïe mechtanïe,
No, vtret’as’s neï, smush’onnyï, ty
Vdrug ostanovishs’a nevol’no,
Blagogov’eïa bogomol’no
Pered sv’atyneï krasoty.

The Beauty

Everything in her is harmony, a marvel,
Everything is above the world and passions,
She rests modestly
Within her solemn beauty;
She looks around:
There are no rivals or equals to her,
The usual pale circle of beauties
Disappears in her brilliance.
Wherever you are hurrying,
Even a love assignation,
Harbouring within your heart
A secret yearning –
Meeting her, you feel perplexed
And stop involuntarily,
Piously revering
The sanctity of beauty.
The Upas Tree

Amid a desert, arid and bare,
In soil, flaming with heat.
The Upas tree, like a fearsome guard,
Stands alone in the entire universe.

The nature of the barren steppes
Created it in the day of wrath
And soaked with deadly poison
Its green branches and its roots.

The poison percolates through its bark
Melting from the midday heat,
And congeals by evening
Into a dense translucent resin.

Birds nor beasts roam not near it:
Only a black whirlwind
Occasionally would fly nearby –
And rush away, but already deadly.

And if a wondering cloud would sprinkle
Upon its dense foliage,
From its branches, the toxic rain
Flows down into the sizzling sand.

But a human sent another human
To the Upas tree with a commanding glance;
And he obediently set off on a journey,
Returning by the morning with the poison.
Prin'os on smertniu smolu
Da vte' s uv'adshimi listami,
I pot po blednomu chelu
Struils'a khladnymi ruchïami;
Prin'os i oslabel, i l'og
Pod svodom shalasha na lyki,
I umer bednyï rab u nog
Nepobedimogo vladyki.

Meanwhile the Tsar drenched with that poison
His obedient arrows
And sent around death
To  n e i g h b o u r s  i n  f o r e i g n  l a n d s .

Not the wind blowing from on high
Not the wind blowing from on high
Has touched the leaves in the moonlit night –
My soul has been touched by you:
It is as sensitive as the lyre's strings.
The blizzard of life was tearing it apart,
And with the crushing attack,
Whistling and howling, tore the strings,
And covered my soul with icy snow;
But your voice caresses my hearing,
Your touch is as light
As the down flying from the flowers,
Like a breeze of the May night.
Prorok
Op. 49, No. 2
Alexander Pushkin

Dukhovnoi zhazhdoiu tomim
V put'nye mrachnoi ta vladali a,
I sharestvlyi saraful
Na pereputie me ne izvili a.
Perstami l'ogkim, kak son,
Meikh zenits konul' ci on:
Otrezlii vesch' le zenitsy,
Kak u isugannoi orelnii.
Meikh uzhel konul' ci on,
I akh napolnul shum i zvon:
I vnal i nebi sodroganie,
I gornii angelov pol'ot,
I god monshkih podrodnih khod,
I dol'nei losi pote abanie,
I on k uztam moim pritnik
I vyval greshnyi moi izyik,
I prazdnoslovnyi, i lukavyi,
I zhali wydliu zmee,
V usta zamershiie moi.

Vozhil disnitsii krovatoi,
I on moe gud' raz'oik mezhom,
I serdtse trepetnoi vyruul,
I ugl', pylaush'ii ego'om,
V gud' orvezstvuii vodivuiul.
Kak trup, v put'nye iu lezhal.
I Bog' gud' ko me vozval:
'Vostsan', prorok, i vizh', i vnemli,
Ispol'ni' voletu moei,
I, obskho'da mot' a i zemli,
Glagolom zhi serdina l'udei.'

The Prophet

Termented by spiritual anguish
I dragged myself through a grim desert,
And a six-winged seraphim
Appeared to me at a crossroad,
With his fingers, light as a dream,
He touched my eye:
They burst open wide, all-seeing,
Like those of a startled eagle.
He touched my ear.
And they were filled with clamour and ringing:
I heard the rumbling of the heavens,
The high flight of the angels,
The crawling of the underwater reptilians
And the germinating of the grapevine in the valleys.
He pressed against my lips
And tore out my tongue,
Both exuberant and shy,
And into my frozen lips
The sting of a wise snake
He pushed with his bloody hand.
He cleared my chest with a sword
And took out my trembling heart,
And thrust into my opened breast
A flaming piece of coal.
I lay in the desert like a corpse,
And God’s voice called to me:
‘Arise, my prophet, behold and bark,
Submit to my will,
And, traveling across the seas and lands,
Spark people’s hearts with verse.’