
Wednesday 10 May

Programme notes

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873 – 1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18
(1900–01)
(33 mins)

Moderato
Adagio sostenuto
Allegro scherzando

Following the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony in 1897, Rachmaninov suffered from depression and writer's block lasting for nearly three years. The symphony had been poorly (perhaps drunkenly) conducted by Glazunov, and had received some severe criticism, with Rachmaninov himself denouncing it for being "weak, childish, strained and bombastic".

Even so, in 1899 Rachmaninov was invited by the Philharmonic Society to perform at the Queen's Hall in London, in the hope that he would play his Second Piano Concerto – a work that he had not yet started. In 1900 Rachmaninov sought the help of Nikolai Dahl, a doctor who specialised in psychotherapy and hypnotherapy. Daily sessions took place between January and April, and by the summer, "new musical ideas began to stir".

Rachmaninov then visited Italy, where he stayed with opera singer Feodor Chaliapin, starting work on what would become his most enduring and beloved work, the Piano Concerto No. 2. Initial ideas coalesced on his return to Russia in August, and the second and third movements were performed in December 1900 with Rachmaninov as soloist.

Even in its incomplete state the concerto was warmly received, and Rachmaninov felt encouraged to write the first movement.

The work was finished in April 1901, and Rachmaninov gave the first performance of the complete concerto in the winter of the same year, with his cousin, Alexander Siloti, conducting. Rachmaninov dedicated the concerto to Dahl.

The Second Piano Concerto was immediately recognised for its maturity and skill, winning Rachmaninov the first of five Glinka Prizes. Writing in Moscow newspaper *Russkiye Vedomosti*, Joel Engel argued that although the death of Rimsky-Korsakov had left Russia bereft, Rachmaninov's development softened the blow: "In the realm of opera a great void has been left by the death of *The Snow-Maiden's* composer... The symphonic and chamber music of Russia is more fortunate. Its future is in strong, trustworthy hands. Here Rachmaninov is in the front rank."

The first movement opens with dramatic chords for piano alone, after which a brooding theme is unfurled by violins, violas and clarinets. A wistful, yearning theme is presented by the piano, and the movement ends with a brilliant coda.

The achingly beautiful slow movement, which shows the influence of Tchaikovsky, is one of Rachmaninov's greatest achievements. The lyrical music gently ebbs and flows, teasingly building and then subsiding until a more animated section leads into the piano's cadenza, after which a climactic moment unleashes radiant piano chords and full-throated orchestral writing.

It is the orchestra that opens the finale, the piano answering with a flurry of activity before a series of glittering exchanges. As with the first movement, Rachmaninov holds back the more

lyrical theme, which is heard first in the oboe and strings, to be taken up by the piano with increasing passion before the work reaches a conclusion that is at once sumptuous and exhilarating.

Programme notes by Joanna Wyld
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Interval (20 mins)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908)

Scheherazade, Op. 35 (1888)
(42 mins)

The Sea and Sinbad's Ship
The Tale of the Kalendar Prince
The Young Prince and The Young Princess
Festival at Baghdad. The Sea.

**Ship Breaks upon a Cliff Surmounted by a
Bronze Horseman**

The late musicologist Richard Taruskin describes Rimsky-Korsakov as an “inspired musical illustrator of fairytales”. So it is with this 1888 orchestral suite, which loosely tells the tale of Scheherazade, the young bride from the *Arabian Nights* who protects herself from death by telling nightly stories to her barbaric husband, the Sultan. So why was it that while many of his countrymen were still turning to Russian history and folk music as inspiration for their operas and symphonies, Rimsky-Korsakov looked further East, to the mythical world of the Orient?

In 1887 the composer Alexander Borodin died. Rimsky-Korsakov set to work orchestrating his compatriot's unfinished opera, *Prince Igor*. The opera, with its exotic Eastern setting complete with harem girls and Polovtsian chiefs, would

have been on his mind, but in his memoirs Rimsky-Korsakov cites an earlier episode in his life, dating back to his early days as a sailor: “It was while hearing the gypsy-musicians of Bakhchisaray [near Sevastopol on the Black Sea] that I first became acquainted with oriental music in its natural state, and I believe I caught the main feature of its character.”

Geographically and culturally speaking, there is of course a world of difference between the ‘East’ of the Black Sea and the non-specific Eastern landscape of the *Arabian Nights*. But for Rimsky-Korsakov, and indeed many audiences in the 19th century, those kinds of distinctions were unimportant. Indeed, in 1910 the impresario Sergei Diaghilev realised that there was serious money to be made from the glamorous appeal of the ‘Eastern’ other, with his famous and highly lucrative enterprise the Ballets Russes.

They never performed in Russia, but thanks to Diaghilev his performers and musicians initiated a vibrant era of cultural exchange in the city of Paris. Diaghilev actively traded on the stereotype of Russian culture as glamorous, sensual and savage. Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* – with its overtones of brutality and its fashionable Eastern setting – was perfect material for Diaghilev's needs, and it was performed as a ballet to great acclaim.

The music, just like the costumes and scandalous dancing (Vladislav Nijinsky's astonishing leaps! Those harem pants!) that accompanied it in 1910, is best enjoyed as a work of fantasy; an idealised, intoxicating vision of otherness – with all the allure that our imaginations allow.

Programme notes by Sophie Rashbrook
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Scheherazade

Listening Guide

Scheherazade ballet set design by Bakst, public domain



“All I wanted,” said Rimsky-Korsakov, “was that the hearer, if he liked the piece as symphonic music, should carry away the impression that it is undoubtedly an oriental narrative of numerous and varied fairytale marvels, and not merely four pieces played one after the other and based on themes common to all four.”

But once you picture the characters in the story – the stern Sultan and his young wife – it is impossible not to read a literal narrative onto the work’s recurring musical motifs. In particular, that stern bass line in the opening movement must surely represent the murderous Sultan, while even Rimsky-Korsakov conceded that the improvisatory violin solo, with its sumptuous harp accompaniment, evokes Scheherazade as she conjures her wondrous tales. There is a reason that Rimsky-Korsakov’s guide to orchestration is still studied in conservatoires today: you are in the hands of a master musical storyteller, so sit back, relax, and enjoy the journey.

The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship (Largo)

‘Sinbad sailing the sea’ was the original title of this movement, and it’s pleasing to recall that Rimsky-Korsakov’s depiction of the waves is rooted in his own personal experience as a

sailor. A cello solo evokes the waves beneath a surging melody that floods through the whole orchestra.

The Tale of the Kalendar Prince (Andante)

The second movement opens with a return to Scheherazade’s rhapsodic violin theme – swiftly interrupted by a stab of tremolo strings and an impish triplet exchange between the trombone and the trumpet. We have arrived in the *Tale of the Kalendar Prince*, and now we start to understand why Rimsky-Korsakov refused to be drawn on precise plot points: the *Arabian Nights* feature three different Kalendar Princes, and it’s not entirely clear which one is referenced here. No matter: there is high drama and excitement aplenty, with a sense of threat looming throughout.

The Young Prince and The Young Princess (Andantino)

From its opening moments, ‘The Romance of the Young Prince and Princess’, as this movement was previously known, exudes a heady, romantic perfume. It has a singing quality, characterised by lilting phrasing that dovetails naturally with the voice of Scheherazade.

Festival at Baghdad (Allegro molto)

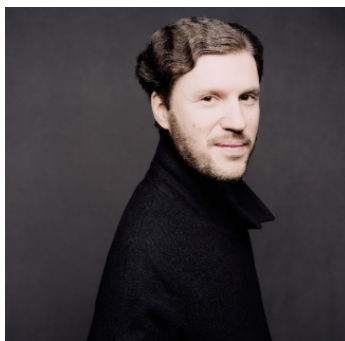
The Sultan’s theme returns in a rapid triplet variation that alternates with the violin part, before we embark on a dizzying tour of fragmented musical episodes. Finally, with a final utterance and sky-high harmonic in the violin, Scheherazade’s tale reaches its happy conclusion: a testament to the power of storytelling.

Listening guide by Sophie Rashbrook

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Stanislav Kochanovsky

Conductor



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Stanislav Kochanovsky was born in St Petersburg and studied at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. He is now considered one of the brightest and most promising young conductors from Russia today. With an in-depth knowledge and experience of a wide range of symphonic and operatic repertoire gleaned during his formative years conducting at the Mikhailovsky Theatre and as a Chief Conductor of the State Safonov Philharmonic Orchestra, Kochanovsky is now receiving attention from orchestras and opera houses around the world.

A regular guest of the Philharmonia, Orchestre de Paris, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Danish National Symphony, Netherlands Philharmonic, Dresden Philharmonie, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, Malaysian Philharmonic and of the main Russian orchestras such as the St Petersburg Philharmonic, Mariinsky Orchestra, Russian National Orchestra, National Philharmonic of Russia and Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, Stanislav has also had successful debuts with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Wiener Symphoniker, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra,

HR-Sinfonieorchester of Frankfurt, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Israel Philharmonic.

Following the success of his debut at the Verbier Festival in 2017 with the Verbier Festival Academy, he is now a regular guest there, conducting *Eugene Onegin* (2017), *Rigoletto* (2018), *The Magic Flute* (2019) and, in 2022, *Hansel and Gretel*. Stanislav is a regular guest of Stars of the White Nights (St Petersburg), Klarafestival (Brussels) and MITO SettembreMusica (Torino and Milan).

Opera engagements have included *Pique Dame* and *Eugene Onegin* (Opernhaus Zürich), *Iolanta* (Maggio Musicale Fiorentino), *Prince Igor* (Dutch National Opera Amsterdam) and *Boris Godunov* (Korean National Opera). As a guest conductor, Stanislav regularly performs at the Mariinsky Theatre, and has over 30 operas in his repertoire.

Stanislav Kochanovsky attended the Glinka Choir School in his hometown of St Petersburg before graduating with honours at the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatoire. His collaboration with the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St Petersburg began in 2007 where, from the age of 25, he was given the opportunity to conduct over 60 opera and ballet performances.

Alexei Volodin

Piano

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Acclaimed for his highly sensitive touch and technical brilliance, Alexei Volodin is in demand by orchestras at the highest level.

Highlights of the 2022/23 season include returns to the Philharmonia Orchestra, Singapore Symphony, Winnipeg Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège and Euskadiko Orkestra, and first appearances with the Kyoto Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal. Volodin will join the Orchestre de chambre fribourgeois at Besançon International Music Festival and tour with Symfonieorkest Vlaanderen throughout Belgium and the Netherlands with the Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1. He returns to SWR Symphonieorchester in a chamber concert of Franck and Schoenberg at the Pentecost Festival Baden-Baden, and joins forces with Igor Levit for duo performances at Wigmore Hall and Lucerne Piano Festival.

Previous seasons have included performances with the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, NCPA Orchestra China, BBC Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, The Mariinsky Orchestra and St Petersburg Philharmonic, working with

conductors Stanislav Kochanovsky, Semyon Bychkov and Robert Trevino.

Volodin regularly appears in recital in venues such as Wiener Konzerthaus, Barcelona's Palau de la Música, Mariinsky Theatre, the Paris Philharmonie, Alte Oper Frankfurt and Madrid's Auditorio Nacional de Música, and at festivals including the Kaposvár International Chamber Music Festival, Festival Les nuits du Château de la Moutte, Bad Kissingen Sommer Festival, Les Rencontres Musicales d'Évian, Festival La Folle Journée and the St Magnus International Festival. This season he performs at Tonhalle Zürich, Geneva, Taipei National Concert Hall, Lithuanian National Philharmonic Hall and across Spain.

An active chamber musician, he has enjoyed collaborations with Sol Gabetta, Janine Jansen, Julian Rachlin and Mischa Maisky, as well as the Borodin Quartet, Modigliani Quartet, Cuarteto Casals and Cremona Quartet.

Volodin's latest album with the Mariinsky label was Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 4. Recording for Challenge Classics, Volodin's disc of solo Rachmaninov works was released in 2013. He also recorded a solo album of Schumann, Ravel and Scriabin, and his earlier Chopin disc won a Choc de Classica and was awarded five stars by *Diapason* magazine.

Born in 1977 in Leningrad, Alexei Volodin studied at Moscow's Gnessin Academy and later with Eliso Virsaladze at the Moscow Conservatoire. In 2001, he continued his studies at the International Piano Academy Lake Como and gained international recognition following his victory at the International Géza Anda Competition in Zürich in 2003.

Alexei Volodin is an exclusive Steinway artist.