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27 February 2022 6pm

St John's Smith Square

TCHAIKOVSKY Violin Concerto

INTERVAL

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV Scheherazade

Dmitry Sitkovetsky *(Violin)*

Royal Orchestral Society

Leader Christian Halstead

Ronald Corp O.B.E. (*Conductor*)

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PYOTR ILYCH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Violin Concerto in D op.35

1877 was a fateful year for Tchaikovsky. He began a long and fruitful (though purely epistolary) relationship with the wealthy arts patron Nadezhda von Meck, and in July entered into a disastrous marriage, the strain of which drove him to a nervous collapse and an attempt at suicide. To recover, he fled to Western Europe, and at Clarens, Switzerland in the spring of 1878 he was joined by a Russian friend, the violinist Joseph Kotek. The two began playing violin repertoire together, and Tchaikovsky, stimulated in particular by their rendition of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, was inspired to write a violin concerto. He composed it in just eleven days—the first movement "*sprang suddenly into my head*" he recalled—and orchestrated it in two weeks.

The intended dedicatee, violinist Leopold Auer, pronounced the solo part awkward to the point of being unplayable, and several years passed before the concerto was performed. It finally had its premiere in Vienna on December 4, 1881, with a new soloist and dedicatee, Adolf Brodsky. It was not well received. Conservative critic and theorist Eduard Hanslick,

an ardent partisan of Brahms, wrote a famously damning review. He called Brodsky a martyr, sneering: "*the violin is no longer played, but rent asunder, beaten black and blue*." He dismissed the music itself as long, tasteless, undiscriminating, wretched, pretentious, crude, brutal, deplorable, coarse, and vulgar; at the end of the review, he actually used the word "*stink*." Tchaikovsky was deeply hurt; apparently, he could recite this review by heart for the rest of his life.

It is difficult to fathom how this concerto, of all pieces, could invite such a torrent of invective, for it shows Tchaikovsky at the height of his inspiration and technique. It has become one of the most popular concertos in the repertoire, and yet still manages to sound fresh—a testimony to the strength and vitality of Tchaikovsky's ideas.

There are two striking departures from an otherwise conventional classical sonata form. The first is the short orchestral introduction, which begins with an attractive eight-bar melody, mostly in the strings, which could have served perfectly well as one of the main themes. But it is never heard again, neither is it needed again-—its sole function is to set the lyrical, pastoral tone of the movement, while dramatically delaying the entrance of the soloist and the first main theme.

The second departure is the placement of the solo cadenza just before, rather than after, the recapitulation, where it serves partly as development, partly to intensify the return to the main key and the first main theme.

The lyricism of the first movement is given a fuller voice in the second—the Canzonetta (*little song*). It opens with a chorale-like melody in the woodwinds that will return to herald the recapitulation (strings), to make a coda (woodwinds), and to effect a striking transition to the finale (strings and woodwinds in dialogue).

Even in the dazzling rondo finale, a lyrical element emerges prominently—the main theme is bustling and vivacious, subjected to imaginative and unpredictable development as the movement unfolds. However, its progress is twice interrupted at length by a slower, more soulful and brooding complex of related motifs. All of the melodic ideas in the finale, as the composer acknowledged, have a strong Russian flavour, sometimes emphasized by rustic effects in the scoring—drone basses in the cellos, for instance, and certain features of the solo-violin part (throaty melodies in the low register, portamento, high harmonics) conjuring the sounds of a peasant fiddle.

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)

Scheherazade

Rimsky-Korsakov started strictly as an amateur composer, with little formal training. Nevertheless, in 1871 his reputation for ultra modern music brought an offer of the Professorship in Practical composition at St. Petersburg Conservatoire. He claimed that, at the time, he could not harmonise a chorale, had never done any exercises in counterpoint, had no idea of strict fugue, and could not even name the chords and intervals. More significantly, he knew little of instrumental techniques and capabilities. Still, he accepted, bluffing his way through, teaching himself one step ahead of his students, eventually becoming acknowledged as the finest composition teacher Russia had ever produced.

Composer of symphonies, choral music, songs, piano works, editions of Mussorgsky, Borodin and folksongs, his main claim to fame lay in his 15 operas and numerous orchestral pieces, where his vivid imagination, often fuelled by the exotic experiences of his naval career, could roam free. *Scheherazade*'s specific inspiration was *The Tales of the Arabian Nights*. The scenario, inscribed on the score, concerns the mighty and misogynous Sultan Sharyar who enjoyed his nuptial pleasures without the risk of acquiring a life-long nag by the politically-incorrect, but temptingly convenient, expedient of having each wife executed the morning after. However, Scheherazade enchanted him with wondrous tales, each of which she craftily left unfinished at the night's end. Left gagging for more, Sharyar repeatedly had to stay the execution, finally admitting defeat.

Rimsky remains the Master Magician of orchestration, surpassing even Wagner and Berlioz (whose *Treatise on Orchestration* taught him the art). His best work is utterly unrivalled in the quality of its scoring - entrancing sounds conjured by the very *simplest* of means. The music of *Scheherazade* is like a magic carpet: it can transport you to another world.

The Sea and Sinbad's Ship Two memorable mottos represent the protagonists: Sharyar, majestic and fearsome on bass strings and heavy brass, and Scheherazade, sinuously seductive on solo violin over harp arpeggios. The movement alternates three climactic passages predominantly scored for strings and brass, casting Sharyar in the role of Sinbad, with three calm twilit episodes featuring both mottos.

The Tale of the Kalendar Prince The Kalendars were wandering beggars, for some superstitious reason fêted as royalty. The movement is a ternary form (ABA) regarding deployment of themes, but otherwise a kaleidoscope of increasingly colourful variations, making atmospheric use of string tremolandos and thrummings, and characteristically pricking textures with sharper sounds. Scheherazade weaves her spell to introduce the A theme - half dancing, half declamatory - on the only woodwind not yet heard solo: the bassoon (resolving a sort of dissonance). The B theme is based on Sharyar, first heard plucked deep in the basses, then in fierce growls and brassy fanfares. A bold march gradually emerges, bracketed by two cadenzas on the declamatory part of A. The first is for clarinet, the second (on bassoon) initiates the final section, containing the most exquisite scoring of the entire work. Sharyar reappears, low down, generating a huge crescendo to a knockout close.

The Young Prince and Princess Invent a story of young love, if you wish - Rimsky provided scant clues: the sumptuous main theme he identified with the Prince, a brief counter-subject (rippling clarinet) with the Princess, and at the central allegretto he suggested, They carry the Princess on a palanquin. Again, this is a ternary/ variations form. The first section rings the changes on string textures tinted by added wind, with contrasting solo woodwind timbres. The allegretto, one of those wonderful oriental dances, is just an upbeat variation of the same material, where the snare-drum part is played on more than the snare-drum. A resounding trumpet-led rubato reinstates tempo primo for a rhapsodic closing section where solo instruments predominate, and Scheherazade embroiders the tale. The codetta is particularly captivating, woodwind swirl over string pizzicati and scintillating percussion: what images *that* conjures!

Festival at Baghdad The orchestration reaches a peak of virtuosity, inevitably with less subtlety as the big guns are drawn to blast huge splashes of poster-colour. Paralleling the work's beginning, the introduction finds Sharyar now gruffly impatient (grabbing first whack on the bass drum), and Scheherazade correspondingly more animated. The Festival is, loosely, a rondo/variations: AB[AC]ABA, where [C], developing the Kalendar fanfare, hijacks the second [A]'s climax. The first and third occurrences of [A], a skittering dance, whip up a blaze of crackling trumpets and booming tuttis - these last based on the the Kalendar Prince's bassoon tune. [B] is the palanquin allegretto, liquidly re-scored. The final [A] builds manically, trumpets triple-tonguing like mad, only for the scene to cut cinematographically to Sinbad's storm-tossed ship, which shudders (theme stuttering in basses) and breaks (tamtam!). In the stunned calm one recognises, through the thematic identity, that this symbolises Sharyar's rising passion for his enchantress and cataclysmic acquiescence to the superiority of woman (or at least this *particular* woman). Sharyar and Scheherazade finally make sweet music together.

A renaissance man and a magnetic creative force, **Dmitry Sitkovetsky** is recognised throughout the world for his versatility - violinist, conductor, creator, recording artist, transcriber, and facilitator.

Over the four decades since the launch of his career in Vienna's Musikverein in 1979, Dmitry has worked with many of the world's great conductors and orchestras – Sir Neville Marriner, Mariss Jansons, Sir Colin Davis, Yuri Temirkanov; Berlin PO, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony, Philharmonia, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, LA Philharmonic, Philadelphia, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Bayerischer RF, Munich PO and the NHK Symphony. His celebrated career as a violinist is documented in an extensive discography of more than forty recordings, reflecting the impressive breadth of his repertoire from J.S.Bach to Shchedrin.

Dmitry has also established a flourishing career as a conductor, and has worked with the Academy of St-Martin-In-The-Fields, London Philharmonic, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, Orchestra della Toscana, San Francisco Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Shanghai Symphony, and Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra, In 1990, he founded the New European Strings Chamber Orchestra (NES), bringing together the most distinguished string players from the top European ensembles, from both Russian and Western musical backgrounds (reflecting Dmitry's own life story).

Since 2003, Dmitry has served as the Music Director of the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, North Carolina, to whom he has brought such soloists as Emmanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, Lynn Harrell, and Pinchas Zukerman.

Dmitry begins 2022 playing Tchaikovsky Concerto in London, Brahms Concerto in Japan, Stravinsky Divertimento in Israel, Beethoven Triple Concerto in Dublin; returning later to Korsholm, Ljubljana, Jerusalem and Enescu festivals as well as Baku and Moscow.

Conductor and composer **Ronald Corp** is the founder and Artistic Director of the New London Orchestra and the New London Children's Choir and also Musical Director of the London Chorus and the Highgate Choral Society.

With the New London Orchestra, he has recorded a number of award-winning CDs for Hyperion including the popular British Light Music Classics series, and also has recorded Rutland Boughton's opera '*The Queen of Cornwall*' for Dutton. He has worked with the BBC Singers and the BBC Concert Orchestra including appearances at the Proms and has conducted the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Ulster Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Symphony Orchestra as well as undertaking engagements abroad.

His compositions include three symphonies and large-scale choral-orchestral works as well as chamber music and operas. His experience and expertise in choral directing are crystallised in the textbook, *The Choral Singer's Companion.* Ronald Corp has received Honorary Doctorates from Anglian Ruskin and Hull universities and was awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours List 2012.

THE ORCHESTRA

Violin 1
Christian Halstead
Aimee Truesdale
Steve Rowlinson
Geraldine Andrews
Jackie Burwell
Teresa Coakley
Michael Malone
Martin Anthony Burrage
Alice Beadle

Violin 2
Katie Lander
Philip Burwell
Adrienne Freeman
Alice Garland
Peter Steele
Raymond Mack
Flora Fontanelli
Chloe Meade

Viola
Rosemary Cook
Susannah Rang
Jeremy Cook
SoniaTuttiet
Janet Farrell
John Dawson

Cello
John Best
Hugh Larsen
Daniel Ivens
Emily Farrell
Francis Norton
Sarah Harding

Double Bass
Manuel dell'Oglio
Chiuyung Chan
Antonio Diaz Fernandez
Fabian Galeana

Flutes
Joanna Murray
Frances Hall

Oboe
Paul Blaker
Anna Pyshkin

Clarinet
Ian Pay
Katie Horten-Middleton

Bassoon
Simon Upcott
Jeremy Crump

Horn
Sophie Prett
Emma Edwards
Derek Holland
Richard Slater

Trumpet
Benjamin Day
Pippa Scourse
Rob Cossins

Trombone
Simon Astridge
Jacob Smallwood
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Tuba
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In 2022–23 the Royal Orchestral Society will celebrate its 150th anniversary

Founded in 1872 by the Duke of Edinburgh (hence its 'Royal' status), the first concert took place at the Royal Albert Hall in 1873

During its long history the orchestra has been joined by many leading soloists and conductors

Please join us to celebrate 150 years of joyous music making through a series of special concerts and events, reflecting ROS's history and present.

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ROS|ROYAL ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY

1872-2022

Sunday 13th November 2022 7pm

St John's Smith Square

Choral concert

This concert celebrates our long-standing relationship with the London Chorus, and will be conducted by its Musical Director, Ronald Corp OBE

The programme includers Arthur Sullivan's *Festival Te Deum* and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*

Sunday 29th January 2023 7pm

St John's Smith Square

British Orchestral Works

For the second concert of the season, we hear some of the most iconic orchestral works by British composers

Britten's *Sea Interludes*

Vaughan-Williams *Symphony No.2* (*A London Symphony*)

Coates *Dambuster's March*

combined with lesser-known gems -

Philip White's *Tuba Concerto* played by Ross Knight and

Arthur Sullivan's Concert Overture *Di Ballo* (Sullivan conducted ROS's first concert in 1873)

Conducted by Adrian Brown

Sunday 19th March 2023 7pm

Cadogan Hall

Mahler Symphony No.3

Orlando Jopling – former principal conductor for over ten years – returns to lead the orchestra plus choir and soloists in Mahler's Third Symphony - a work typical of ROS's ambitious programming

Sunday 25th June 2023, 7pm

TBA

Gala concert

The finale of the 150th season will include:

A new piece by our patron Judith Weir CBE (commissioned by ROS for the occasion)

Dvořák's Symphony No.6 (reputedly given its first UK performance by our orchestra)

A selection of arias performed by soprano Janice Watson

A number of other orchestral gala favourites.

Followed by a drinks reception to round off a great season!

Conductor TBA

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