

## Rimsky-Korsakov - Christmas Eve, Night on Mount Triglav (1996)

Written by bluesever

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01. Christmas Eve:1.Introduction (Overture)-Scene VI [0:03:50.32] 02. Christmas Eve:2.Games and Dances of Stars [0:01:35.37] 03. Christmas Eve:3.Procession of the Comet [0:00:44.66] 04. Christmas Eve:4.Round Dance [0:01:43.50] 05. Christmas Eve:5.Czardas and the rain of shooting stars [0:00:48.65] 06. Christmas Eve:6.Devil's kolyadka-Scene VII [0:05:25.72] 07. Christmas Eve:7.Polonaise [0:05:40.25] 08. Christmas Eve:8.Scene VIII [0:02:22.68] 09. Christmas Eve:9.Ovsyen and Kolyada-Procession [0:04:04.40] 10. Night on Mount Triglav:1.Introduction to Act III,Scene I [0:06:58.62] 11. Night on Mount Triglav:2.Ronde fantastique [0:03:18.28] 12. Night on Mount Triglav:3.Scene II [0:05:47.02] 13. Night on Mount Triglav:4.Scene III [0:01:08.12] 14. Night on Mount Triglav:5.Ronde infernale [0:03:11.61] 15. Night on Mount Triglav:6.Scene IV [0:09:49.22] 16. Night on Mount Triglav:7.Scene V [0:04:20.25] 17. The Tsar's Bride:Overture [0:06:48.38] 18. The Tsar's Bride:Intermezzo [0:01:59.05] 19. On the Tomb: (prelude) op.61 [0:04:29.17] 20. Greetings [0:01:09.50] Moscow Symphony Orchestra Igor Golovschin – conductor

Russian cultural nationalism in the nineteenth century had its musical reflection first in the work of Glinka and then in that of group of five composers, Vladimir Stasov's Mighty Handful, dominated by Balakirev. The group included César Cui, a professor of military fortification, the young guards officer Mussorgsky, the professor of chemistry Borodin and a young naval officer, Rimsky-Korsakov. Born in 1844, this last had followed his childhood ambition and family tradition by entering the naval college in 1856. He had shown an early interest and ability in music, and these he was able to further during his naval career, which lasted until his resignation from the service in 1872. Thereafter he spent a dozen years as Inspector of Naval Bands, a civilian position specially created for him, through the influence of his family, and only abolished in 1884. This led him to develop a particular interest in instrumentation, an aspect of music that had fascinated him since his first experience of opera, Flotow's Indra, which he had seen in St Petersburg in 1857.

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Rimsky-Korsakov had first met Balakirev, Cui and Mussorgsky in 1861, but contact had been broken during a two-and-a-half-year tour of naval duty abroad. From this he returned with a completed symphony, which was performed under the direction of Balakirev at a Free School of Music concert in St Petersburg in 1865. The association with Balakirev was to continue, although the latter's personality, his jealousies and later fanatical religious preoccupations led eventually to a certain coolness. In particular, Rimsky-Korsakov was involved with the new circle of Belyayev, whose musical Friday evenings rivalled those earlier in the week over which Balakirev had long presided. He remained loyal, however, to the other members of the group and this loyalty led him to spend a great deal of time on their music. Mussorgsky died in 1881, leaving much work unfinished, and, in Rimsky-Korsakov's professional view, in need of revision. This he undertook. Similarly, the death of Borodin in 1887 left him the self-imposed task of completing the latter's opera Prince Igor, which he did with the help of his pupil Glazunov.

There were further interruptions in the 1890s to Rimsky-Korsakov's career as a composer, with bouts of depression, the result of cerebrospinal neurasthenia. In 1896 he had completed work on his opera Sadko, but the Tsar's request for something more cheerful led to a breach between the composer and the Imperial Theatres. The opera Mozart and Salieri, based on Pushkin, was staged by Mamontov's Private Russian Opera Company, and the later opera Pan Voyevoda was also entrusted to a private company. In 1905 the composer was involved in the student unrest of that year, as a result of which he was dismissed from the position he had held at the St Petersburg Conservatory since 1871. He was reinstated, with Glazunov and others, under the more liberal policies that followed. There had been student demonstrations in his support at performances of the opera Kaschey the Immortal and trouble with the censors prevented the staging of his last opera, The Golden Cockerel, until after his death, which took place in June 1908.

Although Rimsky-Korsakov's reputation outside Russia may rest primarily on a number of colourful orchestral works, his principal achievement must be seen to rest on his sixteen or so operas, major contributions to a relatively new repertoire. Christmas Eve (Noch' pered rozhdestvom) was completed in 1895 and first staged in December that year at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. The opera is based on a story by Gogol that had also served as the basis of operas by Tchaikovsky and Nikolay Solov'yov among others and it was the former's death in 1893 that allowed Rimsky-Korsakov to tackle the same tale, which he did with a libretto of his own, describing the work as 'a carol come to life'. To Gogol he added elements of Slav mythology and this he later regarded as a mistake, although the subject had, as he said, allowed him to write a great deal of interesting music. The first staging was almost prevented by the intervention of the Grand Dukes Vladimir Alexandrovich and Mikhail Nikolayevich, who attended the dress rehearsal and took strong exception to the presence on stage of a character that they identified with their ancestress the Empress Catherine II. Last minute changes were made and the production went ahead, in the absence of the composer, who had found the objections and the necessary substitution of a baritone for the mezzo-soprano Queen of the original version ridiculous.

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Gogol's story deals with the witch Solokha, mother of the blacksmith Vakula. She agrees, in collusion with the Devil, angry at Vakula's caricature of him in an icon, to steal the moon, thereby preventing Vakula from wooing his beloved Oxana. With no moon or stars, all is dark, leading to great confusion. Solokha, in search of a lover, entertains the Devil, hiding him in a sack when the village headman appears. He in turn is hidden in a sack, when another visitor arrives, the parish clerk, to be hidden in a sack when Chub, Oxana's father arrives, making for the Devil's sack as Vakula returns. Outside the hut carols are sung. Oxana makes fun of Vakula and demands that he fetch her a pair of boots from the Tsaritsa, while the carol-singers free the village notables hidden in the sacks that Vakula has brought out. On his journey to court, Vakula carries the sack of the Devil, who leaps out to offer a bargain, Oxana for his soul. Vakula carries the sack of the Devil, who leaps out to offer a bargain, Oxana for his soul. Vakula will not agree, but forces the Devil to take him forward on his journey to the palace. There, amid court entertainments, Vakula asks for the Tsaritsa's boots. The request is granted and the Devil now spirits Vakula away home again. All ends in happiness when Vakula, believed dead, returns, welcomed by Oxana who wants him rather than the boots he has brought. The composer drew an orchestral suite from the score, well aware of the faults he saw in the opera as a whole. The orchestral suite opens with an introduction that sets the scene of a starry moonlit night, before the Devil and Solokha succeed in securing darkness. The other excerpts bring a series of dances, culminating in the triumphant kolyadka of the Devil. An extended Polonaise is heard in the royal palace. Vakula returns home on Christmas morning and final celebration of Ovsyen, the New Year, and Kolyada, the first day of the month, is heard, associating Christmas with the earlier pagan festival.

In 1872 Rimsky-Korsakov had been commissioned, together with Cui, Borodin and Mussorgsky, to provide the music for an elaborate staged fairy ballet, *Mlada*. Before the work could be mounted, however, the director of the Court Theatre found the whole project beyond his resources. Rimsky-Korsakov returned to the subject of *Mlada* in an opera staged in 1891, influenced now by his first hearing of Wagner's Ring cycle in 1889. The new opera won no great success and was soon withdrawn. *Night on Mount Triglav* is an orchestral arrangement of the third act of the opera of 1890, redrafted in this form in 1901, and followed two years later by a suite from the whole opera. *Night on Mount Triglav* was among the compositions by Rimsky-Korsakov performed in Paris in 1907 in a series of five concerts of Russian music devised by Dyagilev that also included the orchestral music from *Christmas Eve*.

The third act of *Mlada* is set on Mount Triglav, the mountain of three peaks, where the soul of *Mlada* seeks the spirit of her beloved Prince in his dreams. The scene is that of Mussorgsky's *Night on Bare Mountain*, but here it is set in an opening dream-world in the introduction to the act. The introduction depicts a starry night on the mountain. There is a fantastic dance of the ghosts of the dead, with their midsummer garlands. The shade of Princess *Mlada* leads Prince Yaromir up the mountainside, and he begs her to forgive him for his threatened infidelity, asking

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her to allow him entry to the world of shades. He must first undergo various trials and now the moon turns red and witches's sabbath begins, with the monstrous creatures that surround the demon Chernobog. Morena, goddess of the underworld, asks Chernobog to use his magic to make Yaromir fall in love with Voyslava, the princess who has murdered Mlada. Kashchey the Deathless now conjures up a vision of Cleopatra, to seductively oriental melodies, but the cock crows, dawn breaks, and Yaromir wakes from his dream, now resolved to find out its meaning. In the following act he is united with Mlada, after killing Voyslava, their spirits seen together after an inundation that has destroyed Voyslava's city of Retra and the temple where Yaromir has sought an answer to his dilemma.

Rimsky-Korsakov completed his opera *The Tsar's Bride* in 1898. The work was first staged in Moscow the following year by Mamontov's company. Based on a play by Lev Alexandrovich Mey, the opera is set in the reign of Ivan the Terrible and deals with the attempt of the powerful oprichnik Gryaznoy to win the love of Marfa, already promised by her father to a young nobleman, Ivan Likov. Gryaznoy is loved by Lyubasha, who vows revenge on her rival. Marfa, however, is chosen as the Tsar's bride. Her lover is killed by Gryaznoy, while Marfa goes out of her mind, poisoned by Lyubasha, who is stabbed to death by Gryaznoy, now mistaken by Marfa in her delirium for her first betrothed, Vanya. The Overture provides an impressive and apt introduction to the first act, set in Gryaznov's house. The Intermezzo, drawn from the second act, uses material associated from the first act with Lyubasha, who now steals in, peering through the window of Marfa's house and understanding that this is her rival.

*On the Tomb*, written in 1904, laments the death of Mitrofan Petrovich Belyayev, to whose interest and encouragement Russian composers of the time owed so much. Belyayev, an amateur musician, had been able to set up a publishing company in Leipzig, under the name Belaieff, and to sponsor concerts of Russian music. The establishment of a publishing company outside Russia was of importance for the protection of international copyright, not provided by publication in Russia itself. In his will Belyayev left much of his fortune to the continuation of the projects with which he had been associated, music-publishing, the sponsoring of concerts and the provision of prizes for young musicians. Rimsky-Korsakov's tribute to him, based on liturgical material and the sound of the death knell that he recalled from his childhood, was performed at the first Lenten concert of the Russian Music Society in 1904, but seems to have attracted little attention. There is marked contrast between this work and *Greeting (Zdravitsa)*, written to celebrate Glazunov's jubilee in 1907 at the end of January and performed on the formal occasion that marked the event in a concert that included performances of Glazunov's First and Eight Symphonies and a *Greeting* written by Lyadov. This was only one of a number of celebrations of Glazunov's twenty-five years as a composer. ---naxos.com

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