



# RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

## Russian Easter Overture

**Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov**, a Russian composer, was born on March 18, 1844, and a member of the group of composers known as The Five.<sup>[a 2]</sup> He was a master of orchestration. His best-known orchestral compositions—*Capriccio Espagnol*, the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*, and the symphonic suite *Scheherazade*—are staples of the classical music repertoire, along with suites and excerpts from some of his 15 operas. *Scheherazade* is an example of his frequent use of fairy tale and folk subjects. Rimsky-Korsakov believed, as did fellow composer Mily Balakirev and critic Vladimir Stasov, in developing a nationalistic style of classical music. This style employed Russian folk song and lore along with exotic harmonic, melodic and rhythmic elements in a practice known as musical orientalism, and eschewed traditional Western compositional methods. However, Rimsky-Korsakov appreciated Western musical techniques after he became a professor of musical composition, harmony and orchestration at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in 1871. He undertook a rigorous three-year program of self-education and became a master of Western methods, incorporating them alongside the influences of Mikhail Glinka and fellow members of The Five. Rimsky-Korsakov left a considerable body of original Russian nationalist compositions. He prepared works by The Five for performance, which brought them into the active classical repertoire and shaped a generation of younger composers and musicians during his decades as an educator. Rimsky-Korsakov is therefore considered "the main architect" of what the classical music public considers the Russian style of composition. His influence on younger composers was especially important, as he served as a transitional figure between the autodidacticism which exemplified Glinka and The Five and professionally trained composers which would become the norm in Russia by the closing years of the 19th century. While Rimsky-Korsakov's style was based on those of Glinka, Balakirev, Hector Berlioz, and Franz Liszt, he "transmitted this style directly to two generations of Russian composers" and influenced non-Russian composers including Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy, Paul Dukas and Ottorino Respighi.

***Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op. 36*** (*Svetliy prazdnik*, also known as **The Great Russian Easter Overture**) is a concert overture written by the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov between August 1887 and April 1888. It is the last of the composer's series of three exceptionally brilliant orchestral works, preceded by *Capriccio Espagnol* and *Scheherazade*. The work received its premiere in St. Petersburg in late December 1888.

The tunes in the overture are largely from the Russian Orthodox liturgy, based on a collection of old Russian Orthodox liturgical chants called the *Obikhod*. Rimsky-Korsakov includes several biblical quotations in the score to guide the listener as to his intent, including Psalm 68 and Mark 16. In this overture, the composer, as he says in his autobiography, is eager to reproduce "the legendary and heathen aspect of the holiday, and the transition from the solemnity and mystery of the evening of Passion Saturday to the unbridled pagan-religious celebrations of Easter Sunday morning". Rimsky-Korsakov always had a great interest in - and enjoyment of - liturgical themes and music, though he was himself a non-believer (see main article Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and notes). Milos Velmirirovic explained that, "The Obikhod was like the Russian's Liber usualis... In 1848 it became mandatory for all of the Churches in Russia." Thus the Obikhod became nationalistic in a sense. The tunes that Rimsky chose from the Obikhod would carry a certain nationalistic and religious weight to them, and the Russians would absolutely know them. The second way that the piece helps to pull on the heart strings of Russians as well as express its nationalistic appeal is by drawing on religious subject matter via word painting for the Easter Holiday. Professor Robert Greenberg describes The Russian Easter Overture as, "A narrative story of a Russian Easter day from dawn until dusk." In Russian, Easter is known as the "Bright Holiday". In the 1880s Russia went by the Julian Calendar which means that Easter would be celebrated ten to eleven days before it would have been in Western Europe. Because of this difference in the calendars, Easter would coincide precisely with the first day of spring and thus the rebirth of life is a metaphor for the rebirth of Jesus. Because of this, for the Russians, Spring carries with it a religious and spiritual weight.