

The Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet, came from a musical family; he successively studied the clarinet, violin and brass instruments, which he used in fanfares; later he wrote military marches for the Swiss army which he did not consider important. Besides Music, he studied Mathematics in Lausanne and graduated with a Diploma in 1903; until 1906 he taught at the Lausanne Grammar School, then he decided to continue his studies at the Sorbonne and, at the same time, to attend courses at the Paris Conservatory. After his return to Lausanne, he taught Mathematics for one more year before devoting himself entirely to music.



Ansermet was a particular advocate of the Swiss composers Arthur Honegger and Frank Martin. He conducted the first performances of the following works of A. Honegger: Horace victorieux (1921), Chant de joie (1923), Rugby (1928) and Pacific 231 (1923), which was dedicated to him, and of the following works of Frank Martin: Symphonie (1938), In terra pax (1945), Der Sturm (1956), Le mystère de la Nativité (1959), Monsieur de Pourceaugnac (1963) and Les Quatre Éléments, which were dedicated to him. Also important were the first performances of Benjamin Britten's The Rape of Lucretia (1946) and Cantata misericordium (1963).

**GLAZUNOV**  
**STENKA RAZIN - Symphonic Poem**

**BALAKIREV**  
**THAMAR - Symphonic Poem**

**LIADOV**  
**KIKIMORA (Opus 63)**

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**Ernest Ansermet**

conducting  
**L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande**



**HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS**

Alexander Glazunov's brilliant Stenka Razin was one of the 20-year old composer's first successes. The work is a 16-minute tone poem in a style reminiscent of Tchaikovsky and Borodin; it was written, in fact, as a memorial to the latter. Stenka (the diminutive of Stepan) Razin was the leader of the Don Cossacks who rebelled against the ruling landowner during the reign of a weak czar. He was ultimately captured and executed, and quickly passed into legend, inspiring a body of enduring folk and epic literature. Glazunov's musical depiction is based on one such account, in which the hero has captured a Persian princess, along with other plunder, and sailed back to Russia. His servants and fellow fighters chide him for "going soft"; the young woman, they say, has dulled the fight in him. To prove them wrong, he offers Mother Volga "neither gold nor silver, but the most precious of all my possessions," throws the princess into the wide river, and leads his men into battle anew. The music is largely based on the well-known folk song "Song of the Volga Boatmen"; a contrasting "Persian" theme for clarinet represents the princess.

Russian composer Mily Balakirev's symphonic poem Tamara, or Thamar, today one of his best-known works, was the result of 15 years of thought. One of the leaders of the famed Mighty Handful, Balakirev produced a colorful orchestral work that affected not only his fellow Russian composers, especially Rimsky-Korsakov and Ippolitov-Ivanov, but also the generation following, including Sibelius and Ravel.

Tamara was based on a ballad by the poet Mikhail Lermontov, himself inspired by an ancient local legend while exiled to the Caucasus. Balakirev initially saw the work as a possible symbol of the recent political unification of the Caucasus under Russian rule. The poetic style and romantic language of the poem are as important to an understanding of the work as its plot, which describes a beautiful but evil princess (Tamara) whose songs lure travelers to her enchanted castle in the Caucasus by the river Terek. After a night of passion, the princess murders the traveler, whose body is borne away by the river. Balakirev began the work in 1867; work progressed sporadically. In the mid-1870s, during a four-year battle with depression, his friends confiscated his sketches fearing what he might do to them. Yet in 1876 it was Balakirev's friends who helped rekindle his interest in music again by returning the score to him and begging him to resume its composition. Three years later, he performed Tamara on piano to an enthusiastic audience of friends, but when two more years went by without orchestration or performance, it was a gently nagging letter from Stasov which provided the final impetus. In March 1883, a year later, it was premiered with the composer conducting, and the 15-year odyssey, of which perhaps only three years total were spent intensively working on Tamara, was finally

completed.

Dedicated to Franz Liszt, originator of the tone poem, Tamara bears his influence in form and language, which sometimes embraces an Oriental exoticism, but remains distinctively Russian in the vast scope of its orchestration. Liszt asked for a four-hand arrangement of the work, which Balakirev later provided. In 1912 Diaghilev and Fokine produced a ballet to Balakirev's score.

The slow and soft introduction (and conclusion) to Tamara, the rest of which is noticeably faster, is a characteristic of Balakirev's mature orchestral works. The work opens with rippling figures in the strings and low brass, representing the river, which establish the impressively pervasive feeling of foreboding; the key is an ominous B minor. Lyrically supple woodwind melodies abound in the work, and the first few notes of what will later be identified as Tamara's love song are heard from the English horn. After a few more notes of the love song are heard, the rippling returns. The bulk of the piece is then taken up with the two love themes of Tamara. Balakirev develops these melodies from seductive lyricism to driving passion to the murderous climax, after which they ironically assume their original form, and the river music returns. A surprisingly sweet-sounding codetta frames the fairy tale.

Liadov apparently had a thing for witches: in his brief and desultory career as a composer, he wrote not one but two tone poems for orchestra depicting witches. The first is Baba-Yaga from 1904, a short and pseudo-spooky "picture from a Russian folk tale," and the second is Kikimora, a longer but still pseudo-spooky folk tale. Both are scored for full, late Romantic orchestra with a huge percussion section, including the obligatory xylophone, a prerequisite for evoking rattling skeletons. Like Baba-Yaga, the main body of Kikimora is a Presto replete with chromatic scales, woodwinds wails, and brass blasts. But unlike Baba-Yaga, Kikimora has a dark and moody Adagio introduction with the bleakness and despair of Rachmaninov and the harmonic vagueness of Debussy. Thus, although Kikimora is for the most part merely a re-write of Baba-Yaga, its introduction shows that Liadov could be more than a procurer for witches.

# GLAZUNOV

STENKA RAZIN - Symphonic Poem

# BALAKIREV

THAMAR - Symphonic Poem

# LIADOV

KIKIMORA (Opus 63)

# Ernest Ansermet

L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

- 1 Glazunov - Stenka Razin Symphonic Poem 14:46
- 2 Balakirev - Thamar Symphonic Poem 20:31
- 3 Liadov - Kikimora (Opus 63) 6:21
- Total Time: 41:38

Transferred from a 2-track tape 15ips tape  
All tracks recorded by Decca Records (Decca's first stereo recordings)  
Producer James Walker Engineer Roy Wallace  
Recorded May 1954 Victoria Hall, Geneva

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[admin@highdeftapetransfers.com](mailto:admin@highdeftapetransfers.com)  
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