

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).

Rimsky-Korsakov Symphony No.2 - (Antar)

Ernest Ansermet
conducting

L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande



Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov had a work ethic that bordered on the obsessive, and when inspiration failed him, he would often busy himself by tidying up works from his youth. This habit accounts for the proliferation of versions of *Antar*. This work was composed between January and August 1868, and premiered in March of the next year. After a few alterations, it was published in 1880 as his *Second Symphony*. However, in the "new edition" of 1903, which was dated 1897, "*Antar*" was substantially revised and called a symphonic suite, with the words *Second Symphony* in a parenthetical subtitle. In 1913, a final version of *Antar* came out, called simply a "*Symphonic Suite*," as Rimsky-Korsakov had decided that *Antar* was "a poem, suite, fairy tale, story, anything you like, but not a symphony." The final version changes the key of the second movement and has more refined and detailed orchestration. However, the earlier version may best preserve the freshness of Rimsky-Korsakov's response to the myth of *Antar*, a great warrior from Arabian literature.

Rimsky-Korsakov's program opens with *Antar* wandering the ruins of the ancient desert city of Palmyra. Rimsky-Korsakov portrays the desert with grim, bare woodwind chords and elusive, chromatic fragments of melody sweeping over them. *Antar*'s theme enters on the strings, in a lush, resigned harmonization, as he has come to the desert to renounce humanity. Suddenly, a beautiful gazelle appears, which *Antar* chases. A huge black bird swoops down on

the gazelle, but *Antar* repels it with his lance. He then falls asleep, and in his dream he meets the Queen of Palmyra, Gul Nazar, who had taken the form of the gazelle that *Antar* saved. The Queen is represented by a lovely, winding wind theme. Gul Nazar promises *Antar* the three joys of life in exchange for his good deed; as *Antar* contemplates his newfound good fortune, he wakes up to the strains of the harp and the Gul Nazar theme, amid the ruins of Palmyra. So ends the first movement. The second and third movements are devoted to depicting the joys of revenge and power, respectively. Rimsky-Korsakov uses nervous tremolos in the strings and puts the *Antar* theme in defiant brass to suggest revenge, while the *Antar* theme is played sweetly on the strings and in fanfares by the brass to depict power. In the last movement, *Antar* is allowed to experience the ultimate joy, the love of Gul Nazar. He insists that she kill him when she feels his passion cooling; this she does, and *Antar* dies in her arms. This movement features some of Rimsky-Korsakov's finest orchestration, including transcendently poignant blends in the woodwinds which depict the two lovers as their passion swells and fades, ultimately ascending to heaven on a swirling harp and lying to rest with a few final chords. Anyone who enjoys *Scheherazade* should try *Antar* next, as this symphony is almost as inspired as that peak of Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic oeuvre.

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Symphony No.2 - (Antar)
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1. Largo - Allegro giocoso - Adagio - Largo - (Tempo I) 11:55
 2. Allegro - Molto allegro - Meno mosso, allargando - Allegro (Tempo I) 5:11
 3. Allegro risoluto alla marcia 5:42
 4. Allegretto vivace - Andante amoroso - Animato assai - Tempo I 8:29
- Total Time: 31:17

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Recorded at Victoria Hall, Geneva



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