

ing the movement as a piano/orchestral work, but nothing came of this plan.

"Marche miniature," a title Tchaikovsky would reuse in *The Nutcracker*. It is witty and charming, rather similar in mood to its famous ballet counterpart. Incidentally, Tchaikovsky had doubts about this movement and had to be convinced by persistent arguments to retain it. From the premiere onwards it has been one of the best-received parts of the score. The fifth movement, "Scherzo," is swift, brilliant, and folk-like, showcasing the composer's great skill at creating fine melodies. The finale is a "Gavotte." Even in the context of this restrained eighteenth century dance Tchaikovsky deploys some of his most vivid orchestration to bring the work to an effective close.

Glinka, considered the father of Russian Nationalism in music, is largely known for two works: the operas *A Life for the Tsar* (1834 - 1836) and *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1837 - 1842). Though the latter work met with a tepid reception at its premiere, while the former was an immediate success, *Ruslan* would eventually come to be ranked as his most influential effort, its rhythmically and harmonically inventive music rising above its mediocre libretto. Popular in the concert halls for a century and a half has been the work's perky overture, probably the composer's most widely performed orchestral piece. The Overture opens with a driving rhythmic figure that augurs the rhythmic styles of Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and so many other Russian composers from succeeding generations. There follows a vigorous, joyous theme that hustles and leaps about with seemingly unbounded energy. After this melody is presented in a slightly subdued guise, a second theme is heard, a lively but mellow creation especially in its first appearance, played in the middle ranges of the cellos. Later, the opening rhythm is recalled and the themes are developed somewhat as the mood turns playful. Another go-round of themes is given before a variant of the main theme leads to the brilliant and colorful coda. A typical performance of this work lasts about five to six minutes.



# Russian Festival

**Fritz Reiner**  
**Chicago Symphony**



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Consisting of a prologue and three acts, *Colas Breugnon* was first performed at the Mariy Opera Theater, St. Petersburg, on February 22, 1938, and was published as Kabalevsky's Op. 24. Kabalevsky undertook major revisions to *Colas Breugnon* in 1953, but was not satisfied with his efforts until 1969, when he republished the opera as his Op. 90. This version received its first performance on April 16, 1970, also at the Mariy Opera Theater, and received the Lenin Prize in 1972. The Overture is a concert favorite in Russia and occasionally appears on concert programs in the United States.

*Marche Slave*, Op. 31, (French: "Slavonic March") orchestral composition by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, first performed in Moscow in November 1876. It is a rousing patriotic work based on Serbian and Russian folk themes.

Tchaikovsky was commissioned to write the piece specifically for a concert to benefit Serb soldiers wounded while fighting (with help from Russian volunteers) against the Ottoman Empire. Hence the title declared it a march for all Slavs rather than simply for Russians. The piece, though relatively brief, includes a number of distinct moods; bright, festive passages contrast with ominous ones. At several moments, different sections of the orchestra carry their own melodies at the same time, creating a layered effect. As the march progresses toward its triumphant conclusion, the intensity of the music builds, and the main theme is gradually shifted from the woodwinds and strings to the brass and percussion.

Alexander Borodin was a chemist by profession, but is more readily remembered as among the finest of nineteenth century Russian composers. Borodin's dual life prevented him from completing a number of important musical works, among them the opera *Prince Igor*. The composer labored on the score (and text) intermittently for nearly 20 years, intending to create a great historical tableau based on an

ancient ballad about a hero in Russia's struggles against the tribes of Central Asia. The Polovtsy tribe took Igor prisoner for a time, and this episode provides much of the dramatic impetus for the opera. *Prince Igor* -- later completed by Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, and others -- remains one of the most important works in the history of Russian opera, though it is only rarely staged outside of its native land. Various reconstructions of Borodin's original intentions have been made, and the vast dimensions of the work pose problems. The work combines influences from French grand opera (rarely staged much anymore either) with, especially in its depiction of the "exotic" Polovtsy, the typically Russian harmonic daring also associated with Mussorgsky.

The most famous music from the opera is a set of dances, the Polovtsian Dances, that accompany a banquet put on by the Khan of the Polovtsy. These are overwhelmingly brilliant and irresistibly barbaric in the best Romantic crowd-pleasing manner, particularly when performed with the original choral parts. The Dances gained an unexpected popular currency when one of the more memorable tunes was transformed into the song "Stranger in Paradise" as part of the Broadway musical *Kismet* (1953).

In a July 5, 1867 letter to Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, Modest Mussorgsky wrote "(I have) finished *St. John's Night on Bald Mountain*, a musical picture with the following program: (1) assembly of the witches, their chatter and gossip; (2) cortege of Satan; (3) unholy gratification of Satan; and (4) witches' sabbath." Mussorgsky proclaims "in form and character my composition is Russian and original. Its tone is hot and chaotic.... *St. John's Night* is something new and is bound to produce a satisfactory impression...."

The impression was not so satisfactory for Mily Balakirev, who rejected the work in 1869 from consideration for a Free School concert. Balakirev sent the manuscript back to Mussorgsky bearing handwritten marks such as the comment "Rubbish!" in the margins. Later, under the spell of Liszt's *Totentanz*, Mussorgsky considered refashion-

# **RUSSIAN FESTIVAL**

**Fritz Reiner / Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

- 1 Kabalevsky Colas Breugnon, Op. 24: Overture 4:44**
- 2 Tchaikovsky Marche Slave 7:59**
- 3 Borodin Prince Igor: Act III: Polovski March 7:09**
- 4 Mussorgsky A Night On The Bare Mountain 10:09**
- 5 Tchaikovsky Marche Miniature 1:55**
- 6 Glinka Russian And Ludmilla: Overture 5:13**

**Recorded by RCA 13 - 14 March 1959 in Orchestra Hall, Chicago**  
**Engineer - Lewis Layton    Producer - Richard Mohr**



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