



Civic Orchestra of Tucson Program Notes for March 16 and 17, 2019

Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*

According to Baker's *Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* (7th edition, revised by Nicolas Slonimsky) this "great Russian composer" Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857) may be considered the father of Russian music. Many other sources agree, as his musical influence on the last half of the 19th century in Russia was profound.

Arriving with a silver spoon, Mikhail was provided with the best of schools, tutors, music instructors, travel opportunities, and shoulders with which to rub as he matured into adulthood.

Musically, Glinka burst upon the scene in St. Petersburg with his first opera (*A Life for the Tsar*, 1836), the subject of which being a simple peasant who saved the life of the first Tsar of the Romanov dynasty. The premiere was heralded as a milestone of Russian culture, and thought by most to fling open the doors that ultimately led to the establishment of the Russian national musical school. Soon to follow was the quintet of distinguished composers referred to as The Russian Five

The overture to Glinka's second opera, *Ruslan und Lyudmila*, opens these Civic Orchestra of Tucson's performances with the flash and flurry first heard in the 1842 premiere of the opera in Saint Petersburg.

The overture is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons (and contra), four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, and timpani, plus the usual strings.

[Recommended reading: If you choose to browse Baker's book, noted above, you might enjoy Mr. Slonimsky's entry referring to himself.]

Le Coq d'Or (Golden Cockerel) Suite

As chance would have it, Rimsky-Korsakov was born two years after *Ruslan*'s premiere and, according to many, represents the culmination of Russian nationalism. To him perhaps belongs the crown of The Russian Five—Balakirev, Cui, Borodin, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. And to the *Golden Cockerel*, perhaps the crown of the creative spirit of Rimsky-Korsakov. It was also his final work, having been composed in 1906–07 and premiered in 1909, the year following his death.

As was the case with Glinka's *Ruslan*, *Le Coq d'Or* was based on a poem of the celebrated Russian literary giant, Alexander Pushkin. For *Le Coq d'Or*, Rimsky-Korsakov took liberties with Pushkin's poem (1834) as a nod to the recent military conflict between Japan and Russia over the ownership of Manchuria and the disastrous result for the Russians. Rimsky-Korsakov stretched Pushkin's original text into a satire of military incompetence, aristocratic stupidity, and political corruption.

All that aside, the music is quite wonderful and in moments, reminiscent of the more popular *Scheherazade*.

The suite is in four movements: (for Russian readers)

- I. Tsar Dodon at home (Царь Додон у себя дома)
- II. Tsar Dodon on the march (Царь Додон в походе)
- III. Tsar Dodon with the Shemakhan Tsaritsa (Царь Додон у Шемаханской царицы)
- IV. The wedding and the lamentable end of Dodon (Свадьба и печальный конец Додона)

The score calls for 3 flutes (piccolo), 3 oboes (English Horn), 3 clarinets (bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (contra), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, harp, celesta, timpani, multiple percussion, and strings.

“Emperor” Piano Concerto No. 5

One hundred years before Rimsky-Korsakov was breathing life into his final masterpiece, Beethoven was working to create his final piano concerto, the “Emperor.” One can imagine the emotions of that task given that Beethoven had previously been the virtuoso performer of his first four concerti for the instrument. By 1809, however, he had grown too deaf to perform. Perhaps because of that affliction or perhaps because of the invasion and occupation of Vienna by Napoleon, the concerto was required to wait two years for its premiere in Leipzig on November 28, 1811. Friedrich Schneider was soloist and the orchestra was conducted by Johann Philipp Christian Schulz.

The world remains grateful for this magnificent musical monument. Typical of the concerto format of the day, “Emperor” is presented in three movements:

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio un poco mosso
- III. Rondo: Allegro

Piano Concerto No. 5 is scored for pairs of woodwinds, horns and trumpets plus timpani and strings.