



CKYO | 2023-2024

76TH

SEASON

Scheherazade Program Notes

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Scheherazade was written by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov as a musical retelling of stories in *A Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights*. *A Thousand and One Nights* is a tale about a Sultan who, in looking for a faithful wife, would kill all of his suitors by daylight. The Sultan would do this, convinced that he was preventing them from infidelity. Scheherazade, one of the suitors, devises a plan to avoid being killed. She tells him stories, leaving them on cliff-hangers before she and the Sultan go to bed. Her plan leads to her surviving for a thousand and one nights before they get married. Rimsky-Korsakov tells four of these captivating stories in his symphonic suite.

I. The Sea and Sinbad's Ship

In this movement, Rimsky-Korsakov tells the story of the sailor Sinbad. The movement opens with a violin solo, capturing the voice of Scheherazade beginning the story. Throughout this movement, Rimsky-Korsakov retells Sinbad's battle with the waves and storms, represented through the contrast between the swirling and domineering melodies. Rimsky-Korsakov also retells Sinbad's numerous voyages throughout the east, surviving shipwrecks, pirates, and more. The movement features a number of other solos, such as a cello solo and a clarinet solo. In the end, Sinbad is able to triumphantly return home, as Scheherazade ends her story the following night.

II. The Story of the Kalendar Prince

The second movement of *Scheherazade* once again opens with the violin solo, or Scheherazade's theme. This movement tells the story of a prince who must escape his father's kingdom after a coup takes place. The kalendar prince is targeted by the vizier after the coup, and is forced to disguise himself to escape. Rimsky-Korsakov features adventurous twists in this movement with trombone and trumpet solos. As the stakes get higher, the piece increases in tempo. Finally, the sun sets on several solos as the kalendar prince abandons his home, leaving it in the unsteady hands of the vizier.

III. The Young Prince and Princess

Scheherazade, aware of the Sultan's appreciation of love stories, ensured to tell the Sultan quite a few. Inspired by this fact, Rimsky-Korsakov chose to include a love story in the third movement of his symphonic suite. The piece is written in the romantic style, suiting both the era this movement was written in and its theme. This movement includes tender strings instrumentation, as well as solos and light percussion scattered throughout the piece.

IV. Festival at Baghdad. The Sea. The Ship Breaks against a Cliff

The final movement of *Scheherazade* once again opens with Scheherazade's theme. In this movement, Rimsky-Korsakov retells Scheherazade's final struggle to secure the Sultan's hand in marriage. She uses a combination of previous themes and stories to do so. Finally, Scheherazade remembers another story about Sinbad, as the theme from the first movement returns. This time, more roaring than before, symbolizing both Scheherazade and Sinbad's final attempts to survive. Finally, Scheherazade has won the Sultan over, and Rimsky-Korsakov ends the movement with a violin solo.