

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Nikolai Andreevich
(1844 -1908)

Rimsky-Korsakov was born on 6th. March, 1844, into a family, distinguished both in army and navy, in which latter arm of the services he underwent early training. The town of his birth, Tikhvin, in the Novgorod Government, lay about 175 kms. east of St. Petersburg, as the crow flies. The Rimsky-Korsakov parental house, almost at the edge of the town,¹ was a single storey structure, set back on an embankment, a short distance from the River Tikhvinka. Across the river lay the noble Tikhvin Monastery, dating from the sixteenth century, with its characteristic array of domes and spires, its notoriety arising out of the lengthy enforced incarceration therein of the fourth (discarded) wife, Anna Koltovskaya, of Ivan the Fourth (the Terrible). On such a scene, Rimsky-Korsakov gazed from childhood, listening to the jangling of bells, the sounds which he sought to capture in his Easter Festival Overture of 1890.

Later in the century, a new railway line would be constructed from St. Petersburg to Vologda and beyond, and pass through Tikhvin—the same railway line, the financing of which brought about the downfall of the entrepreneur financier and impresario, S.I. Mamontov, with whom Rimsky-Korsakov was associated at the time of the first production of his operas 'Sadko' and 'Tsar's Bride' in Moscow at the end of the 1890s.

Rimsky-Korsakov was the youngest member of the group of five composers headed by Balakirev. He did not follow immediately in the footsteps of his four elders by turning to Bessel as his first publisher, for this was Bernard with whose firm his set of four songs, known as Op.2, appeared in 1866. In due course Bernard was acquired by Jurgenson and the latter firm republished the same work in 1885. This acquisition establishes and typifies the vagaries of Rimsky-Korsakov editions both before and after Belaieff opened his business in 1885, as he himself commenced purchasing rights to publish music owned by smaller concerns.

In a letter to Kruglikov dated 3rd September, 1890,² Rimsky-Korsakov appended a list of works written by him up to that date, bearing opus numbers (with the exclusion of operas which do not bear opus numbers). The list commences with op.1, the first symphony dating from 1865, in the key of E flat minor but published for the first time by Bessel only in 1885, after revision, with its tonality raised a semi-tone to E minor. The list ends with the Easter Festival Overture, Op.36, (Belaieff, 1890). Rimsky-Korsakov lists all the publishers. Much of the information is corroborated in the Memoirs, albeit in a generalized manner. Certain intriguing anomalies are to be found:

- i) The publisher Jurgenson is given for the songs, Op.2 and not Bernard, as originally.
- ii) The songs, Op.7 were listed as Op.5.
- iii) The orchestral piece, 'Sadko' is listed as Op.7. It is normally known as Op.5, though no number figured on the score of the first-published edition in 1870.
- iv) Rimsky-Korsakov originally numbered his String Sextet as Op.21, but it was published posthumously by Edition Russe de Musique (ERM) in 1911 without opus number.
- v) The chorus 'Slava', without orchestral accompaniment is listed as Op.20 and as in manuscript. It was ultimately published by Belaieff as Op.21, pl.nos. 829-832.³
- vi) On the other hand, Belaieff's publication known as Op.20, 'Stikh ob Aleksee'/ pl.nos. 833-836, and supposedly composed in 1878, is omitted.⁴

At the end of the list appears a note, 'N.B. All Büttner editions now Belaieff'. These include the piano pieces, Ops. 10 and 11, the women's choruses, Ops.13 and 14, and the ten songs, Ops.25, 26 and 27, all of which were republished by Belaieff in 1890. (Only the songs have been traced with coloured title pages.) Belaieff also acquired from Büttner the right to republish the Opera 'May Night' in 1889/90. This had originally appeared with Büttner at the end of 1881. Lastly, Johansen sold the rights of the Serbian Fantasy, Op.6 to Belaieff in 1895.