

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)



FAST FACTS

- Talented in music as a child and had a sincere interest in it
- Traveled the world as a navy officer for one year and almost gave up on music!
- Taught at the St. Petersburg Conservatory
- Arranged and completed other Russian composers' works
- Famous for writing orchestral suites inspired by his travels

Born: 1844 (Tikhvin, Russia)
Died: 1908 (Lyubensk, Russia)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov is one of the most important Russian composers in music history, and is often viewed as the musical link between Modest Mussorgsky and Igor Stravinsky, two other major Russian composers. Rimsky-Korsakov was born into a wealthy and musical family, and showed promising talent early on: he had perfect pitch, took piano lessons from age 6, and had a sincere interest in watching musical performances. His parents did not see music as a practical career, though, so they urged him to become a naval officer. In order to do this, he was required to sail around the world with his fellow officers. Because there was no piano on the ship, nor anyone who cared to write or listen to music, Rimsky-Korsakov began to give up hope on his love for music. His world travels, however, showed him many different and beautiful locations, which served as inspiration for music that he wrote some time later.

When Rimsky-Korsakov returned home to Russia, he planned to continue his service with the navy, but his friends convinced him to return to writing music. In 1865, the same year the American Civil War ended, Rimsky-Korsakov completed and premiered his first symphony. The great success of this symphony gave him a position as professor of composition and instrumentation at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Rimsky-Korsakov also began arranging and reworking Russian composers' music, such as Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Gudonov*. His arrangements of Mussorgky's compositions were far from the originals, but he launched them to the spotlight that they deserved. Rimsky-Korsakov also took on the responsibility of finishing the works of his friend Alexander Borodin after Borodin's sudden death. These jobs as well as caring for his own ailing family prevented Rimsky-Korsakov from writing much of his own music, but he was able to complete several suites inspired by his travels years earlier. These pieces included *Russian Easter Overture*, *Capriccio Espagnole*, and *Schéhérazade*, which is perhaps his most famous work, and told the story of an ancient Persian legend through music. The original story of *Schéhérazade* also inspired the Disney movie Aladdin!



Let's Listen!

- The Moscow Symphony performs *Schéhérazade*: [click here](#).
- Listen to instruments from the 1800s in the Anima Eterna Orchestra perform *Russian Easter Overture*: [click here](#).