

Mily Balakirev – Symphonic Works (1957)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 23 October 2014 15:56 -

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1 *Second Overture on Russian Themes for Orchestra - "Russia (Rus)"* 12:41 2 *Piano Concerto in F-Sharp Minor, Op. 1* 14:08 3 *Overture on Czech Themes - "In Bohemia" ("V Chechii")* 11:48 4 *Oriental Fantasy - "Islamey"* 8:41 Boris Zhilinsky – piano (2) USSR Radio Grand Symphony Orchestra Alexander Gauk – conductor

Many examples of Russian music were inspired by Russia's nineteenth century conquest of Caucasian territories between the Black and Caspian Seas and the conquest of Turkic kingdoms between the states which are now known as Iran and Afghanistan. This resulted in a rise of interest in all forms of arts and literature of these newly incorporated regions, and these people's musics were quickly imitated in Russian concert music. Mily Balakirev's 1862 work *Islamey* is supreme among piano works with such a genesis. It is a large-scale fantasy incorporating three themes from Islamic regions of the Caucasus area, decked out with rich harmonies and developed into one of the most flashy virtuoso pieces for the instrument. In 1909, one year before Balakirev's death, the Italian Alfredo Casella introduced his orchestration of the piece, which is suitably dazzling and colorful. The two versions are a little off the beaten track of the standard repertoire, yet they are popular when played because of their color and great vigor. --- Joseph Stevenson, Rovi

Initially planned as an overture on Russian themes, *Russia* was first presented in a concert of the Free School in 1864. Balakirev revised the work numerous times before arriving at its final incarnation in 1884, at which time he gave the work the title by which it is most commonly known today. The work opens in a *larghetto* tempo. Two chords precede the presentation of the first theme, a tune in minor mode with a modal flavor, taken from a song called "It was Not the Wind." This theme is developed. Then the tempo changes to *Allegro moderato* for the

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appearance of "I'll Go Up," a major-mode song. The opening theme returns, followed by a third song, "Jolly Katia in the Fields". These themes are developed and combined. The 15-minute work closes with the return of the opening theme. ---Hector Bellman, Rovi

Balakirev wrote three works for piano and orchestra. Two of them are early—the one-movement First Piano Concerto was composed between 1855 and 1856, and the Fantasie on Russian Folksongs dates from 1852. Both pieces show a thorough understanding of sonata form and the strong influence of Frederic Chopin (the concerto could easily been composed by the Polish master). They also betray the penchant Balakirev showed throughout his career for taking extended periods to finish large compositions, if he finished them at all. He intended to extend both pieces into full-length works but failed to do so. --- flyinginkpot.com

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