

# CBSO



**City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra**

**Thursday 29 October 1970 at 7.30 p.m., Town Hall Birmingham**

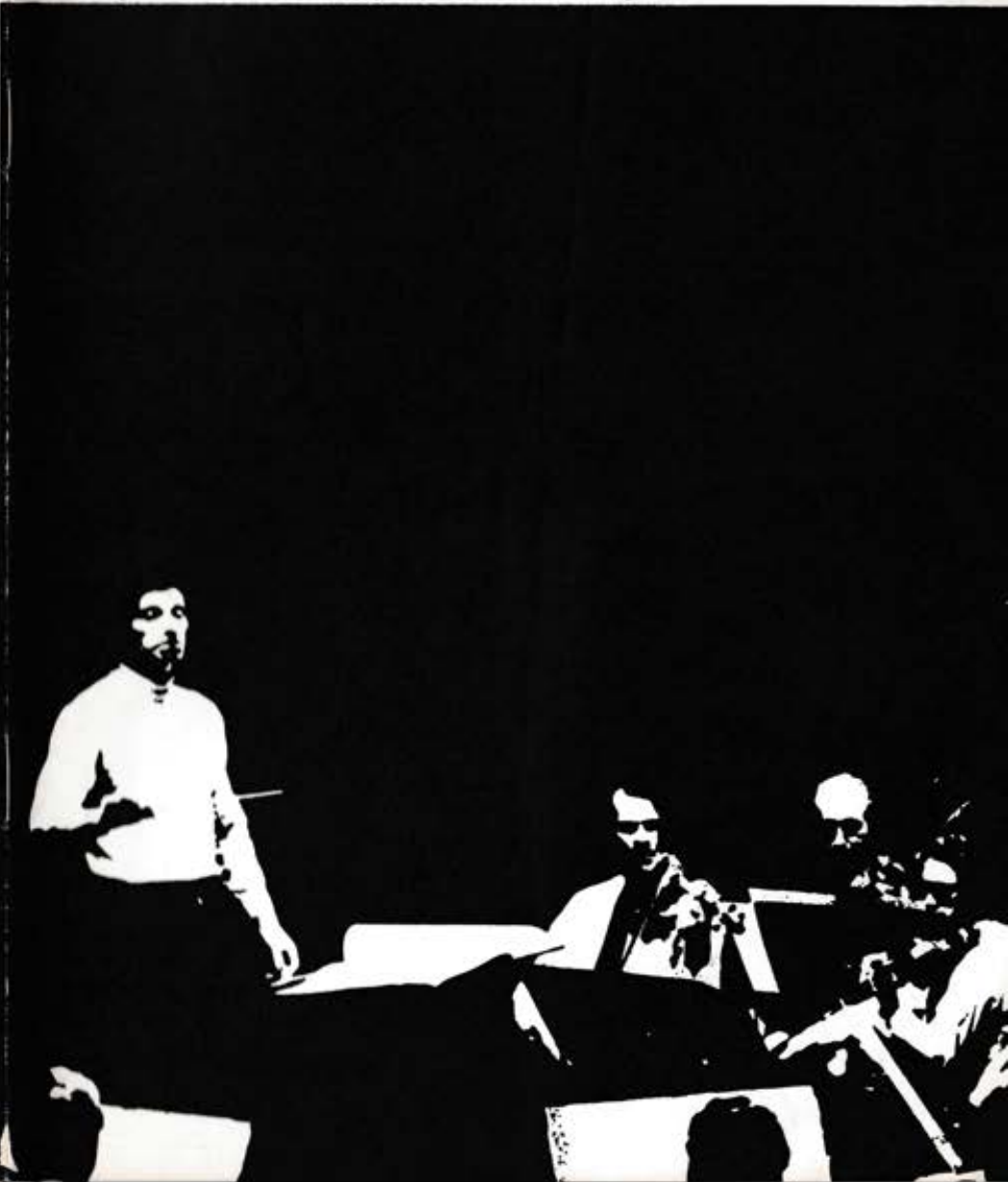




Photo: Constantine

**Louis Frémaux**



Leader : John Bradbury

Conductor : **LOUIS FRÉMAUX**

Introduction and Allegro for Strings .. Elgar

Symphony No. 5 in B $\flat$  .. .. Schubert

**INTERVAL**

Refreshments are available in the Basement Hall before the concert and during the interval

Licensed Bar 6.30 - 10.30 p.m.

Scheherazade .. .. Rimsky-Korsakov

**Patrons are asked not to enter or leave the auditorium while the Orchestra is playing. It would be appreciated if patrons would refrain as far as possible from coughing during the performance**

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra is in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain, the City of Birmingham, and the County Boroughs of Walsall and Warley and the Boroughs of Halesowen and Sutton Coldfield, members of the Midland Authorities Orchestral Association

## PROGRAMME NOTES

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### Introduction and Allegro for Strings Elgar (1857-1934)

Composed in 1905, three years before his First Symphony, the *Introduction and Allegro* (Op. 47) is one of Elgar's most individual achievements. Not only is it technically brilliant as a piece of string-writing; in form and expression, too, it bears the stamp of a lively creative mind, at once impulsive and sensitive to detail. Theoretically, the work has some affinity with the *concerto grosso*. In practice, however, Elgar's handling of the *concertante* part (for string quartet) is very different from that of the composers of the baroque period; it is not concerned with form-making contrasts but with the finer shades of colouring and texture — and with a wistful poetry peculiarly his own. The orchestral strings are much divided to produce effects of great density and power, and the treatment of the themes is symphonic in method.

As always with Elgar, some of the material (the 'Welsh' theme) was taken from earlier jottings, but the work itself was written quickly, with little conscious preparation. The immediate stimulus came from A. J. Jaeger (Nimrod), who was anxious for a new piece by Elgar for the London Symphony Orchestra. 'Why not a brilliant quick String Scherzo,' he suggested, 'or something for those fine strings only? — a real bring-down-the-house torrent of a thing such as Bach could write . . . You might even write a modern Fugue for strings, or strings and organ!' Three months later Elgar wrote: 'I'm doing that string thing in time for the Sym. orch. concert. Intro: & Allegro — no working-out part but a devil of a fugue instead. G major & the said divvel in G minor — with all sorts of japes and counterpoint.' (See Percy Young, *Letters to Nimrod*, Dobson, 1965). One clue to Elgar's enthusiasm is his remark that the work is 'really a tribute to that sweet borderland where I have made my home'. For this is music of the open air, of a kind that captures many personal impressions and experiences: at this level the 'preparation' may well have been immense.

The overall design is typically Elgarian — a thing of cross-references and wayward contrasts. There are three main elements in the *Introduction* (G minor), all of which have a part to play in the *Allegro*: (i) the forceful, declamatory opening; (ii) the wistful theme which immediately follows — later to become the principal subject of the *Allegro* — and (iii) a sad lyrical melody (solo viola) haunted by its falling minor thirds (the 'Welsh' theme).

The *Allegro* is basically a sonata movement (G major) but, as Elgar told Jaeger, with a fugal section instead of a development. The fugue subject (G minor) is new material; in an early sketch it was marked *fantastico*, and this aptly describes the kind of texture which its rhythmic life creates. Combined with it, however, is a thematic idea which relates the fugue to both the *Introduction* and the principal subject of the *Allegro* — an idea heard first on the lower strings near the opening of the work (immediately following the first appearance of the string quartet). The whole of this central section suggests that the composer delighted in the difficulties he was making for himself; it is a magnificent *tour de force*, full of interest for the technically minded and highly effective as sheer sound. After a complete recapitulation of the *Allegro*, the work ends with a broad, expansive treatment of the viola theme from the *Introduction*.

The first performance was given in the Queen's Hall, London, on March 8, 1905, with Elgar conducting.

H.O.

### Symphony No. 5 in B $\flat$ D.485 Schubert (1797-1828)

*allegro*  
*andante con moto*  
*menuetto*  
*allegro vivace*

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length. The orchestration is precisely that for which Mozart originally wrote his G minor Symphony (one flute, oboes, bassoons, horns and strings); but the work has nothing of the profound tragedy of the Mozart, in spite of frequent touches of genuine poetry. It is simply the composition of a boy of nineteen thoroughly enjoying himself, with amazing restraint and mastery. The *planissimo* opening of the first movement, which is going at full speed almost before one is aware of it, gives place to a vigorous transition and an excellently contrasted collection of themes in the second group. The development is Mozartian in its economy and point (the benevolent genius of Mozart hovers over Schubert all through this work); the recapitulation is regular and there is no coda. The second movement is a warmly affectionate *andante*, consisting of an extended and ornamental melody, alternating with a quiet discussion between violins and wood-wind. The cycle comes round twice and then, after a shortened version of the first melody, comes an intensely poetic coda — the only place in the symphony where Schubert gives a hint of the real depths of his nature.

The so-called minuet is really a *scherzo*, vigorous and a little stormy, with a serene trio of the *Ländler* type that Schubert loved. The finale is a deliciously lighthearted piece in full sonata form, with at least two delightful tunes in it. Like so many of Schubert's finales, it is a little lacking in climax; but where the material is so charming and so clearly presented, it would be ungrateful and unnecessary to complain because of its lack of architectural finality. The spirit of subtle comedy is maintained to the end and without any coda, Schubert (like Sam Weller writing his valentine to Mary), leaves one wishing there was more.

### **Scheherazade, Symphonic Suite** **Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)**

'The Sultan Shakriar, convinced of the falsehood and inconstancy of all women, had sworn an oath to put to death each of his wives after the first night. However, the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by arousing his interest in the tales which she told during the 1001 nights. Driven by curiosity the sultan postponed her execution from day to day and at last abandoned his sanguinary design.

'Scheherazade told miraculous stories to the sultan. For her tales she borrowed verses from the poets and words from folk-songs, combining fairy-tales with adventure.'

These words, which preface the score, are all that Rimsky-Korsakov permitted to survive in the way of a declared programme. Earlier he had been more specific and had given the four movements the following descriptive headings; (i) *The Sea and Sinbad's Ship*; (ii) *The Story of the Kalender Prince*; (iii) *The Young Prince and Princess*; (iv) *The Festival of Baghdad: The Sea: The Ship is dashed to pieces on a Rock surmounted by a Bronze Warrior*. The decision to scrap these headings was consistent with the composer's initial impulse as well as with the character of the completed work. Almost certainly the impulse sprang from the Polovtsian scenes in Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*. In 1888, after Borodin's death, Rimsky-Korsakov himself completed and orchestrated the opera, and he was much taken with the exotic vein in the musical style. At once he began to sketch *Scheherazade*, exploring on his own account the possibilities of a colourful 'Oriental' idiom. The idea of a programme based on episodes from *The Arabian Nights* was scarcely more than a convenience, a way of giving point to a cyclic composition and a stimulus to the listener's imagination. 'All that I desired', wrote the composer, 'was that the listener, if he liked my piece as *symphonic music*, should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders and not merely four pieces . . . composed on themes common to them all.'

In his autobiography, *A Chronicle of My Musical Life*, Rimsky-Korsakov shows how mistaken it is to think of the themes as 'leading-motives' with more or

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David Hughes

less fixed literary meanings. Apart from the theme representing Scheherazade herself — solo violin, heard at the beginning of the first, second and fourth movements and in the middle of the third — there is nothing that is fixed in this way, not even the *fortissimo* unison motive in the opening bars: often thought of as the Sultan's theme, this is used again in the second movement (*The Story of the Kalender Prince*), 'where there cannot be any mention of the Sultan Shakriar'. In the fourth movement there is a general gathering-together of material, and this is clearly symphonic rather than descriptive in intention: the build-up associated with the destruction of Sinbad's ship is as impressive a symphonic climax as anything in the music of *The Five*, and equally skilful is the avoidance of anti-climax in the contrast that follows.

What gives the work its distinctive sound? Holst once heard an Arab musician playing the same short phrase on his flute for hour after hour. Such reiteration, plain or embellished, is basic to Arab music, as Rimsky-Korsakov was undoubtedly aware: though much curtailed, reiteration is both the essence of Scheherazade's own theme and a recurring feature of the work in general. The use of 'inflected' scales might also be mentioned, but the biggest contribution to the musical atmosphere is that of the orchestral colouring. Rimsky-Korsakov was a master of vivid, evocative scoring, and in *Scheherazade* his ability to achieve both brilliance and delicacy, without recourse to unusual instruments, is powerfully displayed.

H.O.

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Photo: Peter Stephen Molkenboer

The CBSO, conducted by Louis Frémaux, in the De Doelen Hall, Rotterdam, April 1970.

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**Abraham, Gerald, ed. SCHUBERT: A SYMPOSIUM.**  
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with a short biography.

**Rimsky-Korsakov, N.A. MY MUSICAL LIFE.**  
The composer's autobiography, which also contains much information  
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**RECORDS**

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Sinfonia of London; Allegri Quartet, cond. Sir John Barbirolli,  
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Menuhin Orchestra, cond. Yehudi Menuhin, HMV ASD 2478.

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV Scheherazade, opus 38.**  
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