

Mikhail GLINKA (1804-1857) 'Russlan and Ludmilla' Suite

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| 1 I. Overture | 5:09 |
| 2 II. Fairy Dances, Act III | 9:12 |
| 3 III. Oriental Dances, Act IV | 6:46 |
| 4 IV. Tchernomor's March, Act IV | 4:21 |

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Abbey Road Studio 1, London, 17 July 1951 - Parlophone LP PMC 1031

Nicolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908) 'Ivan the Terrible' Suite

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| 5 I. Overture | 6:52 |
| 6 II. Intermezzo No. 1 | 2:14 |
| 7 III. Intermezzo No. 2 | 4:03 |
| 8 IV. Royal Hunt and Storm | 6:22 |

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Abbey Road Studio 1, London, 25-26 August 1953 - Parlophone LP PMC 1009

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

'The Tsarina's Slippers' Suite (arr. Constantine Saradjeff)

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| 9 I. Introduction to Act 1 - Exorcism and Snow Storm - Minuet | 7:59 |
| 10 II. Introduction to Act 3 - Russian Dance | 5:37 |
| 11 III. Cossack Dance | 3:13 |
| 12 IV. Finale | 1:17 |

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Abbey Road Studio 1, London - 9 January 1953 - Parlophone LP PMC 1028

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| 13 Nicolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV 'May Night' - Overture | 8:34 |
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PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Abbey Road Studio 1, London, 30-31 August 1951 - Parlophone LP PMC 1031



**ANATOLE
FISTOULARI**

**ORCHESTRAL
SUITES FROM
RUSSIAN OPERAS**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
TCHAIKOVSKY
GLINKA**

**LONDON SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA**

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Recorded 1951 & 1953



A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE

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- Art direction: Guild GmbH
- Executive co-ordination: Guild GmbH

- **Guild GmbH, Bärenholzstrasse 8, 8537 Nussbaumen/TG, Switzerland**
Tel: +41 (0) 52 742 85 00 Fax: +41 (0) 52 742 85 09 (Head Office)
- **Guild GmbH, PO Box 5092, Colchester, Essex CO1 1FN, Great Britain**
- **e-mail: info@guildmusic.com World WideWeb-Site: <http://www.guildmusic.com>**

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is variously referred to by that name or by Tchaikovsky's original title *Vakula the Smith*. In this first version the opera was a failure, so Tchaikovsky revised it, retitling it *Oxana's Caprices*, though the Fistoulari recording heard here bore the title *The Slippers!* The reader might feel some explanation of the plot is due. Briefly, Vakula, the village blacksmith, is smitten with the local beauty Oxana who, aware of her charms, sets him the task of presenting her with the Empress's own slippers. It is Christmas Eve, and Vakula, journeying to St Petersburg, encounters the Devil: together they hatch a plot, which is eventually successful. Vakula returns to the village with the Tsarina's slippers which he presents to Oxana, who keeps her side of the bargain amid general rejoicing.

When the Royal Opera House Covent Garden presented the opera in 2009, it was retitled *The Tsarina's Slippers*, which may be thought to be the most suitable title of all, 120 or so years after the successful premiere of the revised version. It is that title we have retained here for the suite extracted from the opera by Constantine Saradjeff, a noted musician and violinist of the day and friend of Tchaikovsky, leader of the quartet ensemble which bore his name and dedicatee of Rheinhold Glière's first String Quartet (1899). The titles of the suite's individual movements are largely self-explanatory, the 'snow storm' occurring during Vakula's journey to St Petersburg when he met the Devil.

Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *May Night*, first produced at St Petersburg in 1880, is also based upon a short story by Nikolai Gogol, in which, after various vicissitudes, a pair of young lovers are successful in finding themselves, and true love prevails. The Overture's opening pages set the time of day when the events occur, and a beautiful theme, depicting the young couple, is finely developed by the composer and superbly orchestrated – as we might expect.

Although Fistoulari was just ten months old when Rimsky-Korsakov died in 1908, his conductor father Gregor had been a pupil of the composer at the St Petersburg Conservatoire: it is surely not too fanciful to think that he would have passed to his son much of the composer's thinking and performance standards, for on this CD we encounter self-evident examples of the 'Russian tradition' in conducting music of Fistoulari's homeland.

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One hundred years ago, in the second decade of the 20th-century, the seeds which were to ripen and grow into the twin conflicts of World War I and the Russian Revolution were well nourished. By 1914, those whose political antennae were cognizant of such developments viewed the future with some foreboding. Of course, few – if any – could have foretold where the War and the Revolution would lead, but the effect on individual lives could not have been other than profound.

In many respects, on the surface Russia was a civilised country, one whose art – like that of France and Britain – was established enough to challenge the Austro-Germanic dominance in music: the 'mighty handful' of Russian composers (also known as the 'Five' – Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky, and Cui), together with Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, Rachmaninoff and the younger Stravinsky and Prokofiev, were regarded as the artistic equals of great Russian literary figures, but the country was hampered by an autocratic political system which failed the larger population. Following the abortive uprising in January 1905, the stage was set, as a consequence of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, for the eventual overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II and of a ruling class which had remained largely unreformed since the Middle Ages.

Artists, by and large, do not make good combatants in war, and although Lenin, the new leader of Russia in the wake of the Tsar's abdication and banishment, had struck a treaty with the German High Command at Brest-Litovsk, withdrawing Russian troops from the War itself, the schismatic upheaval the 1917 Revolution caused to Russian society led to a wholesale emigration between 1918-20 of many of the country's most significant musicians, most of them destined never to return.

It may be difficult to imagine what it is to be uprooted from one's homeland and deposited, halfway across the world, within a different – if not exactly alien – country and culture. The adaptability of children means that they, of all immigrant groups, are perhaps best fitted to adjust and conform to the new society, but even then, they will retain vestigial traces of their native culture and mores.

Anatole Fistoulari had been born in Kiev in 1907, where his father (himself a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov and of Anton Rubinstein) was established as a noted conductor. As a young boy, it was

clear that Anatole had inherited his father's gifts: he conducted his first orchestral concert in 1915 at the astonishingly early age of seven – a programme including Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony, which he had memorised from the published score.

Fistoulari's family was to leave Russia forever in the wake of the 1917 Revolution. By 1920, the Fistoularis had become part of the growing émigré Russian musical colony in Paris, meeting with Stravinsky, Serge Koussevitsky, Alexander Tcherepnin, Serge Prokofiev and others, including George Enescu, who recommended that the 13-year-old conduct Saint-Saëns's opera *Samson et Dalilah* in Enescu's home capital of Bucharest.

Thereafter, it would seem that the young man's career was settled. And so it proved, but it was not to be a steady rise to international acclaim, although he conducted the Ballets Russes in Paris and on tour (including one to the United States) and concerts in Germany and in Holland. When World War II broke out in September 1939 Fistoulari volunteered for the French Army; following the French capitulation in 1940 he escaped to England, where he met and, in 1942, married Anna Mahler, the surviving daughter of Gustav Mahler (by whom he had a daughter, Marina, in 1943). That same year, 1943, Fistoulari was appointed principal conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra with a contract for 120 concerts - averaging one concert every three days. But the pressure proved too much for conductor and orchestra, as he did not possess a large enough orchestral repertoire; his post was terminated at the end of the War in 1945. Yet he had gained an admirable reputation as a dependable and often inspiring conductor in the recording studio, and in the following twenty years or so he made many records for EMI and Decca, especially in Russian repertoire, where his technique and knowledge were legendary. In 1956, he led the London Philharmonic on a tour of the USSR, his memory remaining prodigious even into old age, as the present writer remembers vividly, on producing what proved to be Fistoulari's last recordings in 1978 of Violin Concertos by Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn and Bruch, with the Philharmonia Orchestra and the Japanese violinist Takayoshi Wanami. We may regret that he never recorded the one Russian work which, above all, he wished to commit to posterity – Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony (at a time when the work was little-known) – but as with another Russian collection under his baton in Guild's Historic series, we may hear his mastery in music which, above all, meant the most to him.

On this CD we hear Fistoulari in orchestral music from four Russian operas. The programme opens with the orchestral suite from Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla*. This was the second opera by 'the father of Russian music' – as Glinka is generally known, even outside of Russia – and although the Overture, in particular, has become world-famous, we may be surprised to learn that the music dates from as early as 1842: so fresh and vital, so essentially Russian is its character, that it could easily pass for a score composed forty years later. The purely orchestral excerpts from the opera are very rarely heard, and of course it is only the Overture which will be familiar to most listeners. The three consecutive *Fairy Dances* come from the opera's Act III, when a group of slave-girls are summoned to distract one of Ludmilla's suitors; the Oriental Dances from Act IV (Arabian-Turkish-Caucasian: a Lezghinka) take place in the castle of Tchernomor, who has abducted Ludmilla, and it is his March (also from Act IV) which concludes the Suite.

Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Ivan the Terrible* went through several revisions before finally satisfying the composer: the actual period of composition from first version to the final third took place over thirty years – for not until 1898 was Rimsky-Korsakov satisfied. Although the opera is known as *Ivan the Terrible* (this title was given it by Serge Diaghilev in 1909, two years after the composer's death), the original title was *The Maid of Pskov*, under which name it is sometimes performed today in Russia. The story of the opera ought not to concern us greatly – set in the 16th-century against the civic background of quasi-Hanseatic towns, Novgorod and Pskov, it tells of the realisation by the visiting Tsar Ivan that the young girl Olga, accepted as the Governor of Pskov's daughter, is in reality his own daughter: she is accidentally killed, the opera ending with the grief-stricken Ivan now bereft. The Overture is relatively straightforward, and the two *Intermezzi* preface meetings of the populace, as they gather, anxious for the political fate of their townships. Rimsky-Korsakov based his *Royal Hunt and Storm* on the similarly-titled movement from Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. This was added when the opera's final version was made. It makes an effective, if somewhat odd, ending to the suite as – despite the movement's title – the music dies away as the storm subsides.

Titling has also bedevilled Tchaikovsky's opera *Tcherevichky* from which our third orchestral suite is taken. Based on Gogol's short story *Christmas Eve* (or *The Night Before Christmas*) the opera