

VICS-1013 STEREO

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF
SCHEHERAZADE

MONTEUX
conducting the
LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA


VICTROLA



Leonardo—Heads of Leda

Rimsky-Korsakoff—SCHEHERAZADE
Pierre Monteux/London Symphony Orchestra

Mono VIC-1013
Stereo VICS-1013

“...an Oriental narrative
of some numerous and varied
fairy-tale wonders...”



Though *Scheherazade* is descriptive, not narrative; though the composer refused to provide a “program” for it, he did give us the following explanatory note which appears on the score: “The Sultan Schahriar, convinced that all women are false and faithless, vowed to put to death each of his wives after the first nuptial night. But the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by entertaining her lord with fascinating tales, told seriatim, for a thousand and one nights. The Sultan, consumed with curiosity, postponed from day to day the execution of his wife, and finally repudiated his bloody vow entirely.”

We are not given the details of any of the Sultana’s fabulous stories, though sections of the work are given titles, rather as points of departure for our own imaginings. “I meant these hints,” wrote the composer, “to direct but slightly the hearer’s fancy on the path which my own fancy had traveled, and to leave more minute and particular conceptions to the will and mood of each listener. . . . All I had desired was that the hearer, 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. . . .”

1. *The Sea and the Vessel of Sinbad*. At the very beginning, we are presented to the Sultan in the stern and pompous voices of the trombone, tuba, horns, and some woodwinds and low strings. The violin delivers the lovely little song which now, and at intervals throughout the suite, identifies Scheherazade.

We feel the swell of the sea; a fabulous story

unfolds. Strange birds fly overhead . . . awful shapes move dimly in the green depths . . . a short, fierce storm rages invisibly . . . and in the closing calm we are assured that for one day, at least, she has postponed her uncomfortable fate.

2. *The Tale of the Prince Kalender*. The *kalenders* were fakirs, storytellers and sometimes beggars who were welcomed as entertainers and wits. Here is a golden opportunity for “the clown of the orchestra” (the bassoon). The Prince Kalender subject is in turn pathetic, awkward, grave, jocose, and suggests the beggar himself.

3. *The Young Prince and the Young Princess*. We do not know who the prince and princess were, but only that they were young and bemused by love. They sing of love; the prince speaks first, and to him is given the glowing melody of the violins. Presently the princess speaks a tender song in the reedy sweetness of the clarinet.

4. *Festival at Bagdad—The Sea—The Vessel Is Wrecked*. The Sultana gives a glowing description of a Bagdad celebration. Snake charmers pipe magic tunes . . . fakirs cry their wares . . . ivory-skinned girls peer seductively from shadowy shelters of richest rugs . . . imperious camels bear a lordly satrap and his train through scurrying, chattering crowds. . . . There is dancing and marching. . . .

The Sultan speaks again, ominously; Scheherazade quickly moves to another tale, and we are once again on the deck of Sinbad’s ship. But now the ship trembles in a stormy sea . . .

the sailors turn ashen faces toward a great rock, surmounted by a warrior of bronze; and toward the rock the ship turns too, drawn impotently by some occult force. A heaven-splitting crash, and the ship is gone . . . we hear Scheherazade’s motif . . . finally the Sultan speaks, but now gently, amorously and the violin rises to an incredible, triumphant height.

PIERRE MONTEUX

This celebrated conductor is one of the most famous and beloved figures in the entire music world. Dean of living conductors, Monteux has led virtually every great symphony orchestra both here and abroad. He began his podium career in 1911 as conductor of Diaghileff’s Ballet Russe, and won his reputation as one of the finest technicians of the baton with performances of the modern French and Russian ballet repertoire.

After touring the United States with the Diaghileff ballet, Monteux remained here to conduct the French and Russian repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera. Later, when he held permanent conductorial posts with the Boston Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, and the Symphony Orchestra of Paris (which he founded), his advocacy of Russian music, both romantic and modern, broadened and grew even more authoritative.

Monteux resigned from the San Francisco Symphony in 1952 to devote his time to guest conducting and recording; however, in 1961, at the age of eighty-six, he accepted the directorship of the London Symphony, the orchestra which he conducts in this recording.

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