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PIERRE MONTEUX conducts **TECHAIKOWSKY** *Romeo and Juliet Overture*
NDR Symphony Orchestra, Hamburg **MUSSORGSKY** *A Night on Bald Mountain*
RIMSKY-KORSAKOV *Capriccio Espagnol*



VANGUARD EVERYMAN CLASSICS

Tchaikovsky
OVERTURE-FANTASY,
"ROMEO AND JULIET"

Rimsky-Korsakov
CAPRICCIO ESPAGNOL,
OP. 34

Mussorgsky
A NIGHT ON
BALD MOUNTAIN

VANGUARD
Everyman Classics



PIERRE MONTEUX conducting the N.D.R. Symphony Orchestra of Hamburg

In the 1950's and 1960's, Pierre Monteux was honored the world over as one of the great, magisterial conductors. Entering his 80's (he was born in Paris, April 4, 1875), he seemed to attain an even more youthful fire and incandescence, combined with the ripeness of a lifetime of music-making. Looking up to him as a classic master, who spoke with equal depth and authority over the whole range of music, one sometimes forgot that he had entered the musical scene as something of a rebel, helping to shake up the stodgy academic traditions. In the early 20th century, in Paris, he organized a series of "Concerts Berlioz," when Berlioz was still a controversial figure. Then, as conductor for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, he led the premiere performances of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*, the latter performance being the historic occasion when the fury of the music could hardly be heard because of the fury of the audience. He carried on this spirit of combining the tradition with the 20th century innovations in his subsequent career as a master conductor. When leading the Boston Orchestra, in 1919-1924, he gave *Le Sacre du Printemps* its first American hearing.

This aspect of Monteux's career lends special interest to his performances of the program on this recording. For the wave of "Russian national music" in the late 19th century was one of the most powerful influences on 20th century developments. Electrifying were its new view of the orchestra, with brilliant woodwind and brass colors, its refreshment of the mainstream with folk melodies and scales, its rhythmic vitality and complexity. Nor were these narrowly "Russian." They impelled a search for similar qualities elsewhere, as in Rimsky-Korsakov's interest in Spanish motifs and rhythmic patterns. And one can hear the knowledge of this influence in Monteux's approach. It is not that he underrates the passion, warmth and singing lines of the music. These qualities are all present. But they move within a framework of awareness of the push to new horizons that they represent.

The *Overture-Fantasy "Romeo and Juliet"* by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) is one of the comparatively few recreations of a Shakespeare theme in music (out of the many attempted) that has become an established classic. The reason is not that Tchaikovsky captured, or sought to capture, any Elizabethan or Renaissance color, or that he retold in musical terms the story of the play. It is rather that the theme of the struggle for love, against crushing and anti-human obstacles, was one particularly close to the composer, drawing upon his own deepest feelings. Certainly after hearing this work, it is impossible to think of Romeo and Juliet without the soaring melody coming to mind that expresses their love so perfectly. The work was first written in 1869, re-

written in 1870, published in 1871, then revised to its present form and published in 1880.

The introductory measures (clarinets and bassoons, *Andante non tanto, quasi moderato*, F sharp minor) are both a touching curtain-raiser to a tragedy and a suggestion of the drama's Friar Laurence, in their hint of ecclesiastical harmonies. The following *Allegro giusto* in B minor is music of clash and storm, evoking the Montagues and Capulets, and the violence of swordplay, but also—and this is what makes it music of depth, not merely picture—the intense struggle and conflictful yearning for happiness of the lovers. Then comes what could be called the love scene itself, with its poignantly beautiful melodies, and muted and divided strings. A symphonic development section follows, employing the "clash and conflict" themes and also throwing against them the "Friar Laurence" and love scene motifs. This reaches a climax of high dramatic intensity, followed by a moment of silence, after which the love themes end the work, touchingly and elegiacly transformed to lament the death of the lovers.

When Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) was praised by critics for having written, in the *Capriccio Espagnol*, Op. 34, a "magnificently orchestrated piece," he expostulated that it was not that at all, but rather a "composition for orchestra." For as he pointed out, the particular timbres and techniques of instruments themselves, not only winds, strings and brass but also the varied members of the percussion battery, were organic to the melodic shapes, rhythmic patterns and figurations, let alone the cadenzas which adorn the work so effectively. It was an approach more far-reaching than even the composer suspected, for such a conception became central to the music of Igor Stravinsky, who studied in his youth with Rimsky-Korsakov, and to much of the music of Maurice Ravel. In fact, just as we can hear in the *Capriccio Espagnol* that the first thought which gave birth to it was that of a "violin fantasy on Spanish themes," so we can hear in Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* the touch of its original inspiration as a piece in which the solo piano would expostulate against an orchestra. And such an instrumental concept, independently developed, helped make American jazz a world musical influence.

The *Capriccio Espagnol* is in five movements. (1) Alborada ("Aubade" or "Morning Serenade"), *Vivo e strepitoso*, in A major, 2/4. (2) Variations, *Andante con moto*, F major, 3/8, on a theme heard first from the horn over the strings. (3) Alborada, *Vivo e strepitoso*, B flat major, 2/4, which repeats the first movement but with different scoring. (4) Scene and Gypsy Song, *Allegretto*, D minor, 6/8, in which the stream of cadenzas which opens the movement, and leads to the impetuous song, sensitively

captures the improvisational quality of Spanish folk Gypsy style. (5) Fandango of the Asturias, A major, 3/4, which comes as a climax of the preceding movement and closes with a reference to the Alborada. The latter might be called the binding element of the entire composition.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) was the most original mind among the galaxy of Russian composers of his day, the deepest in his attachment to the common people and their forms of evolved musical expression, the foremost in reshaping the musical tradition to embrace these fresh, strange and moving well-springs of harmony, melodic shapes and rhythm (instead of reshaping the folk material to fit the tradition). His greatest achievements were in opera. His one tone-poem for orchestra, *A Night on Bald Mountain* (more accurately, "St. John's Night on Bald Mountain," this being the Russian Midsummer Night) was inspired by Gogol's "St. John's Eve." It shows Mussorgsky in full command of the originalities of style that would make the opera *Boris Godunov*, which he began immediately afterwards, so ground-breaking a work, and in fact he intended to insert the tone-poem, *A Night on Bald Mountain* into an opera that was left unfinished, "Sorchinty Fair," also based on Gogol's stories.

In a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky gave the following plan of the tone-poem. "The introduction is in two series (the Assembly of the Witches); then a D minor theme with a slight development (the Witches' Gossip). This is linked with the Cortege of Satan in B flat major... The cortege theme, without development with a response in E flat minor (this ribald character in E flat minor is very amusing), is concluded with a chromatic scale on a full movement in contrary motion in D major. After this, B minor (the unholy Glorification of Satan) in Russian style with development, variations, and a semi-ecclesiastic quasi trio; a transition to the (Witches') Sabbath and finally the Sabbath (first theme in D minor also in Russian style with variations.—At the close of the Sabbath the chromatic scale and the figures from the introduction in two series break in, which produces a pretty good impression.—You've hardly any idea of the Sabbath—it has turned out very compact and, to my way of thinking, fiery. The form of interspersed variations and calls is, I think, the most suitable for such a commotion... the transitions are full without the German approach, which is remarkably refreshing." Among the many beauties of the work are the bewitching closing measures, that announce the dawn.

—S. W. Bennett

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