

# notes

October 17/18

## **CAPRICCIO ESPAGNOL & BEETHOVEN'S PASTORAL**

by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

**30 SECOND NOTES:** Ludwig van Beethoven lived during a time of rapid urbanization and industrialization, and he, like many of his contemporaries, found both solace and inspiration in the natural world. Unlike most of his contemporaries, however, Beethoven distilled his countryside experiences into a verdantly evocative “Pastoral” *Symphony*. Two Russian masterworks round out the concert — Alexander Glazunov’s melodious *Violin Concerto*, with the dazzling American virtuoso Elena Urioste as soloist, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s orchestral showpiece inspired by his only visit to Spain, *Capriccio Espagnol*. 🎵



### **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

**Born in Bonn, December 16, 1770;  
died in Vienna, March 26, 1827**

### **SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN F MAJOR, OP. 68 “PASTORAL”**

- First performed on December 22, 1808 in Vienna, conducted by the composer.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on September 19, 20 and 21, 1986 with Yuri Krasnapolsky conducting. Subsequently performed in 1994 and most recently on March 6 & 7, 2004 with Joseph Giunta conducting. (*Duration: c. 44 minutes*)

Beethoven gave each of the five movements of his “Pastoral” Symphony a title describing its general character. The first movement, filled with verdant sweetness and effusive good humor, is headed *The Awakening of Cheerful Feelings at the*

*Arrival in the Country*. The violins present a simple theme that pauses briefly after only four measures, as though the composer were alighting from a coach and taking a deep breath of the fragrant air before beginning his walk along a shaded path. The melody grows more vigorous before it quiets to lead almost imperceptibly to the second theme, a descending motive played by violins above a rustling string accompaniment. Again, the spirits swell and then relax before the main theme returns to occupy most of the development. To conclude the first movement, the recapitulation returns the themes of the exposition in more richly orchestrated settings.

The second movement, *Scene at the Brook*, continues the mood and undulant figuration of the preceding movement. The music of this movement is almost entirely without chromatic harmony, and it exudes an air of tranquility amid pleasing activity. The form is a sonata-allegro whose opening theme starts with a fragmentary idea in the first violins sounded above a rich accompaniment. The second theme begins with

a descending motion, like that of the first movement, but then turns back upward to form an inverted arch. A full development section utilizing the main theme follows. The recapitulation recalls the earlier themes with enriched orchestration and leads to a most remarkable coda. In the closing pages of this movement, the rustling accompaniment ceases while all Nature seems to hold its breath to listen to the songs of three birds — the nightingale, the dove and the cuckoo. Twice this tiny avian concert is performed before the movement comes quietly to its close. When later Romantic composers sought stylistic and formal models for their works, it was to Beethoven that they turned, and when program music was the subject, this coda was their object.

Beethoven titled the scherzo *Merry Gathering of the Peasants*, and he filled the music with a rustic bumptiousness and simple humor that recalls a hearty (if somewhat ungainly) country dance. The central trio shifts to duple meter for a stomping dance before the scherzo returns. The festivity is halted in mid-step by the sound of distant thunder portrayed by the rumblings of the low strings. Beethoven built a convincing storm scene here through the tempestuous use of the tonal and timbral resources of the orchestra that stands in bold contrast to the surrounding movements of this *Symphony*. As the storm passes away over the horizon, the silvery voice of the flute leads directly into the finale, *Shepherd's Song: Joyful, Thankful Feelings after the Storm*. The clarinet and then the horn sing the unpretentious melody of the shepherd, which returns, rondo-fashion, to support the form of the movement. The mood of well-being and contented satisfaction continues to the end of this wonderful work.

**The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two**

**horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.**

**Joseph Giunta's suggested recordings:**

Berlin Philharmonic; Herbert von Karajan, conducting – Deutsche Grammophon.  
Philadelphia Orchestra; Ricardo Muti, conducting – EMI.



**ALEXANDER  
GLAZUNOV**

**Born in St. Petersburg,  
August 10, 1865;  
Died in Neuilly-sur-Seine,  
March 21, 1936**

**VIOLIN CONCERTO IN A MINOR, OP. 82**

- First performed on March 4, 1905 in St. Petersburg, conducted by the composer with Leopold Auer as soloist.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on January 16, 1955 with Margaret Davis as soloist and Frank Noyes conducting. Subsequently performed in 1991 and most recently on January 9 & 10, 1999 with Vadim Gluzman as soloist and Jorge Mester as guest conductor.

*(Duration: c. 20 minutes)*

By the turn of the 20th century, Russian music had become a mature art. The works of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky and Borodin, having been played at home and abroad, established a national character and tradition that those masters wanted to see passed on to succeeding generations. The most important Russian musical torchbearer of the two decades after 1900, the time between the deaths of Tchaikovsky and his contemporaries and the rise of the modern school of Prokofiev

and Shostakovich, was Alexander Glazunov.

Glazunov was gifted with an exceptional ear and musical memory (after Borodin's death, he completely reconstructed the *Overture to "Prince Igor"* from recollections of Borodin's piano performance of the piece), and early demonstrated his gifts in his native St. Petersburg. By age nineteen, he had traveled to western Europe for a performance of his *First Symphony*. During the 1890s, he established a wide reputation as a composer and a conductor of his own works, journeying to Paris in 1889 to direct his *Second Symphony* at the World Exhibition. In 1899, he was engaged as instructor of composition and orchestration at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. When his teacher, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, was dismissed from the Conservatory staff in the wake of the 1905 revolutionary turmoil, Glazunov resigned in protest in April and did not return until December 14th, by which time most of the demands by the faculty for the school's autonomy had been granted. Two days later he was elected director of the Conservatory. He worked ceaselessly to improve the school's curriculum and standards, and he made a successful effort to preserve the school's independence after the 1917 Revolution. In the final years of his tenure, which lasted officially until 1930, Glazunov was criticized for his conservatism (Shostakovich, one of his students, devoted many admiring but frustrated pages to him in his purported memoirs, *Testimony*) and spent much time abroad. In 1929, he visited the United States to conduct the orchestras of Boston and Detroit in concerts of his music. When his health broke, in 1932, he settled with his wife in Paris; he died there in 1936. In 1972, his remains were transferred to Leningrad and reinterred in an honored grave. A research institute devoted to him in Munich and an archive in Paris were established in his memory.

Glazunov's greatest period of creativity came in the years before his Conservatory duties occupied most of his time and energy. He produced much music in all forms except opera — his last major work, the *Saxophone Concerto* of 1934, bears the opus number 109. His best-known piece is the *Violin Concerto*, written just before he was installed as director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, but a few other works, notably the ballets *Raymonda* and *The Seasons*, the *Fourth*, *Fifth* and *Eighth Symphonies* and the atmospheric tone poems *The Kremlin* and *Stenka Razin*, occasionally grace concert programs.

"Within Russian music, Glazunov has a significant place because he succeeded in reconciling Russianism and Europeanism," wrote Boris Schwarz. "He was the direct heir of Balakirev's nationalism but tended more toward Borodin's epic grandeur. At the same time he absorbed Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral virtuosity, the lyricism of Tchaikovsky and the contrapuntal skill of Taneyev.... He remains a composer of imposing stature and a stabilizing influence in a time of transition and turmoil."

Glazunov composed his only *Violin Concerto* in 1904-1905. Of it, Abraham Veinus wrote, "The *Concerto* makes the Tchaikovskian point that a Russian melody can comport itself with social grace amid elegantly cosmopolitan surroundings.... It is an excellent sample of the urbane turn-of-the-century habit of crossing melancholia with virtuoso brilliance. It accomplished its specific task with skill and honesty, and it should always prove popular with audiences who admire the nearly defunct traditions of good manners, brilliance and obvious, poetical feeling." Glazunov constructed his *Concerto* as a single, long span of music ingeniously divided into several sections. The *Moderato* first movement, in effect, is wrapped around the *Andante*, which stands in the place of the expected development section: i.e., main

theme (a chromatically inflected melody of small intervals) — second theme (a sweet strain of brighter mien) — *Andante* — recapitulation of the main and second themes. A showy cadenza for the soloist leads without pause to the *Allegro* finale, a rousing rondo based on the bounding theme introduced by the trumpets at the movement's beginning.

**The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, glockenspiel, triangle, cymbals, harp and the usual strings.**

**Joseph Giunta's suggested recording:**

National Symphony Orchestra; Anne-Sophie Mutter, violin; Mstislav Rostropovich, conducting – Erato.



**NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

**Born in Tikhvin, near Novgorod, March 18, 1844; died in St. Petersburg, June 21, 1908**

***CAPRICCIO ESPAGNOL, OP. 34***

- First performed on October 31, 1887 in St. Petersburg, conducted by the composer.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on January 15, 1950 with Frank Noyes conducting. Subsequent performances occurred in 1971, 1978, 1998 and most recently on September 28, 2006 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

*(Duration: c. 16 minutes)*

Rimsky-Korsakov visited Spain only once: while on a training cruise around the world as a naval cadet, he spent three days in the Mediterranean

port of Cádiz in December 1864. The sun and sweet scents of Iberia left a lasting impression on him, however, just as they had on the earlier Russian composer Mikhail Glinka, who was inspired to compose the *Jota aragonesa* and *A Night in Madrid* on Spanish themes. Both of those colorful works by his Russian predecessor were strong influences on Rimsky-Korsakov when he came to compose his own Spanish piece in 1887.

Rimsky-Korsakov's principal project during the summer of 1887 was the orchestration of the opera *Prince Igor* by his compatriot Alexander Borodin, who had died the preceding winter. Rimsky-Korsakov installed himself at Nikolskoe on the shore of Lake Nelai in a rented villa, and made good progress with the opera, one of many completions and revisions he undertook of the music of his fellow Russian composers. Things went well enough that he felt able to interrupt this project for several weeks to work on a composition of his own, a piece on Spanish themes that was originally intended for solo violin and orchestra but which he re-cast for full orchestra as the brilliant *Capriccio Espagnol*.

He took the new score home with him to St. Petersburg that fall to prepare its premiere with the Russian Concert Society Orchestra for October. In his autobiography, he recounted the events surrounding the first performance of the work: "At the rehearsal, the first movement had hardly been finished when the whole orchestra began to applaud. Similar applause followed all the other parts whenever the pauses permitted. I asked the orchestra for the privilege of dedicating the composition to them. General delight was the answer. The *Capriccio* went without difficulties and sounded brilliant. At the concert itself, it was played with a perfection and enthusiasm the like of which it never possessed subsequently, even when led by (Arthur) Nikisch himself (later music director of

the Boston, Berlin, Leipzig and Budapest orchestras). Despite its length, the audience insistently called for an encore.” The composer made good on his promise to dedicate the work to the Russian Musical Society Orchestra, inscribing the names of all 67 players on the score’s title page.

It was Rimsky-Korsakov’s dazzling orchestral technique that drew the greatest praise for the new *Capriccio*. Tchaikovsky, for one, wrote to him that he had produced “a colossal masterpiece of instrumentation” and he should regard himself as “the greatest master of the present day.” The composer, however, insisted that the orchestration was integral to the structure of the music, and not just a finishing cosmetic touch. “The opinion formed by both critics and public that the *Capriccio* is a *magnificently orchestrated* piece is wrong,” he wrote. “It is a brilliant *composition for orchestra*. The change of timbres, the felicitous choice of melodic designs and figuration patterns, exactly suiting each kind of instrument, brief virtuoso cadenzas for solo instruments, the rhythm of the percussion instruments, etc., constitute here the very *essence* of the composition and not its garb.”

The *Capriccio Espagnol* comprises five brief, attached movements. It opens with a rousing *Alborada* or “*morning-song*,” marked *vivo e strepitoso* — “*lively and noisy*.” The solo

violin figures prominently here and throughout the work, a virtuosic reminder of the origin of the *Capriccio* as concerted piece for that instrument. A tiny set of variations on a languid theme presented by the horns follows. The *Alborada* returns in new instrumental coloring that features a sparkling solo by the clarinet. The fourth movement, *Scena e canto gitano* (“*Scene and Gypsy Song*”), begins with a string of cadenzas: horns and trumpets, violin, flute, clarinet and harp. The swaying *Gypsy Song* gathers up the instruments of the orchestra to build to a dazzling climax leading without pause to the finale, *Fandango asturiano*. The trombones present the theme of this section, based on the rhythm of a traditional dance of Andalusia. The final pages of the *Capriccio* recall the *Alborada* theme to bring this brilliant orchestral showpiece to an exhilarating close.

**The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, castanets, harp and the usual strings.**

**Joseph Giunta’s suggested recording:** Montreal Symphony Orchestra; Charles Dutoit, conducting – London.