

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

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Paul Dukas (1865-1935) The Sorcerer's Apprentice

Originally subtitled “Scherzo after a ballad by Goethe”, Paul Dukas’ symphonic poem aptly re-tells the tale told by the German poet and author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1797, *Der Zauberlehrling*. It is believed that Goethe’s own story recalled an even more ancient tale by the Greek writer Lucian (120-200 A.D.). Dukas’ musical endeavor came to life in 1897 about a century after Goethe’s work, and was premiered the same year in Paris with great success.

Having studied piano and composition at the Paris Conservatory from 1881, Dukas had established himself among his French composing colleagues after winning the Grand Prix de Rome, with Debussy one of his most renowned contemporaries. However, he was known to be such a perfectionist that he limited what works would eventually be published and ultimately destroyed many of his own compositions before his death. The result is that very few of his manuscripts survived, with primarily programmatic music and compositions for the piano making up the bulk of his oeuvre.

Considered by many to be a master of orchestration, Dukas taught at the Paris Conservatory, as a professor of orchestral music from 1910-1912, and from 1927 became a professor of composition there as well. The composer and professor also divided his time between his musical endeavors with his role as a music critic, writing for several newspapers in Paris. However, it is this work, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1897), for which Dukas is most well-known,

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and with Walt Disney purchasing the rights for the composer's music in 1937, as well as incorporating the piece into both the original *Fantasia* and the sequel some four decades later, the work became even more widely known. No matter, it is Goethe's original tale on which Dukas based his original composition, where a sorcerer leaves his apprentice alone at the workshop to do chores.

The ensuing events occur when the apprentice determines to try to conjure up some magic of his own while his master is away in order to get 'assistance' with his chores carrying pails of water to and fro. When he brings the broom to life to work for him, he fails to realize in time that he does not know how to stop the 'magic', which brings a flood of water to the workshop. He attempts to stop the broom with an axe, splitting the broom, but the parts of the broom return to life only adding to the problems of the poor apprentice. The sorcerer eventually returns and casts the spell needed to return the workshop to order, and warns the apprentice in the final lines of the poem to leave the conjuring of magic to the 'master' sorcerer.

Dukas was a master himself in conjuring the musical motives and imaginative orchestration to accurately depict the events and characters in this musical masterpiece. The soft descending thirds in the strings set the magical scene and return later when the magical spell is cast to bring the broom to life. The broom itself is given its own theme first presented by the clarinets in a low dynamic level in the opening section. The master's spell is depicted as if off in the distance by the muted brass intonations, before being picked up by the trumpets and masterfully woven with the pizzicato broomstick motive.

With the master 'away' and the apprentice having intoned the 'spell', the broomstick theme builds, heard now in the bassoons, slowly coming to life, and then passed around the ensemble in its unceasing march-step to a swirling climax, and only stopped briefly when the axe-chop seems to have worked. Instead, the composer presents the theme in canon with both parts of the broom now doing double the work, stirring a second even more fast-paced

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musical climax, until the sorcerer's magic spell motive is heard, returning the workshop to order with the more calm, yet still mysterious theme. The apprentice seems to scurry back to work in an apologetic triplet before the final closing chords appear to announce "The End" to the magical tale.

Work composed: 1897 **World premiere:** 1897, Paris

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (bass drum, triangle, suspended cymbals, cymbals, glockenspiel), harp, strings

Riccardo Zandonai (1883-1944) Biancaneve (Snow White) - Impressions of a Fairy Tale

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The original title included the subtitle in Italian, "*Impressioni di una fiaba*" (Impressions of a Fairy Tale) for orchestra, and indeed this is Zandonai's musical interpretation of "Snow White." The ballet version premiered at the Teatro del'Opera in Rome in March of 1951, directed by Ottavio Ziino, with choreography for the ballet by Guglielmo Morresi together with Attilia Radice and Guido Lauri. The composer, though not as well-known outside of Italy, is most renowned for his opera *Francesco da Rimini* composed more than three decades earlier. Zandonai was born in Borgo Sacco, Rovereto, which was part of Austria-Hungary at the time. He showed musical promise at a very young age, entering the Pesaro Conservatorio in 1899 and completing what was usually a nine-year program in only three years.

At an event in Milan in 1908, Zandonai was introduced to Giulio Ricordi, one of the top publishing figures in Italy at the time. It was Ricordi who eventually pronounced the composer as Puccini's 'heir', even recommending that he be chosen to complete *Turandot* when Puccini died before being able to complete the last act himself. Zandonai became the director of the Rossini Conservatory in 1935 where he remained until his death.

Zandonai's operas, including "*Giulietta e Romeo*" not surprisingly displayed influences from Puccini. Some scholars also attribute influences by some 20th century composers as well, including Strauss, Stravinsky and Rimsky-Korsakov for their orchestrations, and Debussy and Ravel with their whole-tone scales. The operatic works, along with the work being performed for this concert series (initially intended as a ballet), are all illustrative of the composer's ability to build the orchestral music to a strong intensity in order to highlight the dramatic emotions of the scenes taking place on the stage.

Presented in five movements, the opening movement is titled *Biancaneve canta (Snow White Sings)* with clarinet and oboe opening as featured solos. The second movement continues: *Il Bosco (In the Forest)*, *Biancaneve si Sperde (Snow White gets lost)* eventually taking shelter where the seven dwarfs live. In the third movement *I Nani Arrivano* the seven dwarfs make their appearance. The fourth movement opens with *Rintocchi de Morte (The Death Knell)* as the dwarfs carry Snow White to the mountain in a state of sadness. In the final movement Prince Charming arrives and revives Snow White, presenting a proverbial "Happily Ever After" fairy tale ending.

Work composed: 1939 **World premiere:** March 31st, 1951, Rome
Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, english horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, triangle, cymbals, xylophone), harp, piano, celesta, strings

Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) Scheherazade - Symphonic Suite, Op. 35

Rimsky-Korsakov, known for his brilliant orchestration techniques, can perhaps be heard at his peak in this work. In addition, his ability to orchestrate for a specific 'programme' is highlighted in this Symphonic Suite. He had initially gotten the idea in the winter of 1888 to base a work on *The 1001 Arabian Nights*. But he didn't intend the work to follow directly in the vein of

Wagner's infamous 'leitmotifs': "In vain do people seek in my suite the leading motives linked unbrokenly with ever the same poetic ideas and conceptions." Instead the various themes are merely "...taken as a basis for the composition." The composer went on to state:

"...I had in view the creation of an orchestral suite in four movements, closely knit by the community of its themes and motives, yet presenting as it were, a kaleidoscope of fairy-tale images and designs of oriental character."

After sketching out the basic themes during the following spring, Rimsky-Korsakov retreated to Lake Cherechentz where he completed each of the four movements in close succession during the month of July. The work was premiered with the composer conducting in Leipzig, Germany the following year. He prefaced the work with the following:

"The Sultan Shahriar, persuaded of the falseness and the faithlessness of women, has sworn to put to death each one of his wives after the first night. But the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by interesting him in tales she told him during one thousand and one nights. Pricked by curiosity, the Sultan put off his wife's execution from day to day, and at last gave up entirely his bloody plan. Many marvels were told Shahriar by the Sultana Scheherazade. For her stories the Sultana borrowed from poets their verses, from folksongs their words, and she strung together tales and adventures."

Beyond this general description, Rimsky-Korsakov limits himself to mere hints for each of the movements: "I meant these hints to direct but slightly the hearer's fancy on the path that my own fancy had traveled, and to leave more minute and particular conceptions to the will and mood of each."

The two main themes of the work represent the two main characters: Scheherazade, played by the solo violin as she tells her many tales, and the

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Sultan, represented by the low strings and brass instruments. These themes open three of the four movements. The opening movement, *The Sea and Sinbad's Ship*, is in the key of E major, which the composer suitably associated with the color deep blue. In the score for the second movement, *The Tale of the Kalendar Prince*, the composer wrote a few hints at key points, including “one might see a fight” at the point where the basses and trombones intrude suddenly. And when the piccolo plays its triplet pattern he comments: “a sort of sketch of Sinbad's mighty bird, the Roc.”

The third movement, *The Young Prince and the Young Princess*, has the strings taking on the role of the former, while the solo flute theme represents the latter. When the clarinet and snare drum enter together, the hint given is: “They carry the Princess in a palanquin.” In the final movement, many of the previous three movements' themes are brought together in an appropriate climax. *The Festival of Baghdad – The Sea – Shipwreck on a Rock Surmounted by a Bronze Warrior – Conclusion* combines all the tumult as well as calm that one might imagine would be found in these amazing tales so aptly orchestrated by Rimsky Korsakov. And as the composer stated: “All I had desired was that the hearer... should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders.”

Work composed: 1888 **World premiere:** 1888, Petersburg

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes (2nd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling on english horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (tambourine, snare drum, bass drum, triangle, suspended cymbals, cymbals, tamtam), harp, strings

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