



CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Kazuki Conducts Scheherazade
Symphony Hall
Wednesday 3 May, 2023
2:15pm

CBSO.CO.UK

KAZUKI CONDUCTS SCHEHERAZADE

Concert programme E4

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1:30pm in the Director's Lounge.

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4:15pm in the Jane How & Justham Rooms,
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PROGRAMME

Brahms Violin Concerto 40mins

Interval

Rimsky-Korsakov Scheherazade 45mins

Kazuki Yamada Conductor

Daishin Kashimoto Violin


KAZUKI YAMADA CONDUCTS SCHEHERAZADE

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KAZUKI CONDUCTS SCHEHERAZADE

A concert to enchant! In *1001 Arabian Nights* the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by weaving fabulous tales for her husband night after night – Rimsky-Korsakov tells equally magical stories in this brilliant suite. Brahms' exquisite Violin Concerto was a beautiful gift to the composer's violinist friend, Joseph Joaquin.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

VOLIN CONCERTO IN D, OP.77

Allegro non troppo

Adagio

Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace

Brahms takes a holiday

The history of Brahms' Violin Concerto is a tale of a particular person – and a particular place. "I only wanted to stay there for a day" wrote Brahms to Clara Schumann in May 1878. "But the first day was so beautiful that I was determined to enjoy another – and now I intend to stay for quite a while. If on your journey you have interrupted your reading to gaze out of the window, you must have seen how all the mountains around the blue lake are white with snow, while the trees are covered with delicate green".

"There" was the resort-town of Pörtlach, by the Wörthersee in Austrian Carinthia. Brahms had discovered Pörtlach the previous year, and the fruit of his visit had been his Second Symphony – the broad, sunlit masterpiece that had flowed from him like a kind of artistic reflex action to the storms and stresses of his First. Pörtlach was Brahms' relaxation: "I'm continuing to bathe in the warm lake-water" he told another friend "and in the warmth of the Austrians – called *gemütlichkeit*". It's impossible to miss that warmth in the work that occupied Brahms' next summer in Pörtlach; the Violin Concerto.

For Brahms, in the 1870s, a work for violin could be meant for only one man – his long-term friend and collaborator, the Hungarian violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim. Brahms was no violinist. Joachim, meanwhile, had already written three full-scale violin concertos of his own, and Brahms tested the water with care: "I'd like to send you a few violin passages" was his

first hint, in a letter of 21 August 1878. A few days later he revealed more. "I'll be satisfied if you say a word, and maybe write in a few: 'difficult', 'uncomfortable', 'impossible' etc. The whole business has four movements...". Joachim's response was instant: "To me, it's a great, genuine joy that you're writing a violin concerto (in four movements, no less!)...any chance that we might get together for a couple of days?"

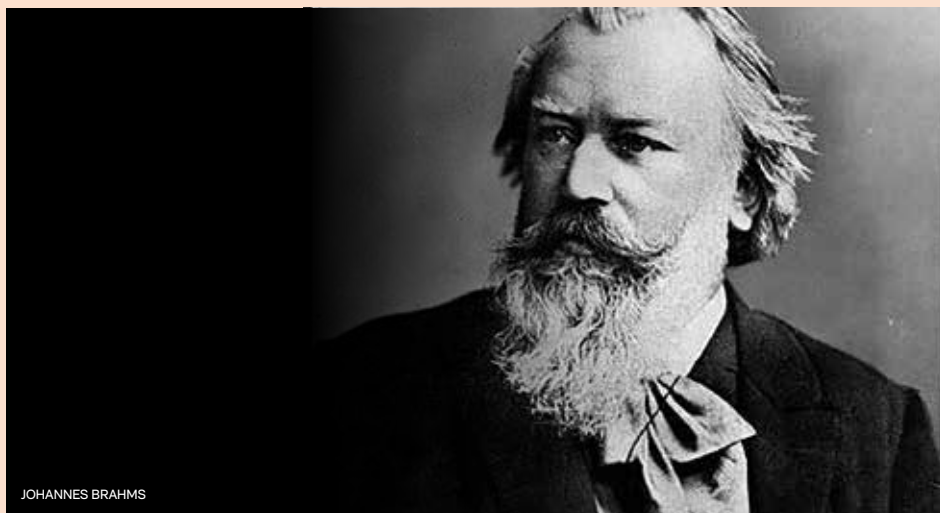
For all Joachim's guidance, however, Brahms knew precisely what he had in mind; and while he asked Joachim to suggest alternatives for the trickier violin passages, he reserved the right to disregard them. He also reduced the concerto from four to three movements. But the whole piece is as much a homage to Joachim's friendship as to the Carinthian scenery; containing oblique references to Viotti's 22nd Concerto (a favourite work of Joachim's) and to Joachim's and Brahms' youthful motto *Frei Aber Froh* ("Free but happy" – rendered into music as the notes F, A and F). It also celebrated Joachim's skill: full of the juicy double-stopped chords at which Joachim excelled, but which rendered this concerto so difficult for other contemporary players that one of them, Josef Hellmesberger, declared it a concerto "not for, but against the violin!"

Flashing fingers and grey trousers

Yet Brahms's Violin Concerto remains – in a crowded field – the finest violin concerto since Beethoven, rigorously constructed but always lyrical, and gloriously expressive. The scholar Hubert Foss summed it up when he called it "a song for violin on a symphonic scale". From the very start of the concerto – its warm, swinging opening subject introducing a string of successively lovelier themes, none a million miles from a waltz – the music unfolds at a very definite pace. The violin's dramatic, minor-key opening flourish, meanwhile, marks out the other extreme of the concerto's expressive world. The genius of this first movement is the way it satisfies the demands of

virtuoso display, and of a stormy symphonic development, without making the solo part sound anything other than a spontaneous, expressive improvisation. In the traditional place, just before the *coda*, Brahms left Joachim space to improvise his own *cadenza* – and then brings the orchestra back in with a stroke of pure, hushed magic.

Brahms feared that his Adagio might sound too slight after so broad an opening movement; but its opening – in which the violin spins a Bach-like aria over a transfigured wind serenade in the manner of Mozart – could scarcely make a better foil. Measured, inward and quiet, the poignant evening colours of its closing bars give no hint of what is to come in the *Finale*. Classical precedent goes by the board, as the solo violin launches a brilliant gypsy-*rondo* – an affectionate tribute to Joachim's Hungarian roots (and his "Hungarian" concerto of 1861). With its swaggering themes and glittering runs, this is entertainment-music of the most open-hearted kind; and after a short, brilliant *cadenza* it breaks into joyous, out-and-out comedy. Brahms is serious, but never self-important. When Joachim premiered the concerto, in Leipzig on New Year's Day 1879, Brahms was nearly late. He turned up to conduct in the nick of time – suspenders unbuttoned, shirt untucked, and wearing a creased pair of grey everyday trousers.



JOHANNES BRAHMS

Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov
(1844-1908)

SCHEHERAZADE, OP.35

The Sea and Sinbad's Ship
The Tale of the Kalendar Prince
The Young Prince and the Young Princess
Festival in Bagdad – The Sea – Shipwreck

The scholar and the dreamer

Amid the creative chaos of 19th century Russian music, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov kept order. When St Petersburg and Moscow composers quarrelled, Rimsky mediated. He wrote classical string quartets as well as colourful folk-operas. He was the one who spotted the teenage Stravinsky's phenomenal talent, confiscated Mussorgsky's cognac, and rescued half-finished scores from underneath litters of rescue kittens in Borodin's chaotic St Petersburg apartment. He wore a beard and spectacles, and his colleagues dubbed him "Herr Professor" – especially after he joined the staff of the St Petersburg Conservatoire in 1871. But

"All I desired was that the hearer, if they like the piece as music, should carry away the impression of an Oriental narrative, filled with fairy-tale wonders."

they'd got him wrong. He was a liberal, a dreamer, and in the 1905 Revolution he sided with the student radicals. He'd begun his career as an officer in the Tsar's navy, sailing to Britain, America and Brazil. Rimsky always loved the colour and excitement of far-away places.

It's no surprise, then, to find him in the summer of 1888 choosing the *Arabian Nights* as the subject of a new orchestral work. Russian composers were fascinated by the Islamic peoples so close to Russia's southern borders. Rimsky was no exception, and with his skill in orchestration (he'd taught himself to play every different orchestral instrument), inspiration flowed



RIMSKY-KORSAKOV – PORTRAIT BY REPIN

freely. The new work was as big as a symphony, though he insisted that it was merely a "Symphonic Suite". He was equally careful to point out that, although he took inspiration from scenes in the *Nights*, the music didn't follow the stories precisely. "All I desired was that the hearer, if they like the piece as music, should carry away the impression of an Oriental narrative, filled with fairy-tale wonders", he explained. And Rimsky was no ethnomusicologist – he certainly didn't research or quote Arabian folksongs. *Scheherazade* is as authentically Middle Eastern as Fry's Turkish Delight, and no less delicious.

Tales of a Thousand Nights and a Night

So the trombones and basses represent the cruel Sultan Shahryar: convinced of the inconstancy of all women, and sworn to behead a new wife each morning. And the solo violin is his latest wife / victim: the beautiful and courageous young Scheherazade, "pleasant and polite, witty and wise", as the *Arabian Nights* tell us. She cheats death by telling him a new tale each night, finishing each time on a cliffhanger – so he simply has to keep her alive to find out what happens next. She launches straight into one of the seven voyages of Sinbad: a rolling, widescreen orchestral seascape. Rimsky had travelled the world under sail and there's something here of the experiences he described in his memoirs: "Wonderful is the tropical ocean with its azure colour and phosphorescent light, wonderful are the tropical sun and clouds, but the tropical night sky over the ocean is the most wonderful thing of all". But it's Scheherazade's story too, and she whispers a few comments of her own as the voyage unfolds.

The *Arabian Nights* contain more than one story of princes forced by fate and circumstance to wander the byways and bazaars in the guise of a Kalendar, a type of holy beggar. In *The Tale of the Kalendar*

Prince, flamboyant woodwind solos swirl over strumming strings (the whole string section plucks their instruments, like a troupe of minstrels accompanying some fabulous tale). Fanfares sound, and the music accelerates to a terrifying gallop as the Roc – the monstrous bird of Arabian legend, as large as a house – takes to the air.

There are many young princes and princesses in the Arabian Nights, too, but we don't need to know which to catch the mood of Scheherazade's pillow-talk in the third movement – the tenderest music (and maybe the single loveliest tune) that Rimsky ever wrote. This is no children's story, though in the faster central section, as the drums rattle and the woodwinds dance, Rimsky suggested that we might imagine "the princess carried in a palanquin". The ending is tender and then playful: perhaps Shahryar's heart is beginning to melt. So the beginning of the finale comes as a jolt. Shahryar loses his temper, Scheherazade pleads; and then she spins a tale of a frenetic chase through the bazaars of old Bagdad before – with a sudden, cinematic change of scene – she resumes the story of Sinbad, whipping up a storm and finally dashing the orchestra to jangling smithereens on a towering crag of percussion and brass.

Scheherazade's stories are over: but her own tale has one final twist. In Rimsky's final scene we hear the couple reconciled and the Sultan finally persuaded to relent: "As for this Scheherazade, her like is not found in the lands; so praise be to Him who appointed her a means for delivering His creatures from slaughter". With a quiet prayer and a final caress, warm woodwind chords let our storyteller sleep peacefully at last.

Conductor

KAZUKI YAMADA

THE POSITION OF CHIEF CONDUCTOR IS SUPPORTED BY JOHN OSBORN CBE



As the new Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Kazuki Yamada builds upon the deep musical bond formed with players during his time as Principal Guest Conductor of the orchestra, a role held by him since 2018. Alongside his commitments in Birmingham, Yamada is also Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo. Having already worked with the two organisations in partnership, conducting collaborative performances of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in Monaco in 2019, Yamada's new appointment sees a continuing link forged between Monaco and Birmingham, with the CBSO Chorus set for a return to Monaco in 2023 for a performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Time spent under the close supervision of Seiji Ozawa served to underline the importance of what Yamada calls his "Japanese feeling" for classical music. Born in 1979 in Kanagawa, Japan, he continues to work and perform in Japan as Principal Guest Conductor of the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra.

DAISHIN KASHIMOTO

Both as the soloist of an international orchestra and as a sought-after chamber musician, Daishin Kashimoto is a regular guest of major concert halls around the globe. The tremendous wealth of experience gained in over 15 years as first concert master of the Berliner Philharmoniker benefits him in his equally adept role as a soloist, where he plays a wide repertoire ranging from classical to new music. Last season, Kashimoto performed Bruch's Violin Concerto with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra conducted by Fabio Luisi, and appeared with the CBSO as well as the NDR Radio Philharmonic. In 2022, his tour of Japan with the Gürzenich Orchestra under the baton of François-Xavier Roth took him to renowned Japanese concert halls, including Suntory Hall in Tokyo. A recent highlight was the world premiere of Toshio Hosokawa's violin concerto with the Berliner Philharmoniker at the Philharmonie Berlin in March 2023. In June he will perform the Swiss premiere at the KKL Luzern with the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra. An Asian tour with the CBSO is scheduled for the end of this season. Kashimoto plays on an Andrea Guarneri violin from 1674.



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