



The
Academy of
St Mary-le-Bow

Rimsky-Korsakov

Scheherazade

Op. 35

Bartók

The Miraculous Mandarin

(suite) Op. 19

Conductor

Alex Fryer

5 October 2024 – 7:30pm

St James's Church, W2 3UD

Tickets £15 Adult, £12.50 Under 30/Conc.

Available at www.academyofstmarylebow.com

Welcome

Good evening and welcome to tonight's concert. It seems appropriate that as shops are filling up with spooky costumes and ghoulish treats in time for Halloween, we present a concert of music inspired by some rather gruesome tales.

The pieces in tonight's programme were only composed 36 years apart but are strikingly different in musical style. Both works portray a struggle between violent, entitled men and the women they wish to take as their lovers. In both instances the women ultimately prevail, but with differing consequences.

Bartok's ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin* was initially banned after its first performance in 1926. The arresting score viscerally evokes the violence of the onstage action, which sees a girl forced to dance to lure men to a robbery. One of the men's obsession with her defies even death, and despite being stabbed three times, he will not die. It is only when the girl allows him to touch her that his lust is satisfied, and he finally falls to the floor and begins to bleed. The end of the ballet was so shocking that Bartok reworked the piece into a suite (which we hear tonight) omitting the final part of the score, allowing the work to be heard in public.

The richness and beauty of Rimsky-Korsakov's stunning score might lead one to think that *Scheherazade* is a great love story in which a king falls in love with a young storyteller (called Scheherazade) over the course of a thousand and one nights. The majority of the music is, in fact, portraying the dramatic stories that Scheherazade is telling the king. Only at a few points does the score allude to the dark truth that she is telling them to save herself from a beheading. The king has vowed to kill each new wife he takes, the morning after their wedding night, so they don't have the opportunity to be unfaithful. Scheherazade (who is represented by a solo violin) avoids befalling the same fate as the kings' previous wives by telling him stories every night and promising to conclude them the following evening. By the time she has run out of stories, the king has fallen in love with her and spares her life... what a guy!

Tonight's concert is the first of our 2024/25 season which is jam-packed with fantastic music and guest artists. We're looking forward to welcoming back guest conductor Maxime Tortelier in February for Mahler's first symphony. In May 2025 we perform Beethoven's ever popular Pastoral Symphony directed from the violin by Britten Sinfonia violinist Ali Caldon. We hope to see you at some more of our concerts this season.

Alex Fryer
(Academy of St Mary-le-Bow, Artistic Director)

Programme

The Miraculous Mandarin
Op. 19 (Suite)

B. Bartók
(1881 – 1945)

- Interval -

Scheherazade
Op. 35

N. Rimsky-Korsakov
(1844 – 1908)

- I. The Sea and Sinbad's Ship
- II. The Story of the Kalendar Prince
- III. The Young Prince and the Young Princess
- IV. Festival at Baghdad – The Sea – The Shipwreck – Conclusion

Programme Notes

Bartók

The Miraculous Mandarin (suite)

Béla Bartók composed his 'pantomime,' *The Miraculous Mandarin*, between October 1918 and May 1919 after recovering from Spanish influenza. Following the end of the First World War, he was living in a small village near Budapest in near deprivation with no electricity or running water, and shortages of fuel and food,

It was not performed until 1926, in Cologne, and promptly closed after a single performance, having been banned by the city's mayor for its shocking and dark themes.

Based on the play of the same name by Hungarian author Menyhért Lengyel, the story is summarised in the score as follows:

In a shabby room in the slums, three tramps, bent on robbery, force a girl to lure prospective victims from the street. A down-at-heel cavalier and a timid youth, who succumb to her attractions, are found to have thin wallets and are thrown out. The third “guest” is the eerie Mandarin. His impassivity frightens the girl, who tries to thaw him by dancing — but when he feverishly embraces her, she runs from him in terror. After a wild chase he catches her, at which point the three tramps leap from their hiding place, rob him of everything he has, and try to smother him under a pile of cushions. But he gets to his feet, his eyes fixed passionately on the girl. They run him through with a sword; he is shaken, but his desire is stronger than his wounds, and he hurls himself on her. They hang him up, but it is impossible for him to die. Only when they cut him down, and the girl takes him into her arms, do his wounds begin to bleed and he dies.

The suite opens frenetically with an evocation of the busy concrete cityscape, complete with honking car horns in the brass, and bustling vigorous scales in the strings. The disjunct viola theme represents the three robbers, whilst a sensuous clarinet melody depicts the girl’s three attempts to lure victims with her dance.

The first two victims; a stumbling old cavalier, and a shy young suitor, are represented respectively by stuttering trombone glissandi, and a softly romantic oboe melody. Both are interrupted by the thugs, who throw the men out onto the street.

The arrival of the Mandarin (a wealthy ‘bureaucrat scholar’) is marked by a menacing minor third in the brass, and frenetic tremolos in the woodwind. As the girl takes up her dance for a final time, a waltz theme emerges, followed by a vigorous and panicked fugue as the Mandarin furiously pursues her. As he catches her and the thieves jump out to attack him at the climactic point of the frenzy, the Suite arrangement ends, leaving the darker elements of the story untold.

The dark and graphic themes portrayed in this work are undeniably shocking and unsettling, however, both Bartók and Lengyel found meaning and beauty within the story. As Lengyel wrote: “The true message of *The Miraculous Mandarin*, of course is...the apotheosis of pure, almost unearthly desire and love.”

Rimsky-Korsakov

Scheherazade

Born into a noble Russian family with a long history of military and naval service, Rimsky-Korsakov grew up hearing his older brother’s tales of his exploits in the navy, and reading books about the sea. This instilled in him a deep love of the ocean, and for much of his life, he combined his musical ambitions with a naval career; firstly as an officer in the Imperial Russian Navy, then as the civilian Inspector of Naval Bands. This love of the sea may have influenced him to write *Scheherazade*, and is particularly evident in its opening and closing movements.

Composed in 1888, *Scheherazade* is one of Rimsky-Korsakov's grandest and most popular orchestral compositions. Whilst he was hesitant to identify the exact stories and characters which inspired the piece, and at one point removed the programmatic titles altogether, he sought to evoke a series of images from the famous collection of medieval Arabian folk tales known as the *One Thousand and One Nights*.

In a preface to the score, he references the titular character Scheherazade:

"The Sultan Shahriar, convinced that women are faithless, had sworn to put to death each one of his concubines after their first night together.

But the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by interesting him in the tales she told him throughout the 1001 nights. Driven by curiosity, the Sultan put off his mistress' execution from one day to the next and finally abandoned his bloodthirsty resolution altogether.

Many wonders were told to Shahriar by the Sultana Scheherazade. She borrowed the words, both poems and popular songs, from older poets, and she mixed both into her stories and adventures."

The suite begins with an ominous descending bass motif, representing the murderous Sultan. He is swiftly followed by Scheherazade who is depicted by a mournful yet sensuous solo violin theme which weaves its way throughout the various tales.

Her first story features the well-known folk hero Sinbad on a voyage at sea; the vast ocean represented in a gently rocking accompaniment and fluid key changes.

The second movement alludes to one of three 'Kalendar Princes' featured in the tales. Whilst it is left deliberately unclear which of these roguish wandering mystics Scheherazade is speaking of, the intricate and adventurous woodwind solos clearly convey a sense of wonder and mystery.

The third movement, 'The Young Prince and the Young Princess,' evokes a beautiful and innocent story of young love, intertwined with Scheherazade's own theme, perhaps suggesting the Sultan's own burgeoning romantic feelings towards her.

The final movement brings together references to previous tales, intermingled with new ideas and imagery of a jubilant festival, as Scheherazade weaves her narratives into a triumphant finale. Having won the heart of the Sultan, thus saving her own life, Scheherazade's violin theme soars peacefully over the quiet rumbling of the Sultan's theme. As he is lulled to sleep by her magical stories, our heroine reaches her own fairytale ending.

Alex Fryer

Conductor

Alex read music at the University of Southampton, where he focused on oboe performance and conducting. During his time there, he was Assistant Conductor to both the University Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra. After graduating, he pursued a postgraduate degree in oboe performance at the Royal College of Music.

During his time at the Royal College of Music, Alex played principal oboe with the RCM Symphony Orchestra in addition to taking part in multiple other ensemble projects including contemporary music groups and chamber music recitals. Since graduating with a distinction in 2016, Alex has enjoyed a varied freelance career as an oboist, singer, conductor, and music leader.

In 2019 Alex joined Southbank Sinfonia for a year-long orchestral fellowship, which included performances at the BBC Proms and broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. More recently he has enjoyed taking part in the Pathway Scheme at the Wigmore Hall, and the Trainee Music Leader Scheme with Spitalfields Music training as a music leader for education and participation work. In 2025 Alex is looking forward to more concerts with the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow as well as a return invitation to work with Herefordshire Chamber Orchestra.

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow is an orchestra made up of outstanding non-professional musicians, many of whom have studied at leading conservatoires or universities, previously worked as professional players or were part of prestigious organisations such as the National Youth Orchestra. Our mission is to provide players with the opportunity to take part in high-quality orchestral concerts with like-minded musicians.

The ensemble performs around six major concerts a year across London and holds a residency at the historic church of St Mary-le-Bow in the City. The ensemble is flexible in size, undertaking projects from chamber music to large symphonic works. In the last year alone, projects have included a wind dectet concert, Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker (performed with a narrator) and Beethoven's fifth symphony (performed uncondacted with a guest leader). Though the ensemble is regularly directed by its Artistic Director, Alex Fryer, it also frequently engages guest conductors and guest leaders for un-condacted performances.

The Orchestra

Violin I

Makoto Nakata
Patrick Bevan
Jeremy Weinstein
Faye Zhao
Chris Hirschman
Nicholas Bacon
Ermos Chrysochos
Amy Lovejoy
Emily Groom*
Sergi Batishchev

Violin II

Harri Caddick
Christabell Pidduck
Sophia Goode
Bethany Thomas
Sarah Benson
Oli Gitting
Aamir Walwyn
Sacha Lee
Tim Seager

Viola

Will Emery
Rachel Lunt
Tilly Mattich
Alex Seow
Clare Everson
Edmund Daley
Naomi Fearon

'Cello

Sarah Hughes
Grace Dunn
Jaeho Bae
Magdalen Christie
Natalie Bevan
Morgan Jones

Double Bass

Will Priest*
Sam Lee*
Emily Green*
Manuel dell'Oglio*

Flute

Jenny Whitby
Sophie Miller-Molloy (picc.)
Tom Baird (picc.)

Oboe

Charlotte Evans
Sarah Gale (cor)
David Hasler (cor)*

Clarinet

Dan Mort
Alexander Card (Eb)
Steph Clark (bass)*

Bassoon

Grace Harvey
Charlotte Wyatt
Grace Meadows (contra.)

Horn

Izzy Wick
Tom Allard
Ben Horton
Jeremy Judge

Trumpet

Victor Rosi
Vlodymyr Bykhunod*
Chrissie Perrin

Trombone

Pau Hernández Santamaria*
Gabriel Eve
Jack Kelly

Tuba

Tom Steer

Harp

Aisha Palmer*

Piano

Roelof Temmingh*

Celeste

Fionnuala Ward*

Timpani

Sami Alsindi

Percussion

Shesh Abu-Jabir*
Sana Abu-Jabir*
Roxy Watts*
Keith Price*
Matthew Kosciecha*

* Denotes guest

Become a Friend

Joining the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow Friends Scheme costs just £50 a year. All funds go towards the running of the orchestra which allows us to put on an exciting and varied programme of events. In return, Friends receive a number of benefits including:

- Entrance into a prize draw to win free concert tickets
- 2 discounted tickets per concert (if you don't win the draw)
- A free drink per concert
- A special acknowledgement in our programme
- Reserved seating (upon request)

If you're interested in becoming a friend, please visit our website or email friends@academyofstmarylebow.com.

Many thanks to our current friends: Martine and Paul Allard, Julia Caddick, Charles Durose, Stephen and Jackie Fryer, Janet High, Steve and Nandita Nelson, Anne Harvey, Lise Bevan, Tom Walford, Geraldine Evans, Angela Pozzuto.

Upcoming Concerts

30 November 2024

St John's Waterloo

Tchaikovsky - Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Op. 13 'Winter Daydreams'
Rachmaninoff - Symphonic Dances, Op.45

Conductor: Alex Fryer

8 February 2025

Holy Trinity Sloan Square

Mahler - Blumine
Mozart - Piano Concerto No. 23 in A major K. 488
Mahler - Symphony No. 1 in D major 'Titan'

Conductor: Maxime Tortelier, Piano: Roelof Temmingh