



Listening Guide- “Springtime Celebrations” Concert

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op. 36

Recording: Russian conductor Valery Gergiev, leading the Mariinsky Orchestra.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbDYtAHTQoE>

Notes: Russian culture holds Easter, or the “Bright Holiday,” as the most important day of the liturgical calendar, offering hope and renewal after the long winter. Rimsky-Korsakov sought to convey “the legendary and heathen aspect of the holiday, and the transition from the solemnity and mystery of the evening of Passion Saturday to the unbridled pagan-religious celebrations of Easter Sunday morning.”

Form: Loosely structured one-movement work, including an introduction, main body, “slow movement,” and a dance-inspired “finale.”

Introduction (A contemplative opening, evoking the mystery and sanctity of Good Friday)		
0:00	Woodwind choir enters “slowly, mystically” with the main theme, the Russian Orthodox hymn “Let God Arise.” This slow, solemn melody evokes priests chanting. The scale is F major, but avoids the third and fifth scale degrees, creating a modal, ancient sound.	Wind choir: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon
0:45	Solo Violin <i>cadenza</i> (a virtuosic improvised section, or suggestive of improvisation), representing God as “the Light.” This is not a hymn, but a pictorial representation of the light Rimsky-Korsakov visualized, emerging from the Holy Sepulchre. Bright C major, vibrant and pure, symbolizes the light.	Solo Violin
1:11	Solo Cello on the Russian Orthodox hymn “The Angel Cried.” This is quite high in the cello range and sounds more like a viola.	Solo Cello
1:29	Solo flute <i>cadenza</i> as “the Light.” C major, same as at 0:45.	Solo flute
1:45	“Maestoso” or Majestic section. The Trombone solo sounds the main theme “Let God Arise,” answered reverently by the string section. This is a <i>call-and-answer</i> section, suggesting a priest (trombone) leading his congregation in prayer (strings). The trombone’s deep and warm voice evokes a spiritual leader.	Solo trombone
2:33	Solo flute <i>cadenza</i> returns for “the Light.”	Solo flute



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2:29	Solo clarinet plays “The Angel Cried” Orthodox hymn melody while accompanied by rapid flute, harp, and violin passages for an ethereal feel. <i>Tremolando</i> (rapid repetition or back and forth between notes) in the string section creates a wavering effect.	Solo clarinet plus flute, harp, violin
3:05	Solo violin as “the Light.” This melody is the same as the flute solo at 1:29, starting at a higher pitch.	Solo violin
3:20	“Andante lugubre” or “Mournful, walking tempo.” Bassoon and tuba play the main theme “Let God Arise” <i>pianissimo</i> , or very softly. This section suggests the Holy Sepulcher shining with light at the moment of resurrection, with gloomy tone colors setting the scene.	Bassoon and tuba
3:40	Solo Cello returns as “the Light.”	Solo Cello
4:05	The final section of the Introduction, a “coda” (Italian for “tail”) in a sense, as the scene has been set. Rapidly alternating notes in the strings create the atmosphere, extended by the harp <i>glissandi</i> (a glide from one pitch to another) at 4:22.	String section
4:23	Solo Clarinet plays “The Angel Cried,” with a very sparse accompaniment to the harps celestial <i>glissandi</i> .	Solo clarinet with harp accompaniment.
<p>MAIN BODY- Based on Sonata Form (Exposition). Rimsky-Korsakov uses two themes simultaneously for the Primary Theme (very unusual!), then progresses through other musical areas that mimic the individual movements of a symphony, similar to a <i>tone poem</i>.</p>		
4:28	“Allegro agitato” or “Fast and agitated.” This section is joyful and dancelike, suggesting the festive mood of the congregation. It opens with the hymn tune “Let Them Also That Hate Him Flee Before Him” (flute, violin I) before moving to the main theme, “Let God Arise,” which we heard many times in the Introduction.	Full orchestra, moving by instrument sections.
4:57	Transitional passage between Primary and Secondary Themes. Thin texture, heard in the Violins I & II, then flute. This transitional figure alternates with the “Let God Arise” main theme.	Violins, flute




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5:10	The hymn tune “Let Them Also That Hate Him Flee Before Him” is presented as Secondary Theme, with a prominent key change to bright and sunny C major. This theme is played by the flutes, oboes, and violins.	Flute, oboe, violins
5:28	Closing section of the “Exposition” featuring a climatic section based on “Let God Arise.” We have a full orchestra texture here, with all instruments moving together rhythmically, called homorhythm. A repetitive rhythm of “long, short, short, long” represents the enthusiastic tolls of church bells (later referenced as the Bell Theme in this guide.)	Full orchestra
“SLOW MOVEMENT”- Based on the hymn “Christ Has Arisen”		
6:04	Significant style change to “sustained and tranquil” plus a key change to D major (not as bright as C Major, but still vibrant). Two solo violins play harmonics (produced by lightly touching a vibrating open string, resulting in a higher pitch with ethereal quality) while the other violins play the hymn melody “Christ Has Arisen” with them.	Solo and section strings, some piccolo.
6:24	Delicately plucked <i>pizzicato</i> notes in the strings suggest a pagan celebration; bell tones and trumpets voice a joyous congregation.	Strings and trumpets prominent
7:24	Hymn melody returns (“Christ Has Arisen”) with clarinet, oboe, and bassoon creating an ancient, archaic sound through close harmonies.	Clarinet, oboe, bassoon
7:48	Based on the hymn “Let God Arise,” a solo trombone, representing the priest, slowly and deeply intones. This section is marked <i>recitative</i> , a musical term for music that mimics natural speech patterns (versus <i>aria</i> , which is melody-driven).	Solo trombone
8:50	Solo violin reprises “The Light” from the opening of the piece.	Solo violin
“Dance Movement/Finale” This section reprises many earlier themes/hymns for a joyful celebration and loosely follows Sonata Form.		
9:01	“Allegro agitato,” in bright C major, recalls the main body of the work (from 4:28). The bell theme from the Closing section returns (“long, short, short, long” rhythm), which is based on the Primary Theme/opening tune “Let God Arise.” Easter has been joyfully proclaimed, let the congregation celebrate! This is almost a dance section, light and uplifting.	Brasses, answered by percussion, then



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		strings and winds.
9:31	A transitional passage utilizing strongly accented notes on weak beats, creating <i>syncopation</i> . This sounds like a Development in a Sonata-Form movement (explores ideas and puts them together in new ways). <i>Dissonance</i> sets this section apart.	Full orchestra
9:47	Dialogue between strings/brass against the woodwinds on hymn "Let God Arise." This functions like a development. We hear the "Let God Arise" theme presented several times.	Strings and brasses in dialogue
10:15	Secondary theme area: flute, oboe, and violins present a modulation on the theme "Let Them Also That Hate Him Flee Before Him," previously used in the main body to alternate with "Let God Arise" and then appears as the Secondary Theme area. Notice the higher key area, suggesting light and adulation.	Flute, oboe, and violin
10:33	Climax on bell theme, full orchestra moves together.	Full orchestra
10:55	Transitional passage to a Coda-type section.	Brasses prominent, supported by strings
11:07	A lyrical theme, "Christ has Risen from the Dead," returns in the violins, previously heard at 6:04, the "slow movement."	Violins
11:35	Solo violin, "the Light."	Solo violin
11:54	Recalls the "slow movement" with material previously heard at 6:24, with a key change to C major. Very bright and pure.	Winds, strings, joined by brass
12:14	Climax, full orchestra plays <i>polyphonically</i> with several musical ideas overlapping, including the brass/bassoon playing a theme from the slow movement and the strings play the transitional figure (two-note pairs, falling)	Full orchestra
12:26	"Christ Has Arisen" hymn in the trombone and tuba, repeated at 12:46 and 13:01.	Trombone, tuba



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13:14	Short transitional figure in the strings brings us back to Closing Bell Theme (long, short, short, long).	Strings alternating with brass
13:31	Closing theme. The work moves toward final resolution and final thematic statements.	Full orchestra
13:46	“Christ is Arisen” theme sounds briefly.	Brasses
13:56	“Majestic.” Re-statement of the “Christ is Arisen” theme, which builds in dynamics and intensity until conclusion.	Full orchestra, brass prominent