

# Alexander Glazunov

Evgeni Svetlanov

Symphony No.8  
Raymonda - Ballet  
*(Four excerpts)*  
Mazurka in G  
Finnish Fantasy

alto



# Evgeni Svetlanov conducts Alexander Glazunov

## ***Symphony No. 8 in E-Flat Major, Op. 83***

1	Allegro moderato	10:53
2	Mesto	11:41
3	Allegro	6:42
4	Finale. Moderato sostenuto - Allegro moderato	12:46

## **Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra**

### ***from La Raymonda, Op. 57***

5	Act 1 Scene 1: Valse	5:22	7	Act 2: Danse Espagnole	2:08
6	Act 2: Adagio	2:01	8	Act 3: Danse Hongroise	4:03

## **Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra**

9	<b><i>Mazurka in G, Op. 18</i></b>	7:40
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10	<b><i>Finnish Fantasy, Op. 88</i></b>	12:18
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## **USSR TV & Radio Grand Symphony Orchestra**

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### NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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*The Eighth certainly represents an imposing summation of Glazunov's career as a symphonist, combining a complete mastery of ideas with a darker, more unsettled mood – one that had been increasingly a feature of some of his best works from the turn of the century onwards. The often- sombre tone may well reflect, in part, his reaction to recent events but, as always in Glazunov's symphonies, there is no extramusical programme. The composer conducted the first performance of the symphony at a Russian Symphony Concert on 8/21 December 1906.*

–John Tail

Glazunov, the son of a book publisher, was a natural melodist and a reformist head of the St Petersburg Conservatoire (1905-28). His administrative duties tended to encroach on his composing. He is well-known for conducting the notoriously disastrous premiere of Rachmaninov's *1st Symphony* in 1897 (Rimsky-Korsakov's wife thought he was blind drunk) and for his protection of his students, including the young Shostakovich, from communist interference. At a time of growing antisemitism in Russia, Glazunov had earlier protected his Jewish students from the Tsarist authorities. When asked, by the repressive Prime Minister, Stolypin, how many Jewish students were enrolled at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, Glazunov responded that he had no idea as he'd never bothered to count them.

The ***Symphony No.8 in E flat Op.83*** (1906) was Glazunov's final completed symphony and arguably his greatest (the poignant, wistful and melancholy fragment of his Ninth Symphony was later completed and orchestrated by Gavrill Yudin). The *Eighth Symphony* is the most troubled of Glazunov's symphonies and the most tragic in tone. It was composed at a time of great political turmoil. Russia's unexpected defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) had been followed by a wave of protests, political assassinations and widespread strikes. Russia has industrialised late compared to western powers but had done so remarkably quickly, resulting in the formation of a large, impoverished and highly concentrated urban proletariat. In such an environment trouble could spread very quickly, as seen in the 'Bloody Sunday' massacre of January 1905 in St Petersburg (commemorated fifty years later in Shostakovich's *11th Symphony 'The Year 1905'*).

There is an Elgarian quality to the opening movement of the *8th Symphony* and a wistful, yearning melancholy. The ominous and threatening three-note motif which appears throughout the second movement anticipates a similarly repeating passage in Vaughan Williams's *6th Symphony* written towards the end of the Second World War. I have no idea, however, whether Vaughan Williams ever heard Glazunov's *8th Symphony*. The despairing outbursts of this movement are quite uncharacteristic of Glazunov. It could well reflect the period of political turmoil during which the work was composed although one wonders whether there are more personal reasons for the brooding melancholy which pervades. A



vivacious and much lighter-hearted scherzo follows, and the symphony concludes with a majestic finale.

Finland became part of the Russian Empire in 1809, following Sweden's losses in the Finnish War with Russia. This marked the beginning of a period of Russian rule that would last until Finland gained its independence in 1917. From 1881 the composer had spent his summer in the resort of Sur-Mericki, working on his *First Symphony*, and in the early years of the 20th Century he would regularly conduct concerts of his own music in Helsingfors (Helsinki). Glazunov turned towards Finland for material in his ***Finnish Fantasy Op.88*** completed in Helsinki in 1909. Russia's neighbour across the Gulf of Finland continued to interest Glazunov and he composed several Finnish-themed scores.

*'[The Finnish Fantasy] is derived thematically from authentic Finnish sources and accoutred in sonorous Russian harmonies'*

– Nicholas Slominsky

*'Glazunov was always responsive to nature and the mysterious forests of the North seem to be reflected in the deep, rich colours with which the piece opens. The contrasting Finnish melodies – including the one he had used in his Piano Variations – are skilfully presented in various instrumental combinations before the work is crowned with a ringing statement of the Lutheran chorale 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott', in acknowledgment of Finland's Protestant religious tradition.'*

– John Tail

This is one of the most dramatic and enjoyable of Glazunov's shorter works. It is based on a Finnish folksong, which is gradually developed in a series of lyrical and more menacing passages. In this work the composer returned to a theme he had used in his *Variations on a Finnish Folk Song* for piano. The *Finnish Fantasy* would have been familiar to British TV audiences when it was used (uncredited) to accompany the opening titles on the mini-series of *Anna Karenina* starring Nicola Pagett and Eric Porter in 1977. Whilst in Helsinki Sibelius may well have been influenced by hearing the early works of Jean Sibelius. Sibelius's tone poem *Night-Ride and Sunrise* is almost contemporaneous with Glazunov's *Finnish Fantasy*. Glazunov, despite his conservative musical views, was liberal in other ways and was sympathetic to Finland's desire for autonomy. In this sense his political stance is reminiscent of Nikolai Myaskovsky quoting old Polish themes at the time of the Soviet take-over of Poland after World War II in his *Slavonic Rhapsody*. Sibelius recognised this himself and on Glazunov's fiftieth birthday Sibelius noted in his diary 'a toast to him, the friend of Finland'.

Glazunov's ballet scores are among his most popular works, especially ***Raymonda*** (1898). *Raymonda* is a ballet that tells the story of the young countess Raymonda who awaits her fiancé's return from the crusades. In his absence, she hosts a party to celebrate her name day, which is interrupted by a group of knights seeking shelter. One of the knights, Abderakhman, falls in love

with Raymonda and attempts to abduct her when she rejects him. The ballet is a medieval fantasy that depicts the love story of Raymonda and the knight Jean de Brienne in the face of the covetous desires of the Saracen chief Abderakhman. In some productions, Raymonda is portrayed as a young, independent woman who makes her own decisions on the path of love. (*Source: Royal Ballet School*)

Both Glazunov and the choreographer Marius Petipa were more interested in the ballet as a vehicle for their own respective talents rather than as a way of exploring the human condition through dance. There is an entertaining anecdote, featured in the memoirs of the conductor Nikolai Malko, concerning *Raymonda's* plot:

Glazunov (to Petipa) *Do you know the plot of Raymonda?*

No, Petipa replied, *do you?*

No, Glazunov said, *I don't either*

Notwithstanding the complexity of the plot, *Raymonda* has remained a popular work which has attracted some of the world's leading dancers including Rudolf Nureyev. *Raymonda* was first performed at the Mariinsky Theatre of 7th January 1898.

The ***Mazurka in G Op.18*** (1888) was the first of Glazunov's 'concert' dances for orchestra composed independently of any ballet score. According to Glazunov the composition of dance and ballet music was a useful technical training for a young composer.

– Jeffrey Davis (2025)

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## NOTES ON THE ARTIST

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**Evgeni Svetlanov** (1928-2002) recorded virtually the whole Russian symphonic repertoire, including a complete cycle of the symphonies of Alexander Glazunov and Nikolai Myaskovsky (ALC 3141).

– Jeffrey Davis (2025)

**Evgeni Svetlanov**, one of the best-known Russian conductors of modern times, was born in 1928 and having studied at the Gnessin School and later at the Moscow Conservatory under Shaporin and Alexander Gauk, he became chief conductor of the Moscow Radio Orchestra in 1953. The following year he took up an important post on the musical staff of the Bolshoy Theatre, becoming its Musical Director in 1962 and touring Europe in 1964. From 1965-2000 he worked with the USSR State Symphony Orchestra and later guest conducted with a number of Western orchestras including the Philharmonia. He was also a noted composer. Svetlanov's many recordings include standard versions of much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' repertoire and he might be said to be at his finest with colourful and exotically scored works such as these. He died in 2002.

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Tracks 5-8 recorded in Moscow, 1961

Producer and engineers uncredited

Track 9 recorded in Moscow, September 1961

Engineer: **Severin Pazukhin**

Track 10 recorded in Moscow, September 1962

Engineer: **Alexander Grosman**

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