

MUSSORGSKY

Night on Bald Mountain

USSR TV & Radio Large Symphony Orchestra

Evgeni SVETLANOV



Modest Mussorgsky

Night on Bald Mountain

1 Night on Bald Mountain 11:04

USSR TV & Radio Large Symphony Orchestra

Evgeny Svetlanov, conductor

Recorded in 1974

Vasili Antonenko, producer and engineer

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

It can be argued that the work we know as *Night on Bald Mountain*, credited to Russian composer **Modest Mussorgsky** (1839–1881), is more the work of **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov**.

Mussorgsky composed *St. John's Eve on Bald Mountain*, a “musical picture” of a Witches’ Sabbath occurring at Bald Mountain on St. John’s Eve, which, interestingly, he completed on that very night - June 23, 1867.

Mussorgsky was proud of this early “mature” effort, but his mentor, Mily Balakirev, refused to perform it. Mussorgsky attempted to insert the music, with expanded forces - vocal soloists, chorus, and orchestra - into two subsequent projects: the collaborative opera-ballet *Mlada* (1872), and the opera *Sorochinsky Fair* (1880).

Mussorgsky’s orchestral original was never performed in any form during Mussorgsky’s lifetime. In 1886, five years after Mussorgsky’s death, Rimsky-Korsakov published his own rearrangement and orchestration of the work, described as a “fantasy for orchestra,” based on Mussorgsky’s last version of the music from *Sorochinsky Fair*.

While Mussorgsky remained credited as composer, scholarly consensus that the work was more Rimsky-Korsakov than Mussorgsky emerged during the 20th century; Mussorgsky authority and musicologist Gerald Abraham went so far as to say in 1945 that

I need hardly remind the reader that the orchestral piece universally known as ‘Mussorgsky’s Night on the Bare Mountain’ is an orchestral composition by Rimsky-Korsakov based on the later version of the Bare Mountain music which Mussorgsky prepared for Sorochintsy Fair.

Mussorgsky’s tone poem was not published in its original form until 1968, and was championed by a number of conductors, most notably Claudio Abbado. Nevertheless, the Rimsky-Korsakov edition remains to this day the far more popular edition in the concert hall and the realm of recordings.

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

The conductor **Evgeny Svetlanov** (1928–2002) was the unsurpassed authority on Russian Romantic orchestral music in the last decades of the 20th century.

From 1965 until 2000, Svetlanov conducted the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, and recorded an extensive catalogue of Russian music, amassing the largest recorded legacy of any Russian conductor. At one point Svetlanov even claimed to have recorded “absolutely all the Russian symphonic music that has ever been written.”

Svetlanov initially trained as a pianist and was also active as a composer throughout his career. From 1955, he conducted at the Bolshoi Theatre, and established a reputation for dramatic readings of Russian operas, always to high musical standards.

At the time of his appointment to the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, he had already worked with them for ten years, and the collaboration was an enduring success. Svetlanov was able to establish a leading international profile for the orchestra through extensive touring.

By the 1980s, Svetlanov had also established significant connections with several Western orchestras leading to appointments with the London Symphony Orchestra, Residentie Orchestra and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In 2000, Svetlanov was controversially sacked from his Moscow appointment by the Russian culture minister, Mikhail Shvydkoi, who cited the excessive time that the conductor was spending with foreign orchestras. However, three years after his death, the orchestra was renamed in the conductor’s honour, and is known today as the State Academic Symphony Orchestra ‘Evgeny Svetlanov’.

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