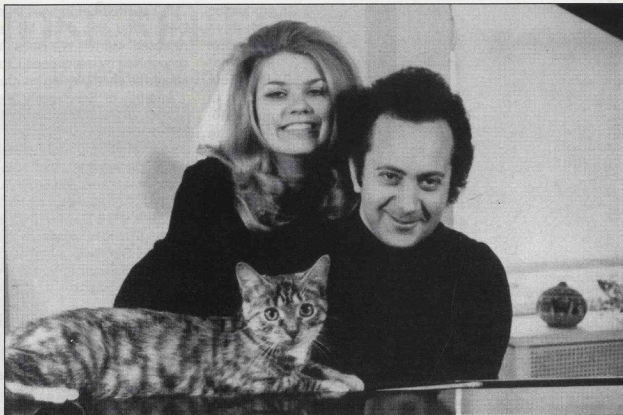


Concerto d'Été and Chaminade's *Automne* before Serebrier's *Winter* Concerto ends the series, as it were. The Concerto is not long, but is remarkably successful and proved to be an instant success. The Phoenix label in America has very recently issued an album of Serebrier's chamber music which includes the haunting *Erotica* for Soprano and Wind Quintet, with Carole Farley, and the early Saxophone Quartet from 1954, a most successful and frequently-played score.

Serebrier's *Winterreise*, completed in January 1999, 45 years after The Saxophone Quartet, is an astonishingly brilliant and compelling piece for virtuoso orchestra, a work which arose from the Violin Concerto. It is an emotionally direct and powerful score and is staggeringly well-played and recorded by the LPO on the Reference CD.

Serebrier's championship of new and little-known 20th-century music continues with another new CD of music by the interesting young American composer Carter Pann on the Marco Polo label, conducting the Czech State Philharmonic.

The trouble is, as Robert Simpson once wrote, that for the creative artist "versatility can be a curse". Serebrier's international career shows every sign of developing still further with an important



José, Carole and Fiordiligi

all-Tchaikovsky series of CDs so that his latest original compositions would seem to demand more of his time than he can humanly give them. However, what cannot be denied is that whichever of the disciplines of composer or conductor Serebrier follows at any one time, our musical life will be further enhanced by the work of a notably gifted artist, unafraid to be himself: an original thinker, whose life is dedicated to the art we all love and share.

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SEREBRIER ON RECORDING SCHEHERAZADE

Before making his first recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's famous *Scheherazade* José Serebrier delved deeply into both the score and the recorded background to the work

It seems extraordinary that some of the most imaginative orchestrators of the 19th-Century were practically self-taught. Berlioz, who was many decades ahead of his contemporaries with his inventiveness, never quite learned to play an instrument and his schooling was rather sketchy; Wagner had a similarly rushed learning experience. Rimsky-Korsakov managed to get himself a job teaching theory at the St Petersburg Conservatory before he knew much about the subject. He then learned it by correspondence, keeping one step ahead of his students. With such genius, there are no rules. Rimsky-Korsakov's musical language is simple and direct, even basic in content and harmonic structure. One could even think of the *Russian Easter Festival Overture* as an early minimalist essay, basically playing around with the same three chords over and over, just changing keys for occasional variety. It is through the vivid, brilliant orchestration that Rimsky-Korsakov maintains the interest. Using the simplest elements, he achieves the most colourful musical painting. The unity of the piece and its impact are marvels of craftsmanship. I find it extraordinary that his most popular composition, *Scheherazade*, is also his most sophisticated work, a fountain of unending imagination. The orchestration is novel and surprising, even today. Almost every page contains an inventive new orchestral colouring, an unexpected use of the instruments. While he composed it in a relatively short time, everything is carefully calculated to work. And work it does. It's pure magic.

I hesitated to accept the assignment when Reference Recordings proposed this repertoire. I knew that Stokowski had recorded it six times, three times in Philadelphia, and three times in London with different orchestras. I had been present during some of the London Symphony Orchestra sessions. While I did not have any of these recordings, or any other versions, I had heard that there were landmark recordings made during the early stereo era by Sir Thomas Beecham, Ernest Ansermet, Pierre Monteux and Fritz Reiner. I did not see any reason to record it again. I was curious, however, to hear several of Stokowski's versions and try to discover why he would do it over and over again. I heard four of his versions. I am not attempting to write a review of the recordings, but I think I may have found a reason for the persistence: *Scheherazade* is a very elusive work. One may never be completely satisfied with the final result. "Next time I'll do it better" Stokowski muttered after his last LSO session, and these were prophetic words. A decade later, in his mid-nineties, he attempted it one last time. It was with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, in 1975. This time, surprisingly, he deleted most of the orchestration changes he had previously made, removing the tam-tam from one of the early climaxes in the finale, leaving the original orchestration alone at the end of the work, and so on. Still, exaggerations abound. While his performances were the most imaginative and poetic, Stokowski seemed to miss the light-hearted character of some of the playful dance sequences. His pulling and stretching of the famous phrase in the slow movement has so many imitators that one can hear second-rate Stokowski performances all over the world.

Perhaps this is the kind of music that allows such personal touches of interpretation. What it does not permit are changes in Rimsky-Korsakov's scoring. His two-volume book on Orchestration, a musical bible during my childhood, cites numerous examples from *Scheherazade* indicating some of the options he could have chosen and the reasons why he made a final decision.

The clarity of his creative process is so rational and businesslike as to give the impression of a genial craftsman rather than a pure genius who may act by some divine intuition or sudden inspiration. Like Wagner's and Berlioz's treatises on conducting, Rimsky-Korsakov's advice on orchestration may seem a little naive today. For example, his explanation of the volume of a single flute: "one flute matches the sound of the first violins". The basic principle, however, remains valid.

In the early sixties, Stokowski encouraged me to keep in touch with my family in Kiev and St Petersburg. I had not been back to Russia for many years, so I decided to follow his advice. The visit to St Petersburg was most revealing, especially because of Pavel Serebriakov, who had become a celebrated pianist and Dean of the famed Conservatory. Through his contact I was able to see and study many manuscript scores of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky, an experience which proved invaluable. The first versions of composers' works are not always the best ones. There is no doubt in my mind that the revised and final version of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture* is far superior to the earlier, original version. Stokowski had tried to find the best of both worlds by combining the two versions by performing the final one with the quiet slow ending of the first version, which was more in the spirit of the tragic end of the play. Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* manuscript was neat and methodic. To me it seemed second only to Ravel's in its neatness and clarity. The conviction with which he indicated every dynamic marking seemed to indicate that no changes should be necessary.

While the genius of Stokowski is unmistakable in all his recordings of *Scheherazade*, none of the versions seemed fully satisfactory, and he must have known it. The freedoms he took are refreshing, but one could argue the taste and the distortions, as well as the repeated alterations of the score. I remembered Monteux talking about his two recordings, one with the San Francisco Symphony and the other with the London Symphony Orchestra, during my Summers of study with him in Hancock in Maine. He often spoke about the hundreds of performances he conducted of it of Fokine's Ballet version Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. I had never heard his recordings of this work, and the first hearing of the early San Francisco version made a wonderful impression. It was short lived. How could Monteux's version be more than six minutes shorter than

