

Albert Coates Russian and French Music



I can imagine strife in many a peaceful home when Part 4 of this suite is reached.
Father: "I call that a nose."
Son or Daughter, with that desire to irritate so conspicuous in happy families: "Nose? A term used by the Elizabethans to denote a band or company of musicians."

(*Quipped snidely from behind*)

Mother, reading newspaper, quite irrelevantly remarks "How terrible these Bolsheviks are."

Son, of course, misunderstands, and replies with withering scorn "Naturally you cannot understand that the juxtaposition of tonal masses, the empirical anomalies, etc., etc." (until the entire family is flattered out!)

The *Firebird* music suffers more from being detached from its proper setting—the theatre—than did the later work *Petrushka*. It will sound extraordinarily scrappy and disjointed to anyone who has not seen the ballet. Moreover, the notes affixed to the records do not correspond very satisfactorily with the plot given in the supplement. Further, Mr. Percy Scholes' excellent analytical notes, done for a B.B.C. concert at Covent Garden, from which I have culled some information, present the music in a different sequence to that given here. Perhaps, therefore, the following analysis, merely a personal interpretation based with the main outlines of the story, will be helpful.

Part 1.—An enchanted garden with something sinister and evil lurking in the background. A scene bathed in half-light. After many obscure mutterings the air suddenly grows tremulous with sound, a rich glow dispels the shadows. The wonderful exotic fire bird flutters into the garden.

Part 2.—She dances round a silver tree loaded with golden fruit, seeming to the young Prince Ivan (hidden in the bushes) the loveliest thing he has ever seen. Greedy dancing he captures her, but she begs to be released, offering him a gift of one of her feathers.

Part 3.—She departs. The garden is now filled with a band of maidens headed by a Princess. They too dance with charming vivacity and have a game with the golden apples. At dawn they disappear.

Part 4.—The Prince is seeking them when suddenly there appears the monstrous retinue of the evil spirit of the place, the demon king Kaschei! The magic feather preserves Ivan's life, but the Firebird also comes to his rescue. She makes the bey of wild Indians, warrior, Turks, Chinamen, Clowns, Imps, Hodgepkins, Ogres, and Apes burst into a frenzied dance. While they are thus engaged she directs Ivan to smash a huge egg in a casket in which is hidden the demon's life. This done the monster dies and the loathsome creatures vanish. Ivan marries the princess.

The highly coloured orchestration rather blinds one to the lack of any real "meat" in the music. It is a positive relief on reaching Part 3 to encounter a genuine tune, one which seems better than it actually is by reason of what has gone before. Rhythmically the music is feverishly alive, melodically it has to rely on actual or spurious folk tunes for sustenance. These sound very like concessions. The final section with its blocks of harmonies pushed this way and that makes a terrific din that fits the stage picture, but is meaningless without. As a study for *Petrushka* the music has a definite interest and as all of us like a bit of "two-pence coloured" at times, these records will find a place in our cabinets. Whatever criticisms one may make of this Debussy-Scriabin-Stravinsky confection, there are none to be made about the recording. Real above tone, that floating incisive quality, is heard at last; the string background, the occasional solo violin relief, the writhings and posturings of the wind and brass are excellently reproduced. Everyone, at least, will be able to take genuine pleasure in the *Dance of the Firebird* (Part 3).

N.P. The Gramophone, April 1925. review of the Albert Coates recording of Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, HMV D.958, 959

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Albert Coates

conducts

Glinka

Ruslan and Lyudmila Overture

Rimsky-Korsakov

Le Coq d'Or Suite • Dance of the Tumblers

Stravinsky

Firebird Suite (1911)

Liadov

Kikimora

Debussy

Golliwog's Cakewalk

Ravel

Ma Mère l'Oye

Transfers by Ward Marston

Acoustic HMV recordings 1921-1924

Coates Russian & French Music

- [1] GLINKA Ruslan and Lyudmila *Overture* (4:24)
- [2] RIMSKY-KORSAKOV Le Coq d'Or - *Suite* (22:02)
- [3] RIMSKY-KORSAKOV The Snow Maiden - *Dance of the Tumblers* (3:20)

STRAVINSKY Firebird Suite (1911 version with small cuts)

- [4] 1. Introduction – Kashchei's Enchanted Garden – Dance of the Firebird (5:52)
- [5] 2. Supplication Of The Firebird (3:43)
- [6] 3. The Princesses' Game With The Golden Apples (2:24)
- [7] 4. The Princesses' Khorovod (2:15)
- [8] 5. Infernal Dance Of All Kashchei's Subjects (4:14)

[9] LIADOV Kikimora (4:02)

- [10] DEBUSSY Golliwog's Cakewalk (from *Children's Corner*) (3:46)

RAVEL Ma Mère l'Oye

- [11] I. Pavane de la belle au bois dormant (1:21)
- [12] II. Petit Poucet (2:54)
- [13] III. L'Alceste, Impératrice des pagodes (3:10)
- [14] IV. Les entretiens de la belle et de la bête (3:20)
- [15] V. Le jardin féerique (3:32)

Symphony Orchestra Albert Coates

Transfers by Ward Marston

Cover artwork based on
photographs of **Albert Coates**
Glinka Ruslan and Lyudmila
Recorded 5 May 1922. Issued on HMV D658

Rimsky-Korsakov Coq d'Or
Recorded 10 May and 14 July 1922
Issued on HMV D732-734

Rimsky-Korsakov Dance of the Tumblers
Recorded 14 July 1922. Issued on HMV D658

Stravinsky Firebird Suite
Recorded 24 and 29 October 1924
Issued on HMV D958 and 959

Liadov Kikimora
Recorded 28 October 1921
Issued on HMV D620

Debussy Golliwog's Cakewalk
Recorded 25 April 1922. Issued on HMV D620

Ravel Ma Mère l'Oye
Recorded 25 November 1921, and 25 April 1922
Issued on HMV D709 and 709
Total duration: **70:19**

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