

The Ballets of Alexander Glazunov:
Scènes de Ballet, Raymonda and *Les Saisons*

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Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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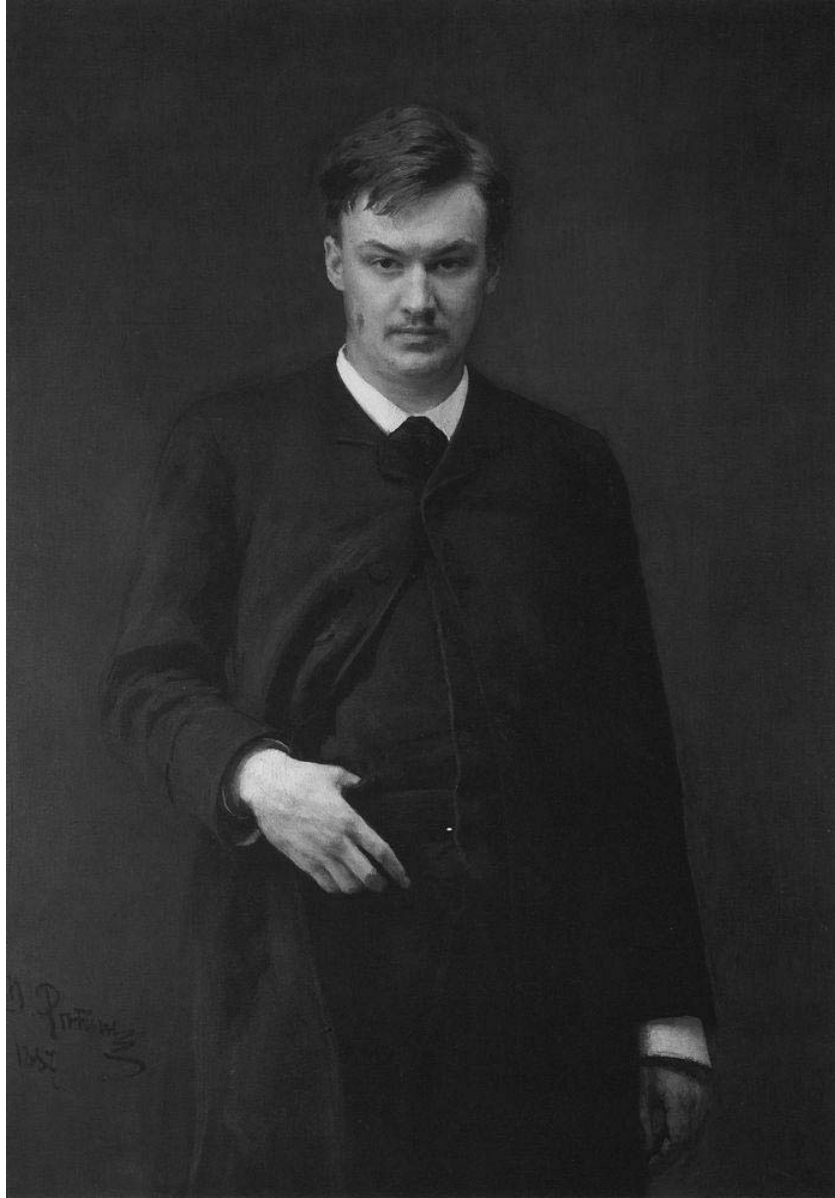
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Alexander Glazunov. Portrait by Ilya Repin (1887)

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INTRODUCTION

Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov

Glazunov represents one of the greatest natural talents in the history of music. He was born on 10 August 1865, the son of a prosperous bookseller and publisher. He showed a talent for music early. After Balakirev had shown Glazunov's first compositions to Rimsky-Korsakov, he began studies with the latter, "making progress by the hour". His Symphony No. 1 in E major, completed before he was 17, was premiered by Balakirev at a concert of the Free Music School, and won him the admiration of all Russian musicians. Such was the astonishment that greeted the composer when he appeared in his school uniform, that rumours began circulating that his wealthy parents had paid to have it prepared. He became known as "the little Glinka", and the influential Belayev undertook the publication of his works. In 1884 a European tour extended his fame, and within 10 years his reputation had spread to the rest of Europe. His music was heard with increasing frequency throughout the capitals of the world. Such was the sharpness of his hearing and prodigality of his memory, that he could reproduce any piece of music on the piano after a single hearing. He was rarely sober, and astonished listeners by playing complicated music on the piano without removing his habitual cigar from his fingers. His sheer facility seems to have affected his creative originality adversely: composition came to him so easily that he never renewed his style, nor seemed ever to have subjected his music to a rigorous self-criticism that might have helped to transform his talent into something greater.

At first Glazunov was regarded as the inheritor of the Russian nationalist ideals, but he soon turned to absolute forms, rather than the thematically inspired tone paintings so typical of the Mighty Handful. His symphonic compositions are nonetheless full of Russian folk allusion. His emotional world seems to have been centred in the atmosphere of the classical Russian ballet. The movements in his abstract orchestral scores seem to reflect a glittering, chandelier-lit cosmos. He was the composer of four masterful dance compositions: *Scènes de Ballet*, Op. 52 (1894), *Raymonda*, Op. 57 (1898), *Les Ruses d'Amour*, Op. 61 (1900), and *The Seasons*, Op. 67 (1900). All became major works in the sunset of the Imperial Ballet, and remain landmarks in the history of theatre music for the dance. In fact Glazunov became a lifelong caretaker of the 19th-century Romantic musical ideals, with his unrelenting insistence upon the skills and amenities of musical craftsmanship. He had an impeccable sense of form, and became a master orchestrator, specializing in suave instrumental textures (with remarkable handling of the woodwind, especially flutes). He was also a skilled contrapuntalist, although he seldom focussed attention on conspicuous display of this facility. While experimentation by younger contemporaries (like Igor Stravinsky, from the same Russian school) was raging through the musical culture of Europe, Glazunov continued breathing his own life into the traditional musical procedures he had favoured from his youth. There was nothing indecisive or amorphous about his preference. He would sketch a mood quickly and directly, and then develop it to its full potential. He was a highly skilled craftsman emerging necessarily from a rich, full artistic culture, nurtured on tradition and respect.

Glazunov appears to have been a warm and genial man, a firm friend and modest about his accomplishments. His features were broad and Slavonic, with kindly eyes under arching brows. Towards the end of his life he composed little, but continued to conduct his own music. As a teacher he in turn exercised considerable influence on the younger generation through his composition classes at the St Petersburg Conservatory, where he also became director. His life was outwardly uneventful, but single-minded in pursuit of his musical ideals. He was accorded full honours when he died in Paris on 21 March 1936.

Scènes de Ballet

This suite, Opus 52 in 8 movements, was written in 1894, and published the following year, dedicated to the orchestra of the Russian Opera, St Petersburg. It was first performed at a concert of the Imperial Music Society in 1895, with the composer conducting from the manuscript score. Each section of this work is structured and delimited with a confident hand, developed with masterly certainty, and defined in its own ideal musical character.

1. *Introduction (Préambule) (Allegro, A major, 12/8)*. Lengthy brass fanfares give way to a lyrical theme announced by the strings, then taken over by the woodwind. Elements of the fanfare reappear in the subsequent development.

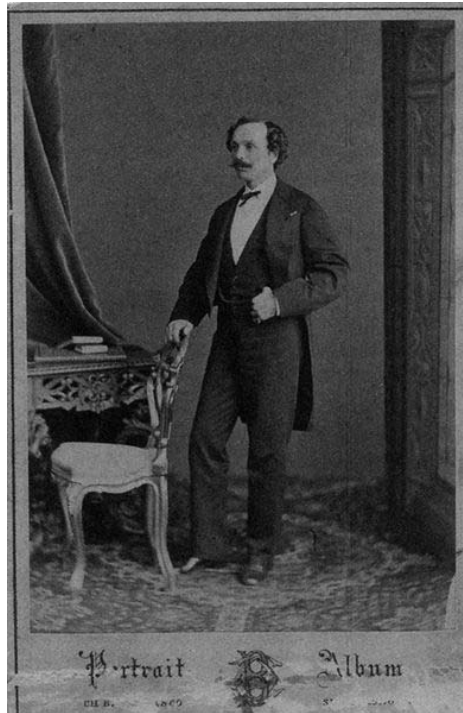
2. *Marionnettes (Allegro, D major, 3/8)*. The music is a delicate tonal evocation of the puppet theatre and the type of emotion elicited by it. The mood is ebullient, and succeeds in capturing the romance and sentiment of the world of marionettes. A short introduction leads in to a glittering skittish theme for piccolo, pizzicato strings and glockenspiel. The G-major trio features a slight theme on the strings, and leads back into the first subject. This movement was used in Glazunov's ballet *Les Ruses d'Amour* (1900) Opus 61 for the depiction of a marionette performance.

3. *Mazurka (Allegro, F major, 3/4)*. The introduction of 28 bars seizes attention, preparing the way for the sonorous first subject. The D-major trio is more reflective, before a return to the more assertive opening material.

4. *Scherzo (Scherzino) (Allegro, A major, 2/4)*. This presents a rush of melodic fragments for lightly scored woodwind and muted strings, and releases a carefree mood, airy and graceful.

5. *Pas d'action (Adagio, D major, 4/4)*. This is the heart of the suite, sustaining a unique intensity and emotional commitment. The lyrical mood is presented by the principal melody introduced by the cellos, and then taken up by the violins. These two groups of strings then participate in a duet of warmth and sensitivity.

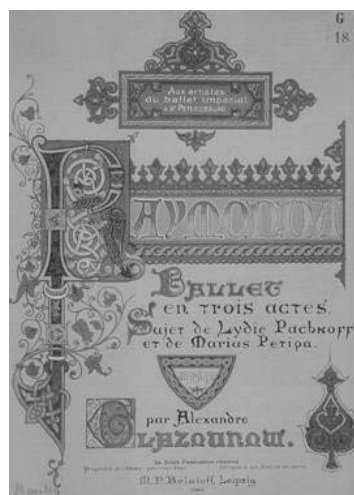
6. *Danse Orientale (Allegretto, G minor, 3/8)*. The Eastern mood is instilled by a languorous oboe melody over strings and percussion. The theme is then developed at greater length by the strings and brass. This is typical of the so-called 'character dances' of the Russian balletic tradition, sketched along predictable formal lines to fit classical choreographic patterns, and conveying a sense of tonal and melodic atmosphere appropriate to the perceived place of origin.



Marius Petipa (1870)

7. *Valse* (*Allegro moderato*, C major, 3/4). The principal melody of the archetypal dance of the 19th-century ballet is introduced on the violins, and is typically touched with melancholy. The trio in A-flat major is initiated by a solo violin, and then taken up by the flute, before the return to the main theme.

8. *Polonaise* (*Moderato*, A major, 3/4). This is the longest piece of the suite, and provides a suitably brilliant, vividly coloured and rousing finale. An introduction leads into the crisp rhythmic first subject, for the full orchestra. The trio is initiated by a jaunty oboe theme, leading back into the opening subject, with a coda bringing the piece to a powerful conclusion.

*Raymonda* Score

Raymonda

Ballet in 3 acts and 4 scenes

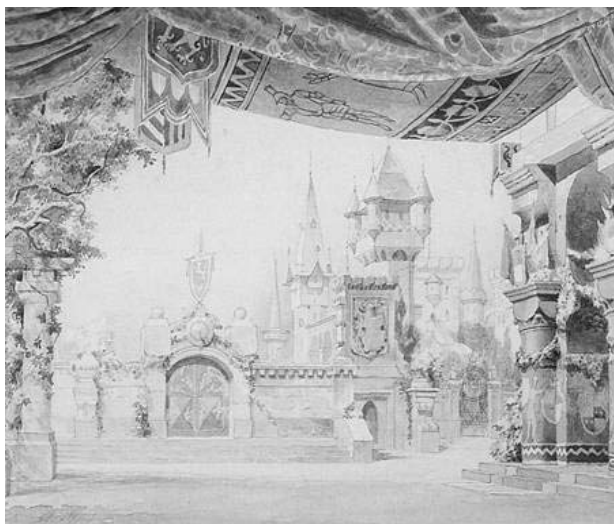
Scenario: Lydia Pashkova and Marius Petipa

Choreography: Marius Petipa

Sets: O. Allegri, K. Ivanov and P. Lambin

First performance: St Petersburg, Maryinsky Theatre, 19 January 1898

Principal dancers: Pierina Legnani (Raymonda), Sergei Legat (Jean de Brienne), Nicholas Legat (Beranger), Pavel Gerdt (Abderaman)



Raymonda Act 1 design

Raymonda is to marry Jean de Brienne, but the Saracen knight Abderaman forces his attentions on Raymonda while de Brienne is on the Crusades. At the last moment de Brienne returns, fights his rival, and sets the scene for the preparations for the marriage festivities. These start with a lavish Hungarian divertissement.

Act 1. Raymonda, betrothed to Jean de Brienne, is celebrating her birthday. Her fiancé, who is expected the next day, sends some presents in advance, including an embroidered portrait of himself. First, however, the Saracen knight, Abderaman, arrives and pays court to the lady. In the next scene Raymonda dreams that Jean comes down from his portrait to dance with her, only to find on waking that Abderaman is there to renew his amorous proposals.

Act 2. While the festivities continue, Raymonda is anxiously awaiting the arrival of her betrothed. Abderaman invites her to dance, then with his accomplices, attempts to abduct her. At this moment Jean enters with his brother, the King of Hungary. A duel is fought between the two rivals, and the Saracen falls.

Act 3. A feast is held at the castle to celebrate the wedding of the lovers, and featuring national dances.

In some of the scenes, and to some extent in the melodies and tone colours, this ballet pays homage to the Tchaikovskian tradition, especially to certain passages from *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. The story serves as the pretext for a series of divertissements, almost too profuse, intended to show off the virtuosity and special

gifts of the famous soloists. This explains its success at the turn of the century. The Tchaikovskian model inspired Glazunov to compose agreeable music, always easy to listen to, but also slightly commonplace and bland. It lacked the nobility of inner expressive force inherent in Tchaikovsky's music. All the same, there are particularly happy and very individual moments, such as the heroine's entrance and first act waltz, also the Arab Dance in act 2, and the finale, which achieves elegance of form, harmonic audacity, and a firm contrapuntal technique.



Raymonda Dobuzhinsky designs 1 & 2

The ballet has always been able to stimulate the acting abilities of the great ballerinas. Thus, in Russia, where it is still danced, there was a production in 1900 directed by the choreographer Gorsky at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. After the October Revolution it was often put on, both at the Kirov in Leningrad and at the Bolshoi. The revival by L. Lavrovsky on 13 October 1945 gave Maia Plisetskaia her first success in a leading part. The ballet was constantly revived in the USSR and is still kept in the repertory of the more ambitious companies.

The ballet came to the West in N. Zverev's production for the National Ballet of Lithuania given in London in 1935. The first US production was Danilova's and Balanchine's abbreviated version for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo (1946). In Italy, *Raymonda* was performed for the first time on 10 July 1964 at the Teatro Nuovo, Spoleto, a complete production by the Touring Royal Ballet, with Petipa's choreography revised by Rudolf Nureyev, sets and costumes by Beni Montresor, and orchestral direction by Ashley Lawrence. But this was shown only at the Spoleto and Baalbek festivals. Thereafter, only the third act was kept in the repertory.

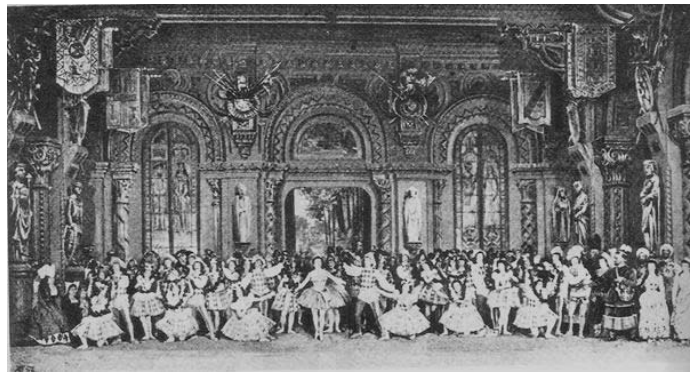
In the Royal Ballet Company of London, the chief parts were taken by Nureyev and Doreen Wells (substituting for Margot Fontyn, who was ill and could dance only in the last few performances). Nureyev and Fonteyn were together again when the third act of the ballet was danced at Nervi on 28 June 1968 (sets and costumes by Harry Kaye). In May 1976 there was a version at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, with choreography by Loris Gai and direction by Beppe Menegatti. The principal dancers were Carla Fracci, Burton Taylor, and Bruce Marks.

Further complete versions were mounted by Nureyev for the Australian Ballet (1965), Zurich Opera Ballet (1972), and American Ballet Theater (1975), and then by Gsovsky (first two acts) and Beriozoff (third act) for German Opera Berlin (1975).

Balanchine choreographed a ballet *Pas de dix* (1955), with most of the music from the Grand Pas Hongrois; *Raymonda Variations* (1961), to a different set of musical numbers; and *Cortège Hongrois* (1973).



Raymonda Betrothal



Raymonda Act 3



Raymonda Marie-Agnès Gillot as Raymonda

*Raymonda* Kaunas 1933***The Seasons (Vremena Goda)***

Ballet in 1 act

Scenario and choreography: Marius Petipa

Sets: Lambini

Costumes: Ponomaryev

First performance: St Petersburg, Maryinsky Theatre, 7/21 February 1900

The ballet has no story as such, and unfolds in four scenes as an evocation of the yearly phases of the natural world. Each is represented by a number of episodes, some amorous, others idyllic, but all dominated by the natural cycle of winter sleep, spring awakening, summer blossoming, and autumn harvest, moving towards sleep again.

The Four Seasons pass in review, accompanied by their attributes. First is Winter, with its frost, ice, hail and snow. This yields to the Spring, with its zephyrs, flowers and birdsong. The Summer brings its drowsy heat, where cornflowers, poppies and waving fields of corn disport themselves. They are interrupted by the Autumn with its revelling fauns and satyrs. Autumn begins with a sumptuous Bacchanale: music from the preceding seasons is recalled, and after a shower of dead leaves, an apotheosis reveals the starry constellations revolving in the heavens.

This was Glazunov's third ballet, the most important and successful of his balletic works. As a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, an heir to the Mighty Handful, or "Group of Five", he was by then the author of a very considerable body of work, including six symphonies. *The Seasons* belongs to the pre-Diaghilev tradition of Russian ballet that found its culmination in Tchaikovsky's three masterpieces in the genre. Glazunov shared something of Tchaikovsky's passion for clarity and elegance, and an insistence on the primacy of melody. The first scene of Winter is characterized by a theme with variations, which the second (Spring) represents in a broader treatment, rich in tone, colour and melody. The third scene (Summer) is the most successful and inspirational. It consists of an introduction, a waltz and a barcarolle, and ends with a long coda that more or less sums up all the foregoing rhythmic and thematic elements. The fourth scene (Autumn) is best known for its fervent and rhapsodic bacchanale, a display of orchestral pyrotechnics. The music is inventive, fresh, attractive, and beautifully scored throughout.



Marius Petipa in old age

105379

A Messieurs les Artistes
de l'Orchestre de l'Opéra Russe
à ST PETERSBOURG.

Scènes de Ballet

Suite pour
grand Orchestre

composée

Alexandre Glazounow.

Op. 52.

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Scènes de Ballet.

I.
Préambule.

Secondo.

Alexandre Glazounow, Op. 52 N°1.

Réduction par N. Sokolow.

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 144.$

PIANO. *f*

$\text{♩} = 80.$

sf

sf

Scènes de Ballet.

I.
Préambule.

Primo.

Alexandre Glazounow, Op. 52 N°1.
Réduction par N. Sokolow.

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 144.$

PIANO.

$\text{♩} = 80.$

4

Secondo.

Alla breve.

ff

6/4

ff

3

Allegretto. $\text{♩} = 96$.

f f dim. p

Alla breve. *Primo.* 5

Allegretto. ♩. = 96.

ff

mp

p

mp

p

6

Secondo.

This musical score is for the 'Secondo' section of a ballet, measures 6 through 11. It is written for piano in D major (two sharps) and 3/4 time. The score consists of six systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).
- Measure 6: Features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Measure 7: Continues the melodic development in the right hand with a slur over the first half.
- Measure 8: The right hand has a half-note chord, and the left hand continues its accompaniment. A piano (*p*) dynamic is marked.
- Measure 9: The right hand plays a series of half-note chords, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. A mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic is marked.
- Measure 10: Similar to measure 9, with half-note chords in the right hand and accompaniment in the left. A forte (*f*) dynamic is marked.
- Measure 11: The right hand has a melodic phrase with a slur, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. A mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic is marked.
- Measure 12: The right hand has a melodic phrase with a slur, and the left hand continues the accompaniment. A piano (*p*) dynamic is marked.

Primo.

7

musical score for Primo, measures 1-12. The score is written for piano in G major (three sharps) and 3/4 time. It consists of six systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clef). The dynamics and markings are as follows:

- Measure 1: *mp*
- Measure 2: *dolce*
- Measure 3: *mf*
- Measure 4: *f*
- Measure 5: *mf*
- Measure 6: *f*
- Measure 7: *mf*
- Measure 8: *p espressivo*
- Measure 9: *p espressivo*
- Measure 10: *p espressivo*
- Measure 11: *p espressivo*
- Measure 12: *p espressivo*

8

Secondo.

mf cresc.

f

ff

f

mf

p

mf

dim.

pp

mf

dim.

pp

p

mf

Primo.

9

The musical score for the Primo section on page 9 consists of six systems of piano accompaniment. The key signature is A major (three sharps). The notation is as follows:

- System 1:** Treble and bass staves. Treble staff has a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. Bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics: *mf cresc.*
- System 2:** Treble staff features a complex, rapid sixteenth-note figure. Bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics: *f* and *ff*.
- System 3:** Treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics: *f*, *mf*, and *p*.
- System 4:** Treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics: *f* and *pp*.
- System 5:** Treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics: *f*, *pp*, and *mp dolce*.
- System 6:** Treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes. Bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamics: *mf* and *mp*.

40

Secondo.

Secondo.

p

cresc. *poco a poco*

f *cresc.*

ff

ff *f*

Primo.

mf *mf* *mp*

p *f*

cresc. *poco a poco*

f *cresc.*

ff *sf* *sf*

II. Marionnettes.

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 84.$ **Secondo.** Alexandre Glazounow, Op. 52 N^o 2.
Réduction par N. Sokolow.

PIANO.

