

an introduction to
Rimsky-Korsakov's
Scheherazade
 the story of
 The Thousand & One Arabian Nights

SCHEHERAZADE BACKGROUND & RESOURCES

The Art of Scheherazade: Persian Miniatures

The Persian Miniature is a small, brightly colored illustration that tells a story. In the 14th Century poetry and literature became very popular in Persia (Scheherazade's country) and there were many important painting schools. Each group of artists had their own style in creating their paintings. The beautiful drawings would illustrate poems or stories, making books more enjoyable and easier to understand. The drawings would include characters in the poem or story, palaces, gardens, birds and flowers.



Left: Herat School, "Khamseh", Nezami
Middle: A miniature of Persian ruler Harun al-Rashid; (ca: 763–809) was the fifth and most famous Abbasid Caliph. Ruling from 786 until 809, his reign and the fabulous court over which he held sway are immortalized in *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*.
Right: Saki by Reza Abbasi from the Moraqqa' e Golshan 1609 Golestan Palace



Web links for Persian Miniatures:

- www.youngartists.com/mphatouf.htm A comprehensive history of miniature painting
- www.iranchamber.com/art/articles/history_iranian_miniature.php A history of Persian Miniatures
- www.hurstgallery.com/exhibit/recent/IndianPersianPaintings/ A museum show of important Persian Miniatures

Storytelling

Storytelling is an ancient art that had its beginnings long ago, from many cultures, and in many old languages. The earliest surviving record of storytelling is found in Egypt where there are paintings of the sons of the Pharaoh Cheops (who built the famous pyramids) entertaining their father with stories. Before printed books were available, traditions, history, education, and even religious rituals were told by means of storytelling. In the Middle Ages, storytellers known as Bards were also poets and musicians who traveled between villages and brought information and entertainment to people. In some cultures storytelling for children was more important than for adults, as stories often taught children how to behave in wise and good ways. There have been many famous collectors of ancient stories, some of the best known were the Brothers Grimm who recorded many old tales in their well loved collection of fairy tales. The tales of the Arabian Nights were likely first told as stories performed by a traveling storyteller in front of an audience. Scheherazade was a very popular tale about a strong and intelligent girl and King Sharayar who had ordered the girls of his kingdom put to death, one each night. Scheherazade, a great story teller, begged the King to listen to a story first. He agreed, and she began, but stopped her story at the most important point and offered to return the next night to finish her tale. The King wanted to hear the end of the exciting story so asked her to return, postponing her death, as she had been the next girl sentenced to die. Scheherazade continued to tell stories for the next one thousand and one nights, sparing her own life and the lives of all the young girls of the kingdom. Thus, the Arabian Nights are also known as 1001 Nights.

Links to Storytelling and the Arabian Nights:

www.storycraft.com This site is for kids introducing storytelling and describing ideas for stories to tell, storytelling crafts to make and a kid's club

www.storyarts.org A great site for kids and teachers, storytelling in the classroom, lesson plans and activities, articles and curriculum idea exchange

www.storyteller.net All things in storytelling, resources, articles, audio stories, book reviews, find a storyteller, storytelling events

www.talesandscales.org A music and story telling ensemble which spins music, story, theatre and dance into a performance for schools and communities, *Arabian Nights* is one of their ensemble works

www.candlelightstories.com A story site for kids and parents, the kid's zone has printable versions of the *Arabian Nights*

<http://www.middleeastuk.com/culture/mosaic/arabian.htm>. A short history of the *Arabian Nights*

The Geography of Scheherazade

Persia's history as a nation of people did not begin until 1500 B.C. Before that time peoples of different cultures occupied the land ultimately known as Persia. Persians eventually established themselves to the south of Lake Urmia, the northern border of the kingdom of the Elamites, and in the land surrounding modern day Shiraz. During 550 B.C., the Persians were led by Cyrus the Great who greatly expanded their kingdom. His followers conquered Egypt, Macedonia, and Thrace and spread the Persian Empire east to the Indus River.

Web links for Geography:

www.science.co.il/Maps-Near-East-Empires.asp Maps of the ancient world

www.baghdadmuseum.org/maps/map_middle_east_m.htm Maps of the modern day middle east

About the Composer: Rimsky-Korsakov



Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1840-1908)

came from a wealthy family. When he was young, he studied the piano and the cello but he always just wanted to compose music. When Nicolai was just 17 years old and an officer in the Russian navy, his piano teacher introduced him to Balakirev, a well known musician and composer of those times. Nicolai showed Balakirev some of his compositions which showed so much talent that Balakirev invited him to join a small group of students. This group also included some other Russian composition students who also went on to become famous, Mussorgsky and Borodin, and they called themselves "The Five." These young composers were interested in creating new music which told stories and sounded like their Russian traditions of song; they helped each other and liked to work on each other's music. When he was older, Nicolai became a professor of composition at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He was very worried! Although he was already a great composer, he had no classroom training in the composition basics! Rimsky started to study hard and kept just one step ahead of his classes. In a few years he became a fine teacher. He also composed

a series of operas, many orchestral pieces, songs, piano pieces, choral works and church music. His most famous student was the composer Igor Stravinsky. Rimsky-Korsakov is most known for his beautiful compositions that paint pictures in music using the colors of sound made by each instrument of the orchestra. This is called orchestration, and Rimsky-Korsakov is known as its master.

Web links for the Music of Rimsky-Korsakov:

www.geocities.com/Vienna/3606/ A Rimsky-Korsakov home page, biography, compositions, comprehensive information about the composer Rimsky-Korsakov

www.classicalarchives.com/main/r.html#RIMSKY-KORSAKOV A music site with compositions of Rimsky-Korsakov, some for free listening