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# More than Pictures: The Emotional Journey of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition"

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# More than Pictures: The Emotional Journey of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition"

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*“I regard the people as one great being, inspired by one idea.”*

*-Modest Mussorgsky*

## ***Abstract***

A piece of music is so much more than notes on a page. It embodies the historical context in which it was written, the feelings or events which inspired the composer to write it, the message the composer wishes to convey, the way a performer chooses to interpret it, and the impact it has on the audience. Since we know that different performances of one particular piece are often compared to each other as being higher or lower in technical and musical quality, it is clear that not every performance is the same, and that the differences that exist can affect the audience's reception of the piece.

This paper compares three performances of one piece of music, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, originally composed for piano by Modeste Mussorgsky and later orchestrated by Maurice Ravel. I compare performances by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a highly respected ensemble; the Syracuse University Symphony Orchestra, of which I was a part; and Vladimir Horowitz, a concert pianist. Based on background information about Mussorgsky and events which had occurred in his life previous to the composition of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I developed my own interpretation of the piece as not only the musical depiction of pictures viewed at an exhibition but also as an emotional journey of Mussorgsky himself. I then closely analyzed the three performances and determined certain decisions made by different performers to be either positive or negative with respect to my interpretation of the meaning of the work as a whole.

While I do not suggest that my own reading of *Pictures at an Exhibition* is the only "correct" interpretation, it is important for a performer to be aware of the fact that even slight differences in aspects of performance such as dynamics, articulation, and phrasing can affect the message that a piece sends to a listener. The message which Mussorgsky wished to send through *Pictures at an Exhibition* is suggested by a hand-written note in the movement "Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua" in his original manuscript, but can also be inferred based on our knowledge that music is a tool of self-expression and communication of emotions.

## ***Introduction***

Music, in the most basic sense, is organized sound. As human beings, however, we know that music is so much more complex than that. It is aesthetically beautiful. It depicts stories, events, or pieces of art. Most importantly, it expresses and inspires emotion. Composer Antonin Dvořák once said, “Any intelligent and sensitive artist is always very pleased if he can find at least one voice to which he can respond: “Yes, he understands me.” I have learned in my own studies as a violinist that it is infinitely more important to “say something” musically than it is to be technically flawless. Communication of emotion, then, seems to be an indispensable aspect of music. It is why composers compose, why musicians play, and why listeners listen.

Modeste Mussorgsky wrote his masterpiece, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, in reaction to the untimely death of his close friend, Victor Hartmann. It would seem natural, then, that the piece would be an expression of his feelings about Hartmann’s death and an outlet for his grief. In addition to intuitively knowing that music is typically used to share emotion, we can infer that this was Mussorgsky’s purpose based on an inscription in “*Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua.*” This note, penciled-in by the composer, explicitly links this movement with his personal feelings and thoughts about Hartmann’s death. Interestingly, though, when I started to study *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I found that it has almost exclusively been analyzed in terms of its programmatic basis: that is, as the musical depiction of various drawings by Hartmann.

The drawings are clearly a very important aspect of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, since they were a source of inspiration for Mussorgsky and the piece is structured around them. Unfortunately, however, many of these drawings are long lost, and those that were recovered in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were often received with disappointment. Art and Music editor for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Alfred Frankenstein writes, “Mussorgsky had led them [people acquainted with *Pictures at an Exhibition*] to expect something grander and stronger” (Frankenstein 268-269). Nevertheless, *Pictures at an Exhibition* continues to be a beloved piece of music. There must, then, be something more to the piece than the depiction of Hartmann’s drawings. There must be something more which draws people to it, and which drew me to it the first time I heard it performed by the Syracuse Symphony almost four years ago. I believe that “something” to be the emotional journey which Mussorgsky illustrates along with the drawings. It is this combination of Mussorgsky’s memorial to his friend’s art and life with an expression of his own grieving process that makes this work so powerful.

Though every listener may not interpret a piece of music in the exact same way, Modeste Mussorgsky felt that “art’s subject-matter should be chosen with a view to its capacity for effecting an appeal to the many” (M. Montagu-Nathan 109). While the composer’s inspiration for a piece may have come from a particular feeling or event in his life, decades or even centuries later, a listener can hear the same piece and relate it to something specific in his or her own life. Mussorgsky wrote *Pictures at an Exhibition* in reaction to the Hartmann’s death,

but the more general subject matter of grieving and healing after the death of a loved one is something that everyone can relate to. Of course, by themselves, composers can only write down notes on a page in hopes of being able to communicate their message with an audience. They are dependent on musicians, then, to perform their compositions in such a way that the audience will understand and respond to the message of the music. While music is abstract and ambiguous enough that a particular interpretation cannot necessarily be determined to be “right” or “wrong,” my purpose in this study is to examine how different interpretations in performances of Mussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition” can affect the meaning that the listener may draw from the piece. Differences in execution can cause separate performances of the same piece of music to paint quite different pictures.

### ***Background Information***

#### **Russian Nationalism in Music**

“Pictures at an Exhibition” was composed in the late nineteenth-century at a period of heightened nationalism in Russia. Nationalism is the idea of unifying a state through aspects of culture such as art, literature, philosophy, education, theater, and music. It can be, and often is, used to strengthen the government because it promotes “attitudes of loyalty to the state” (Thaden 3). Geographically, Russia is located on the edge of Europe and in close proximity to Asia, and for this reason it has always had trouble determining which culture it should identify with. Often, it has opted to identify with neither Europe nor Asia, choosing



instead to be uniquely Russian. However, as Edward C. Thaden explains, the problem with this concept during the nineteenth century was that, “It was difficult for the Russian poet, writer, or artist to become an organ of patriotism because the artistic forms and intellectual materials he used were generally of Western European origin” (Thaden 5). This inability to detach from Western European ideals also occurred in music.

From the introduction of secular music in Russia up until around 1860, Russian music was little more than “an import from the West” (Ridenour 5). Russian composers based their music on the influences of Italian, French, or German styles rather than creating their own national style. For example, Pjotr Tchaikovsky, a Russian composer of the late nineteenth century, was trained in Germany and German influence was obvious in his music. Anton Rubenstein took the first step towards nationalism in music by promoting musical education in Russia through the creation of the Russian Musical Society. The society strived for “the development of music education and the taste for music in Russia and the encouragement of native talent” (Ridenour 32). However, even Rubenstein was more interested in fostering talent in the Western sense than in a Russian national sense. In 1855, a new group, opposed to Rubenstein’s objectives because of his taste for German musical styles, banded together to form a new musical society with a somewhat different cause.

The Mighty Handful was made up of five musically gifted young men, Mily Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, and Modest Mussorgsky. They all had a strong passion for music and considerable

natural talent, yet none except for Balakirev had received any theoretical musical training, and in fact many members of the Mighty Handful already had professions in fields other than music. Cui was an army officer, Rimsky-Korsakov a navy cadet, Borodin a chemist, and Mussorgsky a guards officer. Balakirev, therefore, took it upon himself to better acquaint the rest of the group with “the great works of the masters of music” and also trained them in composition (Ridnour 70). He took his lead from Russian composer Mikhail Glinka, who incorporated modal scales and folksongs in his compositions to give them a distinctly Russian sound. Balakirev also adopted “daring harmonies, dynamic and flexible rhythms, and bright, pure orchestral colors...as the hallmark of authentic Russian national music” (Ridenour 76). Since other Russian composers followed Glinka’s example, these are still the characteristics which define Russian music to this day. Although Mussorgsky had broken free of Balakirev’s tutelage by 1863, he continued to be influenced by the concept of Russian nationalism throughout his life as a composer.

### **Modest Mussorgsky**

Modest Mussorgsky was born in March of 1839 to a noble family in the village of Karevo, outside of St. Petersburg. He started piano lessons with his mother at age six and showed promising talent. However, his family intended for him to become a military officer, and when he was thirteen he was sent to cadet training school. It was after his graduation from the school in 1856 that he began to further his interest and talent in music by joining Balakirev and the Mighty Handful. Balakirev and Mussorgsky did not see eye-to-eye on many things, and

for this reason Balakirev considered him to be the weakest of the five composers in their circle. By 1863, Mussorgsky had discontinued his association with Balakirev and was instead teaching himself. He was influenced by Russian revolutionary writer Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who championed artistic realism. Mussorgsky strove to depict life as realistically as possible in his music, hoping to remain “as far as possible an unsophisticated and natural musician” (Montagu-Nathan 113). This can be seen in his rejection of symmetrical musical forms, naturalistic word setting in vocal music, and programmaticism in *Night on Bald Mountain* and *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Unfortunately, Mussorgsky’s career was short-lived due to his alcoholism, which was accentuated by the loss of several close friends, including architect Victor Hartmann. Mussorgsky died after a series of seizures brought on by alcoholic epilepsy in March of 1881.

### **Victor Hartmann**

It is not surprising that Victor Hartmann and Mussorgsky shared such a close friendship. Raised in St. Petersburg and trained at the Academy of Fine Arts, Hartmann was one of the premier architects working within the nationalistic movement in Russia. In architecture, nationalism meant “mainly elaborate, fantastic, and, at least from the modern viewpoint, impractical and useless ornamentation,” and much of Hartmann’s work fit this description (Frankenstein 270). He received lots of praise from other nationalists, but modern critics speculate that from an architectural standpoint his work may not deserve so much merit. For example, Frankenstein writes that Dmitry Stassov, a figure at the forefront of the nationalist movement, “whooped it up for Hartmann a little more

than the man's accomplishments warranted" (Frankenstein 270). However, because of his nationalistic sentiments, Hartmann was introduced to Balakirev's Mighty Handful circle and became acquainted with Mussorgsky. Interestingly, Mussorgsky's musical aesthetic was nearly the complete opposite of Hartmann's ornate architectural style. As Montagu-Nathan explains, Mussorgsky was "opposed to mysticism, to the undue elevation of style, to the decadent, as a stultification of the true purpose of art" (Montagu-Nathan 109-110). Clearly, characteristics of nationalism in art were not consistent across different media. Frankenstein states, "An idea that may be perfectly valid in literature or the drama may be completely invalid in music or painting (Frankenstein 269-270). However, the different aesthetics of Mussorgsky and Hartmann did not hinder the friendship which formed between them.

In addition to his architectural endeavors, Hartmann also produced many watercolor paintings and pencil drawings. The majority of these were created while he was traveling abroad. When he died of a heart aneurism in 1873 at the young age of thirty-nine, over four hundred of these paintings and drawings were collected to be displayed at an exhibition arranged by Stassov. Mussorgsky was so moved by the exhibition that he was inspired to compose a piece which would commemorate the life and work of his friend. Since many of the drawings have since been lost, this musical composition is almost all we have left to remember Hartmann's work.

## **Pictures at an Exhibition**

*Pictures at an Exhibition*, completed in 1874, is a virtuosic work written for solo piano. It consists of ten movements, and although each represents a different Hartmann drawing, many of the inspirations for the piece were not actually displayed at the Hartmann exhibition. For example, “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle” was based on a drawing that Hartmann had given Mussorgsky several years earlier. Several “Promenades” are also interspersed throughout the work. They represent an exhibition visitor wandering from painting to painting, and, I believe, also convey Mussorgsky’s own emotional journey as he comes to terms with the death of his friend.

*Pictures at an Exhibition* was only the second large-scale instrumental piece that Mussorgsky composed, and it is now commonly believed to be his greatest compositional success. Unfortunately, it never received a public performance during his lifetime, and was not even officially published until 1886, twelve years after the completion date and five years after his death. Even then, the edition which was published had been edited by Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov and was not always consistent with Mussorgsky’s original manuscript. It was not until 1931 that an accurate edition was published. Nine years later, in 1940, Italian composer Luigi Dallapiccola published an important critical edition. I chose to study the Dallapiccola edition because it is the most accurate score which I had access to.

*Pictures at an Exhibition* only gained real recognition after it was orchestrated by French composer Maurice Ravel in 1922. This is still the version

which is most popular and most frequently performed today. In orchestrating the piece, Ravel was working from the Rimsky-Korsakov edition, meaning that some of his mistakes carried over into the orchestration. However, these were mainly questions of the accidentals of certain notes, and this was not something I chose to study in this work. Therefore, I will assume any differences which I observe between Mussorgsky's score and Ravel's score to be the purposeful intent of Ravel. I used the Boosey and Hawkes 2002 edition of the orchestral score because it is based on Ravel's original printed score. The errors made by Rimsky-Korsakov in transcribing Mussorgsky's score show that in addition to musicians, editors and publishers also have a responsibility to preserve the accuracy of a composer's work.

### **Maurice Ravel**

Maurice Ravel was born March 7, 1875, in Cibourne, France. He began piano lessons at the age of seven and was composing his own music by the age of thirteen. His parents encouraged his interest and talent for music and sent him to study at the Conservatoire de Paris. He showed promising skill as a composer, but associated himself with a rowdy group of students, and he left the conservatory after his involvement in a scandal prevented him from winning a competition.

Ravel did not let that incident stop him from continuing to write music. He went on to become one of the two most important impressionistic composers, the other being Claude Debussy, although he claimed that he was mainly influenced by classical composers such as Mozart and Couperin. The harmonies he uses are innovative, but they are used within traditional forms and structures. Ravel also

enjoyed and had a talent for orchestrating works of other composers. He is especially noted for his thoughtful use of tonal color in these orchestrations. With respect to *Pictures at an Exhibition*, it is said that he “made a new work out of Mussorgsky’s piano piece” (Stuckenschmidt 198). This does not mean, however, that he altered what was already there. He instead “completely identified himself with Mussorgsky’s creative thinking,” (Stuckenschmidt 198) and through the wider musical palette of timbres and textures, augmented what was already there, giving the piece new life and strength.

### ***Method***

For each of the movements of the piece, I will examine the depiction of the Hartmann picture which the movement corresponds to, Mussorgsky’s expression of his emotions in that movement, and the function of the movement in the work as a whole. Although I feel that Mussorgsky’s emotional journey is the most important aspect of the piece overall, there are several particular movements in which the predominant function seems to be the characterization of the Hartmann drawing which inspired it.

I will describe some points of comparison between the original piano version of “Pictures at an Exhibition” and Ravel’s orchestrated version, while also examining the advantages and disadvantages of certain musical choices made by different performers. These evaluations will be made in the context of my own reading of the piece as an emotional outlet for the composer. I will analyze how a

performer's choices may affect a potential listener's interpretation or understanding of the movement.

I chose to study Vladimir Horowitz's 1947 piano recording not only because he is a renowned pianist who specialized in performing the works of Russian composers but also because he arranged his own version of the score. He worked with both the Mussorgsky piano score and the Ravel orchestral score to create this arrangement, and played from it for this recording. I wanted to examine how the changes he made may have had an affect on the meaning of the piece in his performance. I chose to study the 1957/1959 recording by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra because this was a landmark recording performed under the direction of Fritz Reiner, one of the foremost conductors of his time. Finally, I studied the 2006 recording by the Syracuse University Symphony Orchestra (SUSO) under the direction of James Tapia. I am a part of this ensemble and I chose to use this recording so that I could consider my own personal experiences from performing this piece. I will assume that the orchestras chose, as I did, to work from an edition of the score which is considered to be in closest agreement with what Ravel originally wrote.

"Rehearsal" numbers refer to the boxed numbers found in the orchestral score. I have transferred these rehearsal numbers to the corresponding measures in the Dallapiccola piano score for easy reference.



## *Analysis*

### **Promenade**

The opening Promenade represents Mussorgsky as he approaches the exhibition and gathers his thoughts before going inside. It is “a kind of musical portrait of Mussorgsky himself walking about in the gallery” (Frankenstein, 281). The music is stately, but also has an underlying sense of sadness and reflection. The shifting meter is an indication of Mussorgsky’s emotional instability as he faces the task ahead of him. We know that Hartmann’s death was an extremely painful event in Mussorgsky’s life from several letters he wrote, including one to Stassov which begins, ““My very dear friend, what a terrible blow! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, and creatures like Hartmann die”” (Frankenstein, 279). However, since *Pictures at an Exhibition* does continue after the Promenade, I believe that by the end of this movement the audience should have a clear sense of Mussorgsky’s resolve and determination to continue into the exhibition. The Promenade gives the listener their first impression of the piece, and if it sounds too tragic, that could influence how they hear the rest of the work.

In orchestrating the Promenade, Ravel uses different instrumental timbres to accentuate Mussorgsky’s emotional instability. From the very beginning, it seems that Ravel understands that the piece is about more than just an art exhibition. He opens with a solo trumpet and then uses brass to create thick, heavy chords. Brass instruments are often associated with triumphant fanfares, but here they serve to create a somber tone, which represents Mussorgsky’s conflicted state. The Chicago Symphony, in contrast to the performances by Horowitz and

the SUSO, takes a much slower tempo. I think that this is an effective decision because it makes the Promenade even more stately and pensive, as if Mussorgsky is slowly counting to ten or forcing himself to take steady breaths in order to keep his emotions under control.

The idea that Mussorgsky's supposed confidence is somewhat forced is confirmed at Rehearsal 2, where the mood completely changes. I read this section as Mussorgsky reflecting on his memories of Hartmann. The dynamic has dropped from *forte* to *mezzo forte*, and the tone is more lyrical and sad, with a dream-like quality evoked through a lighter, more legato style of playing. Again, Ravel is able to accentuate this change through his choice of instrumentation. Stringed instruments, playing legato slurs, are predominant here. Then, at Rehearsal 3, the full orchestra plays together for the first time in the piece. The music becomes confident again, but some reservation is still apparent. For example, this reservation is depicted by the descending pairs of quarter-notes in the strings and flute in the second measure of Rehearsal 3.

The significant crescendo going into Rehearsal 4 represents Mussorgsky coming out of his dream-like memories of Hartmann and returning to reality, the smoothness and lyricism being replaced by sturdy accents. Horowitz chooses to drop down to *piano* and then to make a crescendo both in the measure before Rehearsal 4 and in the second measure of Rehearsal 4. He seems to interpret this Promenade in the same way I do: as Mussorgsky encountering a struggle between memory and reality. Ravel makes another illustrative choice in the second measure of Rehearsal 4 by deviating slightly from the piano score and adding a

triumphant sounding sixteenth-note flourish in the horns, giving Mussorgsky just a little extra boost of courage as he prepares himself for what is to come.

The music presses on in this resolute manner until the end of the movement. Mussorgsky even indicates in the piano score that the ending should be “*senza ritardando*,” or, in other words, should not slow down. However, Horowitz does slow down quite a bit in his performance, which I feel defies the objective of the Promenade. I believe that the interpretations of the Chicago Symphony and SUSO are much more appropriate. The Chicago Symphony stays in tempo and cuts the last note off in precise time. The SUSO stays in tempo but holds the last note slightly longer. Either of these two choices is suitable because both of them say with finality that Mussorgsky is now ready and prepared to view the exhibition.

### ***Gnomus***

Mussorgsky’s ideas about artistic realism are apparent in this movement. The music is not beautiful, but rather disjunct and even grotesque, realistically portraying Hartmann’s drawing of a gnome-shaped nutcracker. Although this drawing has since been lost, from the music that Mussorgsky wrote, it is easy to infer that the gnome was not very attractive. I believe that this movement not only portrays the grotesqueness of the gnome, but also serves as a catharsis for Mussorgsky, allowing him to release some of his anger over Hartmann’s untimely death. The audience will only be able to interpret it this way if the performer fully embraces the grotesqueness of the music.

The movement opens abruptly with a fast, *fortissimo* figure which is then repeated more softly and slowly two measures later. To me, this gentler repetition of the same figure represents the gnome's conniving way of trying to convince someone of his innocence. In his rendition, Horowitz emphasizes this idea. He has the advantage of being able to freely play with the tempo since he is a soloist. For example, when the figure comes back again more aggressively in the seventh measure of the movement, Horowitz slows down and slightly holds the last note of the figure, perhaps almost convincing the listener that the gnome is not all evil, until hitting them suddenly with the abrasive octave B flats. This tempo fluctuation is an effective technique, and is something that neither the Chicago Symphony nor the SUSO employ here. Horowitz also takes the liberty of adding something that Mussorgsky did not write in his score. In the Mussorgsky score, Rehearsal 7 is nearly identical to the opening of the movement, except for the fact that this time the eighth-note figure is not repeated at a slower tempo and *piano* dynamic. However, Horowitz decides to do so anyway. The result is that the listener is taken back and forth once more between "innocent" gnome and "evil" gnome. I think Horowitz's choice is successful in conveying the gnome's trickery, but I also feel that it is a bold move to alter what the composer wrote.

In his orchestrated version, Ravel does not change what was in the piano score, yet is able to portray the grotesqueness of the gnome even more vividly through the contrast of different instruments. For instance, on the first beat of the second measure, only the horns hold out the pitch while the rest of the instruments have a staccato note. Thus, Ravel achieves a sharp, abrupt sound without

forfeiting the rhythmic value that Mussorgsky had indicated in his score. Ravel's instrumentation is also useful in expressing the mysterious ways of a gnome. The melody shifts to different parts of the orchestra to portray the way a gnome is always sneaking around, always shifting position. For example, at Rehearsal 8 the melody is in the flute, but at Rehearsal 9 the same melody is repeated by the celesta. The use of the celesta is also significant because it has often been used to represent the supernatural, for example, in "The Sugar Plum Fairy" in The Nutcracker ballet by Tchaikovsky. Overall, Rehearsal 9 in the orchestrated version has a more magical quality than Mussorgsky's piano version does, due to the dream-like timbre and supernatural connotations of the celesta, the glissandos and harmonics in the strings, and Ravel's choice of a *piano* dynamic throughout. This makes for an even greater contrast and impact when the forceful opening statement returns intrusively at Rehearsal 10. Horowitz's interpretation of the phrase at Rehearsal 10 differs slightly from that of the Chicago Symphony and SUSO. While both of the orchestras end with the last note of that phrase being played almost as an afterthought, Horowitz keeps the energy and intensity strong through the end. This gives an impression of anger rather than mischief. Since Mussorgsky did indicate a decrescendo in the score, I think that the Chicago Symphony and SUSO's portrayal of mischief is a better interpretation.

In the rest of the movement, I envision a gardener who is getting extremely frustrated with the gnome who is destroying his garden. The serious sections (*Poco meno mosso, pesante*) represent the gardener's anger, while the sudden interjections (*Vivo*) represent the gnome pulling yet another prank. Here, I

find Horowitz's liberties with the tempo not as effective as they were earlier in the movement, because I think the mood should be completely serious, and therefore the tempo should be steady. The SUSO takes a slower tempo here than either Horowitz or the Chicago Symphony, and I think this is very appropriate and conducive to illustrating a serious mood. In his orchestration, Ravel takes the idea of seriousness and steadiness one step further by removing the hairpin crescendos and decrescendos that Mussorgsky had included. The result is a more constant state of anger rather than fluctuating, emotional drama. In my opinion, this is the sentiment that Mussorgsky wanted to evoke, and Ravel simply saw a way to make this sentiment clearer to the listener. Ravel also removes the crescendo leading into the *Vivo* sections, which also supports my reading of a surprise attack by the gnome. After three of these *Vivo* "attacks," the gardener is at his wit's end. The *Meno mosso* is the most intense point in the movement thus far. In the seventh bar of Rehearsal 14, Horowitz adds some trills as ornamentation to the chromatically descending passage, which helps to portray the insane rage of the gardener. I also feel that Ravel's addition of a whip crack right before Rehearsal 15 has the perfect effect: it shows that the gardener has finally snapped and initiates the chase that follows.

This "chase" is illustrated by scalar sextuplets, crescendos and decrescendos, and an ongoing *accelerando*. Horowitz's crescendos here are more convincing than either of the orchestral performances, but this may be due in part to Ravel's choice of instrumentation: he writes this part for bass clarinet, bassoon, and viola, three rather mellow instruments. However, Horowitz also makes more

out of the *accelerando*, making his approach to this section the most dramatic. The chase comes to a halt at the *sempre vivo*, and Ravel adds a rattle two measures before Rehearsal 18, enhancing the grotesque portrayal of the gnome. But, however grotesque, the final few measures of the movement show the final escape and triumph of the gnome, with an eighth-note passage which races to the end. Horowitz executes this passage more quickly than either of the orchestras and I feel that this is a place where faster is better. The orchestral version, however, has the advantage of being able to use the drum to enhance the grotesqueness. The drum in the Chicago Symphony performance is heard much more loudly and clearly than in that of the SUSO, but this may just be a matter of the positioning of the microphones used in recording this piece. The contrast between evil and feigned innocence, or between seriousness and mischief, is the most important element of this movement, and each of the performances convey these contrasts in different ways.

### **Second Promenade**

The second Promenade returns us to Mussorgsky's emotional journey as he explores the exhibition. The theme of the opening Promenade is used, but here it has been stripped of any pompousness or notion of confidence. Instead, Mussorgsky is now so completely overwhelmed by heartache that this section of the piece is practically devoid of emotion. The Chicago Symphony captures this inability to deal with distress by taking a slightly slower tempo than either Horowitz or the SUSO. However, in this Promenade I prefer Mussorgsky's original piano composition to Ravel's orchestrated version because by varying the

instrumentation, Ravel has added different layers to a movement which should, in fact, be quite flat. I feel that the solo piano more effectively conveys to the listener the emptiness that consumes Mussorgsky as he moves on to the next picture.

### ***Il vecchio castello***

“*Il vecchio castello*” or “The Old Castle” represents Hartmann’s drawing of a troubadour performing outside of a castle. Mussorgsky must have envisioned the troubadour singing a forlorn love song, as his own music in this movement sounds quite sad. More importantly, I think that this piece aims to illustrate the concept of timelessness: the idea that life will go on after Hartmann’s death is represented by the castle. The castle is a sturdy edifice which remains the same even as it sees many changes occurring around it. There is a pedal tone of G# which plays one rhythm, a quarter-note tied to an eight-note, throughout almost the entire piece, and this consistency reminds us of the stability of the castle. Ravel’s choice of instrumentation also adds to the music’s ability to convey both sadness and timelessness, as the melody is most often given to the woodwinds, which have a mellow, pure, and perhaps even distant tone. However, in Horowitz’s interpretation, he diminishes the aspect of steadiness by taking liberties with the tempo quite often, adding in *ritardandos* where they are not notated. Although I think that taking time and stretching certain notes is often a very expressive technique, in this case it inhibits the listener’s ability to understand the significance of the sturdiness of the castle. Horowitz’s dynamic expression, on the other hand, is very effective.



In this movement, I believe that exaggerated dynamic contrast is extremely important. I envision the dynamics as representing difficulties that the old castle has faced and survived. Therefore, the more dramatic the dynamics are, the more impressive the stability of the castle is and the more majestic it appears. For example, at the very end of the phrase going into Rehearsal 24, Horowitz emphasizes the crescendo more than either of the orchestras do in their performances. However, Ravel indicates an exaggeration of the decrescendo towards the end of Rehearsal 24 by beginning it in measure 43, whereas Mussorgsky had not indicated it until measure 46. The fourth measure of Rehearsal 27 is another place where Ravel alters the dynamics found in Mussorgsky's score. He includes a crescendo on the C# minor chord in the second half of the measure, emphasizing the arrival on that chord by including all of the instruments used in the movement except for the saxophone, and then adds a decrescendo over the next measure. These dynamic additions increase the ability of the piece to convey the strength of the castle even through turbulent times.

Ravel also makes a brilliant choice in passing the melody seamlessly from the violins to the oboe and saxophone in the seventh measure of Rehearsal 23 and again two measures before Rehearsal 25. This orchestration reflects the fact that while some things about the old castle may change, what is most important remains the same. The strings have a more sentimental and emotional sound compared to the calmness first heard in the woodwinds, but nevertheless they both play the same melody. The options available to Ravel in using a full

orchestra allow him to amplify the message that Mussorgsky had originally created.

At Rehearsal 26, the old castle is put to the most difficult test of strength yet. The tension mounts with a series of diminished seventh chords which alternate between being extremely dissonant and less dissonant. The extreme dissonance is created in part because of the added tone of a continuous G# pedal point. After this push and pull of tension, we reach the unexpected major-minor seventh chord built on the fifth scale degree in the fifth measure. It is very uncommon to have a major-minor seventh chord as the culmination of a phrase, as we see here, and I think that the use of this chord seems to illustrate the defiance of the castle. Dynamically, Ravel chooses to use one continuing crescendo here rather than Mussorgsky's hairpin crescendos. The hairpin crescendos seem to complement the pushes and pulls of tension in the harmonic structure, while Ravel's crescendo continuously builds tension. The Chicago Symphony executes this section nicely, but I think that the SUSO should have shown more dynamic contrast. Horowitz chooses to cut out this section altogether, from five measures before Rehearsal 26 until Rehearsal 28, but when a variation of the phrase returns four measures before Rehearsal 29, he chooses to use a long crescendo rather than Mussorgsky's hairpin crescendos.

I feel that Horowitz's cut detracts from the narrative in this movement. The section that he cuts is repeated at Rehearsal 28, and is nearly exactly the same as the first time through, however, there is a slight difference which I think is important. The first time through, the melody involves the rhythm of a quarter-

note followed by an eighth-note, seen in the second measure of Rehearsal 26. The second time, that rhythm has been altered so that it is a dotted quarter-note and sixteenth-note followed by an eighth-note, as seen in the seventh measure of Rehearsal 28. The second rhythm is more complex, which I feel symbolizes the increasing complexity in the castle's surrounding environment over time, but again, the melody, and thus the strength of the castle, is unaffected. By cutting the original rhythm, then, Horowitz does not allow us to hear the contrast between the two, and the complexity of the second rhythm loses its significance.

I believe that the ending of this movement is intended to show the castle at its most vulnerable time. Perhaps it has just endured an especially fierce storm and is looking weathered and tired. Mussorgsky illustrates this by starting the familiar opening melody at Rehearsal 31 but cutting off the last two measures. The notes then become much sparser, the only thing resembling a melody at Rehearsal 32 being two pairs of descending notes. Three bars from the end, the ever-present tied quarter-note to eighth-note rhythm even stops. Meanwhile, a decrescendo has been continuing since the fourth bar of Rehearsal 31. Not surprisingly, Ravel also illustrates weakness by using a thinner instrumentation. Seemingly, the music is fading and the castle is disintegrating. But then, suddenly, two bars from the end a defiant forte G# minor (i) chord rings out and the omnipresent rhythm resumes one last time, although this time it is an eighth-note tied to a quarter-note instead of a quarter-note tied to an eighth-note, which causes the emphasis of the beat to shift. This rhythm, familiar yet not exactly the same, shows that the castle has regained its strength, even though its appearance may

now be slightly different. This section, beginning at Rehearsal 30, is the one time in the movement when I feel that Horowitz's liberty with the pulse is effective. Slowing down here emphasizes the temporary debilitation of the castle. However, I believe he should return to the original tempo for the last two measures. By continuing the *ritardando* through these measures, he does not send a clear message as to the fate of the castle: the forte signifies strength, but slowing down signifies weakness. I feel that a successful interpretation of *Il vecchio castello* should be very expressive within the limitations of the foundation, or tempo, which has been "built" for it, as heard in the Chicago Symphony and SUSO performances.

### **Third Promenade**

The third time the Promenade theme returns, Mussorgsky's emotions have shifted: this Promenade is heavier with a sense of anger over the unexpected death of Hartmann. Mussorgsky uses lots of bass in the piano score, and Ravel imitates this by using instruments in the lower range (bass, cello, bassoon, bass clarinet, and tuba) prominently, especially in the first two measures. The Chicago Symphony takes a slightly slower tempo, which may cause the audience to hear sadness in this Promenade. I prefer the quicker tempo that Horowitz and the SUSO take because it is more consistent with the depiction of anger. Horowitz makes a crescendo in the second measure, which also evokes a sense of anger.

At Rehearsal 33, the tone changes, as if Mussorgsky's energy is spent after such intense feelings of anger. Horowitz emphasizes this by making a diminuendo and slowing down, beginning in the second measure of Rehearsal 33. The

Chicago Symphony and the SUSO delay the *ritardando* until the very last measure, as notated in Ravel's score. I think that slowing down earlier is effective, especially because even in doing so, Horowitz does not allow the music to get too gloomy. By exaggerating the staccatos on the notes in the last two measures, he shows that Mussorgsky has not yet put his anger aside. The Chicago Symphony also keeps the last notes of the movement very short, while the horns in the SUSO hold out the last note slightly. I prefer the last notes to be short, so as to make a smoother transition into the next movement, "Tuileries," which conveys a lighter, less serious form of anger.

### **Tuileries**

The inspiration for this movement was Hartmann's drawing of a garden, the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris. Mussorgsky musically depicted children in the garden, and added the French subtitle "Dispute d'enfants après jeux," or, "Dispute between children at play." Overall, the movement is lighthearted, but also has moments of anger when the disputes reach a peak. By the end, though, it seems the conflict has been resolved and the children are happy once again. I think it is likely that this represents Mussorgsky beginning to let go of his own anger over Hartmann's death.

While the Chicago Symphony and the SUSO give similar performances of this movement, Horowitz's performance contrasts greatly in terms of the tempo, which is quite a bit slower. He also shows liberty with the pulse by pushing forward the sixteenth-notes and holding back the quarter-note – eighth-note figures. This approach is very effective because it illustrates the children's energy

as they run around and then lose momentum. Since it is more difficult for an orchestra to take these liberties with the pulse, Ravel added accents to give a greater sense of energy and liveliness at certain times. The quarrel between the children begins at Rehearsal 34, and Ravel shows their mounting anger by including a crescendo over the first two measures. Although Mussorgsky had not indicated this in the piano score, Horowitz also crescendos through these measures. The argument, although intense while it lasts, ends abruptly when the lighthearted theme returns three measures before Rehearsal 35.

A bit slower and calmer, Rehearsal 35 marks the beginning of a new idea, as if the children have decided to play a quieter game for a while. Horowitz emphasizes this change by pausing briefly before beginning this section. Simplicity is important here, and I think that Horowitz is most successful in conveying a childlike innocence. Ravel's orchestration loses some of this innocence due to his addition of hairpin crescendos and decrescendos, which I feel makes this phrase more complex than it should be. Even in the children's quieter game, however, a dispute arises beginning at Rehearsal 36. While Mussorgsky makes the anger appear suddenly and unexpectedly with a *subito forte* in the fourth measure, Ravel decides instead to build a crescendo over the first three measures. I think that the original *subito forte* makes this argument seem less serious, which of course is usually the nature of a dispute between playing children; keeping the mood lighthearted makes it more likely that the listener will hear children being depicted musically. Regardless of the seriousness of the argument, it has again been forgotten four measures before the end of the

movement when the original “playing” theme returns again. The triple *piano* on the ending B major chord (the tonic of the movement) assures us that the dispute has been resolved, and Ravel enhances the playfulness by making the last few notes *pizzicato* in the strings. The dissolution of anger and the positive ending to this movement reflect Mussorgsky’s own release of anger. Of course, the emotional journey ahead of him will still be a difficult one.

### ***Bydlo***

The movement “*Bydlo*,” Polish for cattle, depicts a literal journey, as well as an emotional one. It is commonly believed that the drawing which inspired this movement was of a Polish oxcart trekking through the mud. The journey portrayed in this movement represents strength and persistence through difficult situations such as the death of a friend. A sense of weight, then, is very important, and Mussorgsky achieves this effect through the constant presence of heavy underlying eighth-notes. Interestingly, each of the performances approach these eighth-notes differently. Horowitz, for the most part, makes the first of each pair of eighth-notes louder, longer, and more accented and the second pair softer and much shorter, thus emphasizing the downbeats. There are, however, moments when he uses a more legato style. The SUSO keeps all of the eighth-notes very even and legato, but they end up sounding almost flaccid, whereas this is a time when the music should in fact feel laboured. It is the Chicago Symphony which I believe interprets the eighth-notes most successfully. Like Horowitz, they give the first of each pair some length and keep the second shorter, but while Horowitz makes them so short that it seems as if the oxcart is not getting anywhere at all,

the Chicago Symphony finds just the right length. The first eighth-note is connected to the second, but the second is played shorter, which gives the effect of heavy, laboured breathing. I think this nicely illustrates the difficult task of pulling an oxcart through treacherous terrain.

Horowitz, the SUSO, and the Chicago Symphony all also differ in the tempos they take. Horowitz takes the quickest pace, which I feel undermines the heaviness and difficulty that should be portrayed in this movement. The Chicago Symphony is the slowest, but I think the degree to which it is drawn out may be too overbearing. In between these two extremes, I prefer the tempo that the SUSO takes.

In a journey through uneven terrain, it is to be expected that there will be places which are more difficult to maneuver through and places which can be travelled with more ease. I believe that Mussorgsky represents these changes dynamically, louder dynamics signifying increased difficulty and softer dynamics signifying smoother ground. This is seen both with the larger dynamic markings, for example the *poco a poco crescendo* which is written at the beginning of the movement and presumably continues until the *pianissimo* at Rehearsal 39, but also with crescendos and decrescendos within smaller phrases. For example, in the fifth measure of Rehearsal 38, Mussorgsky begins a crescendo which builds to the B natural, and then notates a decrescendo in the eighth measure. I envision these smaller phrase markings as smaller hills that the cattle must climb. Ravel only includes the larger, overall dynamic markings in his orchestration, and even Horowitz does not pay very specific attention to the small nuances, usually



ignoring the decrescendos. I think that Mussorgsky's conception of dynamics is important to the interpretation of the movement, and it is unfortunate that they have been somewhat overlooked in this instance.

At a *pianissimo* dynamic, Rehearsal 39 is the "smoothest" this journey has been yet. However, I think that Horowitz overdoes this moment, making it completely legato and thus more like a joy ride than trudging cattle. Although the dynamic here is very soft, I think there should be at least a little bit of bite to each note to remind the audience that although the pressure may have lessened momentarily, this is still no easy journey. The slower tempo of the Chicago Symphony is actually an asset here, as it allows for the most success in keeping the desired level of intensity. The separation between each of the notes and the strong support of the bass instruments playing quarter-notes also contributes to the success of the Chicago Symphony's interpretation. In general, I think that the thick instrumentation of Ravel's orchestration is better equipped to portray weight and density in this movement than the piano is, but Horowitz does get an incredible amount of sound out of his instrument. One place where this is especially apparent is at Rehearsals 40 and 41. While the continuous eighth-notes in the lower strings get somewhat drowned out by the high register melody in the flute, oboe, clarinet, and violins in Ravel's orchestration, Horowitz is able to give the eighth-notes much more presence, which I think is important. I also like his return to shortened offbeats in the fifth and sixth measures of Rehearsal 41 because, while the shortness may be too exaggerated for much of the piece, here the thickness and heaviness of the chords make it seem as if the oxcart is perhaps

momentarily stuck. While the main theme returns at Rehearsal 42, the *con forza* marking in Mussorgsky's score and triple *forte* marking in Ravel's score show that the struggle is not quite over yet. Ravel further illustrates this lack of closure by giving the theme to almost all of the instruments *except* for the tuba, which played it in the beginning of the movement. By Rehearsal 43, however, a relative level of calmness is reached.

At this point, the ox and his cart have survived the most difficult part of the journey and the outlook is steady for the near future. Mussorgsky shows this idea musically by returning to a *piano* dynamic. I feel that Horowitz is too loud here, not actually reaching *piano* until the fifth measure of Rehearsal 43. Ravel's use of instrumentation to exaggerate dynamics and provide overall contrast is brilliant. He thins out the instrumentation to create a quieter sound, gives the melody back to the tuba to show a return to normalcy, and uses a timpani to portray the onward march of the oxen. From here, the music continues to fade, as if we are seeing the oxcart disappear into the distance. Still using instrumentation to his full advantage, Ravel gives the last fragment of the melody to the horn two measures before Rehearsal 45, making it sound as if it is an echo in the distance. Meanwhile, he continually thins out the instrumentation. You can almost see the oxcart getting smaller and smaller as it disappears into the distance. Mussorgsky's piano version, and Horowitz's performance of it, rely more on a *ritardando* and *diminuendo* to convey the fade. Horowitz also makes the interesting decision of eliminating the very last note of the movement. As it is written in Mussorgsky's score, the movement ends on a B#, the third scale degree of G# minor. This

sounds unresolved, and I think is an indication that although the oxcart is disappearing out of sight, the journey is not yet over. By eliminating this note, Horowitz ends on a G#, the tonic, which gives the movement a feeling of finality. Combined with the *ritardando*, this makes it seem as if the oxcart has slowed down and come to a stop. It is unclear whether the halt indicates the completion of the journey or a surrender mid-journey. Either way, by eliminating that one note, Horowitz has given the ending of the movement an entirely different meaning from what a reading based on Mussorgsky's emotional journey would suggest. This movement does not conclude the piece, and therefore it should not indicate in any way that the journey is over. Although Horowitz interprets much of this movement very well, by bringing the oxcart to a halt at the end, he undermines the aspects of strength and persistence, which are extremely important here.

#### **Fourth Promenade**

In the fourth Promenade, Mussorgsky has reached a point where he is no longer overwhelmed and no longer angry, but is simply in mourning. His sadness is conveyed by a minor key for the first time, meaning that the same familiar Promenade theme is used, but with the third and sixth scale degrees lowered. To me, this shows that Mussorgsky is now able to be more honest with himself, whereas in the opening Promenade he had attempted to make himself appear almost unaffected. This Promenade is also more intimate than the previous ones. In the very beginning, the first two beats of the theme are omitted, making the starting place unexpected, as if the listener has just happened to wander across a window looking into Mussorgsky's inner emotions. I think that a piano, because it

is a solo instrument, is naturally better suited to capture this sense of privacy and intimacy than an orchestra is.

Beginning at Rehearsal 47, Mussorgsky's suffering becomes more and more intense. The melody is first heard in a lower register: the left hand in the piano version and the bassoon, contrabassoon, and lower strings in Ravel's orchestrated version. Horowitz actually omits the top octave of the right hand, helping the bass melody to come through more. In the third measure of Rehearsal 47, the right hand of the piano, or the upper strings and winds in Ravel's orchestration, repeat the same melody. The intensity of the upper register makes it even more heart-wrenching.

Suddenly, two measures from the end, a quick, quirky figure interrupts the Promenade, taking the listener out of Mussorgsky's inner thoughts and feelings and back into the real world. This figure actually functions as a segue into the following movement, the "Ballet of the Chicks." In my opinion, Horowitz makes the best transition because of his decision to keep the last two notes very short and separated, which brings out the unpredictable character of the chicks to follow.

### **Ballet of the Chicks**

"Ballet of the Chicks" is a light-hearted movement which I believe Mussorgsky includes to remind himself that happiness can still be found even after the death of a close friend. It was inspired by Hartmann's drawing of chick costumes that were intended to be used in a play (see Appendix A). The music is in ternary form: an "A" section, a "B" section which is a Trio, and then the return of the "A" section. The movement is light, bouncy, and yet somewhat awkward,

as if the chicks are running about, hopping and pecking. In orchestrating this movement, Ravel is able to depict jumpiness quite literally by having the theme “jump” around among different instruments. Horowitz, for his part, depicts unpredictability by making several different *accelerandos* in the “A” sections. The first of these occurs right before Rehearsal 49, and a sudden pause afterwards makes it seem even more jumpy. Horowitz then makes an extreme *accelerando* from Rehearsal 50 through Rehearsal 51. I think this may give a listener the impression of insanity and perhaps even anger, rather than happiness and buoyency. Although a slight *accelerando* would add energy, one this dramatic does not quite seem to fit because, as I see it, the chicks are probably not in a hurry to get anywhere.

At the Trio, Ravel continues to embrace the clumsiness of the chicks by adding a choppy figure in the flutes which did not exist in the original Mussorgsky score. Horowitz, on the other hand, takes a gentler approach. His legato articulation acknowledges the fragility of the young chicks. In Mussorgsky’s score, Rehearsal 53 is a repeat of Rehearsal 52, and Rehearsal 55 is a repeat of Rehearsal 54, but Ravel chooses to create some contrast by using a denser instrumentation on those repeats. This gives the illusion of a question and answer, as if one chick does something and then the rest of the group imitates him. Finally, the “A” section returns, with the addition of a playful two-measure ending. The challenge in this movement is showing the clumsiness and immaturity of the chicks, but also portraying fragility and delicacy.

### **Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle**

Several years before his death, Hartmann had given Mussorgsky drawings of two imaginary characters, Goldenberg, a rich Jew, and Schmuyle, a poor Jew (see Appendix A). Mussorgsky fuses these two characters into one movement in “Pictures at an Exhibition.” The stately opening theme, which represents Goldenberg, shows that he is very straight-forward. The melody is doubled in octaves but lacks any harmony. The tune is very heavy and deliberate, showing that Goldenberg most likely has a gruff personality. The SUSO gives more length to each of the eighth-notes which precede a rest, while both Horowitz and the Chicago Symphony make those notes more abrupt. I prefer the pompousness that the longer eighth-notes convey. However, the SUSO loses some of this pompous character when their level of intensity drops in the last note before Rehearsal 58.

At Rehearsal 58, Schmuyle is introduced for the first time, depicted by a repetitive triplet figure which portrays his insistent, whiny character as he begs for money. The piercing, nasal quality of the trumpet solo which Ravel uses for this figure makes Schmuyle appear even more conniving. Perhaps resisting some of the anti-Semitism that is displayed here, Horowitz slows down at the end of each two measure phrase. This makes the passage prettier and more musical, and in effect makes Schmuyle more lovable than obnoxious. This may not have been what Mussorgsky intended in his depiction of Schmuyle, but it may be a favorable change considering that anti-Semitism is a sensitive subject.

The measure before Rehearsal 60 begins a new phrase which includes the rhythm of an eighth-note followed by four thirty-second notes. The trumpet

soloist in the Chicago Symphony holds the first eighth-note slightly longer and then plays the thirty-second notes more like grace-notes, giving this passage a more manipulative character, which I think is extremely effective.

At Rehearsal 60, the themes of the two Jews are combined for the first time, as if Schmuyle, making his begging rounds, has finally come to Goldenberg. At Rehearsal 62, a variation of Goldenberg's theme is alone again and played, as notated in Mussorgsky's score, "*con dolore*," or with pain. It would seem as if Goldenberg is perhaps having a moment of compassion and is going to help Schmuyle, until suddenly with an abrupt *subito forte* on the last note of the phrase, he changes his mind. This happens once more in the next measure, and it becomes apparent that Goldenberg also has a devious side. Finally, the movement ends with a decisive, *fortissimo* triplet and then a dotted quarter-note. Ravel changes the value of this last note to an eighth-note, which enhances the ending because it gives a greater sense of finality: an assurance that Goldenberg will not be giving in to Schmuyle's requests for charity. The SUSO, however, still elongates this last note, and Horowitz holds it even longer than the dotted quarter-note value printed in his score. I prefer the quick cutoff of the Chicago Symphony. Interestingly, in Ravel's orchestration, the trumpet, which had depicted Schmuyle earlier, also plays this ending figure, which I think shows that Goldenberg and Schmuyle, though one is rich and one is poor, are not so different in character after all.

### **The Marketplace at Limoges**

This movement represents a marketplace scene in Limoges, a city in central France. The music is light, crisp, and fast-paced, and sounds almost like dance music. Musically, we can hear the bustling and chattering of merchants and customers at the market.

Ravel's orchestration enhances the illustrative ability of this movement dramatically. He creates the effect of conversation by using a "hocket" technique in which the melody is divided among different instruments so that they fill in each other's silences, together creating the overall melody line. For example, at Rehearsal 64 the sixteenth-note run is divided between the flute and the first violins. It is a continuous sixteenth-note passage when put together, but the varied timbres of different instruments create the illusion of hearing snippets of conversation while perusing the marketplace. In some places, for example at Rehearsals 66 and 70, the melody line is so disjointed that it only seems to make sense when divided among different instruments. In other words, when it is divided among instruments, we can envision women at the marketplace gossiping and interrupting each other, whereas when played on the piano it almost seems as if it is just a poorly constructed melody. Ravel's use of a variety of instruments is a more convincing depiction of a marketplace atmosphere in general, as the many colors and textures of merchandise for sale at the marketplace are represented in the many tone colors and sound textures we hear in different instruments in the orchestra.



In this particular movement, the Chicago Symphony performance surpasses the SUSO performance in several areas. First, the tempo they take is much faster, which is more effective in conveying the fast pace of the marketplace. Second, the percussion comes through much more strongly in the Chicago Symphony recording. This may be the result of the placement of the microphone during the recording, but at Rehearsals 67 and 68, for example, the bells can barely be heard in the SUSO recording. Finally, the Chicago Symphony executes the accents more sharply, which improves the crispness of the performance and also better conveys the bustling nature of the marketplace scene. I find the piano performance of this movement to be the weakest of the three, not by any fault of Horowitz, but simply because Ravel's orchestration made such drastic improvements to the movement, due to the greater versatility of a full orchestra.

### **Catacombs**

The lighthearted ending of "The Marketplace at Limoges," which portrays the women happily scurrying home from the market with their new purchases, segues immediately into the grave and mysterious "Catacombs." Drawn out chords in a low register represent Hartmann's drawing of himself in the dark underground catacombs in Paris (see Appendix A). Many of the chords start strongly, often with a *sforzando* in Mussorgsky's score, and then *diminuendo*, as if imitating the echoing acoustics of the catacombs. This movement is very eerie, and represents the fear of death which Mussorgsky would be likely to experience after the death of his friend.

Horowitz takes this movement at a brisker tempo than either the Chicago Symphony or the SUSO. I think that a slower, drawn-out tempo evokes a more mysterious quality. For this same reason, I like the amount of time the SUSO takes during the rest going into Rehearsal 73: there are three full seconds of silence, which create anticipation and allow the listener to understand the seriousness of this movement. The decision of both the Chicago Symphony and SUSO to completely cut off and pause for a moment after each of the three fermatas at the beginning of Rehearsal 73 has the same dramatic effect. Finally, three measures before Rehearsal 74, the SUSO trumpet soloist stretches the D on the third beat, which also increases the level of tension and mystery before the resolution in the next measure.

Horowitz adds rapid trills in measures three through six of Rehearsal 74, another technique used to increase intensity. Interestingly, he does not decrescendo through these measures as indicated in the score but rather continues to grow in volume until the second-to-last measure. I find this to be an effective way to add to the degree of anticipation. For his part, Ravel's inclusion of an ominous cymbal crash on the last note makes the ending of this movement extremely eerie.

### ***Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua***

The Latin title of this movement means “with the dead in a dead language,” and it goes hand-in-hand with the preceding death-related movement, “Catacombs.” However, while “Catacombs” is dark and heavy, “Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua” is light and ethereal. I think that while “Catacombs” conveys

underground burial, a very literal aspect of death, “Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua” portrays the more spiritual notion of an afterlife. Mussorgsky penciled in a note with “Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua” saying “The creative spirit of the departed Hartmann leads me towards the skulls and addresses them – a pale light radiates from the interior of the skulls” (Frankenstein, 286). This clearly supports my reading of “Pictures at an Exhibition” as a piece which relates to Mussorgsky’s life on a very personal level. In particular, his reference to the pale light radiating from the interior of the skulls depicts a supernatural image which symbolizes his realization that Hartmann’s creative spirit will continue to live on.

The beginning of this movement is quite eerie, and the *tremolos* in the violins and violas in Ravel’s score add to this mysterious quality. Then, one measure before Rehearsal 77, Mussorgsky writes in a *rallentando*, which Horowitz executes beautifully. Ravel removes this *rallentando* in his score, which I think is unfortunate, since there is such a contrast in character beginning at Rehearsal 77. The suggested tonality here is major rather than minor, making it sound more magical than eerie, and the ascending bass notes seem to depict Hartmann’s ascent into an afterlife. Ravel puts these figures in the harp, which is associated with heavenly imagery. I like the strong presence of the harp heard in the Chicago Symphony recording since the harp is something that any listener can easily associate with the afterlife, and thus it plays a very important role in illustrating the narrative of the movement.

By the end of the movement, Hartmann’s spirit seems to be at peace in the afterlife. Mussorgsky indicates a *ritardando* from Rehearsal 78 to the end, and

this enhances the tranquility and sense of finality that is reached as the movement ends. Ravel, however, does not keep this *ritardando* in his score, illustrating the idea of eternal life rather than a definitive end. Either interpretation seems appropriate to me. Another difference I found in the ending was that the flutes in the SUSO cut off the last note quite abruptly, while the Chicago Symphony tapers it more, making a gentler ending. I prefer the delicacy shown by the Chicago Symphony because I feel that the most important aspect of “*Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua*” is the depiction of Mussorgsky coming to peace with Hartmann’s death, as opposed to the fear of death shown in “Catacombs.”

### **The Hut on Fowl’s Legs (Baba Yaga)**

This movement musically portrays Hartmann’s drawing of the design for an ornate clock in the shape of the hut where the infamous Baba Yaga dwells. In Russian folklore, Baba Yaga is a frightening old witch whose hut in the forest moves about on giant chicken’s legs. The idea of this fantastical structure is actually derived from real structures which were used by the nomadic Serbian people, built atop several tree stumps, whose roots could resemble chicken feet. Baba Yaga is very wise, but because she ages one year every time she is asked for advice, she is not very receptive to visitors. The fence to her house is lined with skulls, and, according to the legend, there is always room for one more.

Clearly, violence is central to the personification of Baba Yaga, and should be represented in the music. I envision this movement as a depiction of Baba Yaga chasing after someone who has come to her with a question and has therefore caused her to age. The tonality of the piece suggests the unsettling

nature of a chase through chromaticism and eventually a suggestion of C major, but never an overt statement of that key through a V-I cadence. Mussorgsky sets a violent, unsettling tone right from the beginning of the movement with the abrupt *fortissimo* chords, which he even marks “*violento*.” Horowitz connects the first note to the second in measures one and five, which I feel detracts from the violent effect. At Rehearsal 81, however, there is no mistaking the violence in his *sfortandos* which occur on the second beat of each measure, as well as the first beat of the fourth and eighth measures. In Ravel’s orchestration, bassoon, contrabassoon, and harp are added on these beats to create a *sfortando* effect, but the *sfortandos* are still more successful in Horowitz’s performance than in either of the orchestral performances. Perhaps more forceful brass instruments would have been more effective in the orchestration. Ravel does, however, create dynamic interest by adding a crescendo through Rehearsal 81 as well as dropping to a *piano* dynamic for the first time at Rehearsal 82 and then moving to another dramatic crescendo. I like that this gives the passage a sense of direction, rather than using a continuous *fortissimo* dynamic; if it is *fortissimo* all the time, then this intense dynamic does not stand out as being particularly significant.

At Rehearsal 83, we hear for the first time what I consider to be the “hero’s theme.” The adventurous seeker of Baba Yaga’s advice now thinks for a brief moment that he has escaped her. Ravel gives this theme to the trumpet section, amplifying the triumphant quality that it naturally has. However, the descending chromatic notes in the fourth and eighth measures of Rehearsal 83 tell us that danger is still lurking. These notes are scored in the bass instruments in

Ravel's version, but are barely audible over the trumpets, horns, and bass drum. This is unfortunate, because they play such an important role in making it clear that our hero's predicament is far from being over.

At Rehearsal 84, the hero also begins to realize that he is still in danger. The first four notes resemble the beginning of his theme, but his confidence is interrupted by a menacing fear, depicted by the eighth-notes in the third and fourth measures. Ravel uses several techniques to capture the hero's mounting fear. He creates a more pointed sound through the use of pizzicato in the strings. He also changes the eighth-notes in the strings to sixteenth-notes to increase the sense of urgency. Finally, he changes the articulation in the woodwinds at Rehearsal 86 to include more separation and fewer slurred notes, since slurs evoke a gentler sound. Horowitz is able to portray fear by speeding up the tempo in Rehearsals 87 and 88. This is especially effective at Rehearsal 87 because here the same figure is repeated four times and each time it becomes faster, which gives a sense of direction and conveys the hero becoming more frantic as time passes. Finally, at Rehearsal 89, each measure alternates between the tonalities of A flat and G, as if the hero is looking around trying to decide which way to run next. Ravel accentuates this idea even more by putting the A flats in the woodwinds (except flute) and strings, and the G's in the brass and flute, increasing the listener's sense of the hero's intense confusion and indecisiveness. Then, the movement transitions into the gentler *andante mosso* section. Ravel adds an extra two measures into the score to allow more time for this adjustment, but Horowitz makes the most of the two measures he has been given by making a *rallentando*,

even though the score specifically says not to. Mussorgsky may have intended for the change in moods to be more abrupt rather than eased into.

The *andante mosso* section of the movement is much more mysterious, as if depicting the little hut on chicken legs tiptoeing through the woods. The steadiness of this section may also evoke the ticking of the clock in Hartmann's drawing. Ravel's use of harmonics in the strings at Rehearsal 91 brings about a mysterious, fantastical quality, as do the bells at Rehearsal 92. The tremolos and hairpin crescendos and decrescendos in Rehearsal 93 make the music sound dizzy and magical, and the Chicago Symphony executes these effects best. However, their cymbal crash on the last note before Rehearsal 94 is barely audible. Although it is marked *pianissimo*, the cymbal crash signifies the end of this mysterious "B" section before returning to the aggressive "A" section, and therefore should be given more importance. Horowitz holds the fermata on this last note for a particularly long time, which is effective because it makes the sudden jump into the recapitulation more startling.

At the beginning of the recapitulation, Horowitz plays something that departs from both of the scores that I have been studying. Since the basic thematic idea is the same, it is possible that he just wanted to add some variation the second time through. Rehearsals 95 through 101, though, are an exact repeat of Rehearsals 82 through 89. Finally, the movement ends with the fast and furious coda at Rehearsal 102 which is, for the most part, an ascending chromatic scale. Horowitz plays this coda with such velocity that individual notes are barely distinguishable, which helps to portray Baba Yaga's rage. However, in the last

three measures Mussorgsky indicates a *ritardando*, which Horowitz follows. While this makes for a smoother transition into the final movement, I prefer Ravel's decision to continue to convey Baba Yaga's fury by continuing to the end at full speed. The movement ends on a G, the fifth scale degree of C, and since Mussorgsky does not give us the tonic C, the movement does not end with any sense of resolution. To me, this indicates that Baba Yaga is continuing the chase through the woods, and we are not sure what the fate of our hero will be. It is therefore better to end the movement in "mid-chase," without slowing down.

### **The Great Gate of Kiev**

"The Great Gate of Kiev" is based on Hartmann's winning design in a competition for a city gate to be built to commemorate Tsar Alexander II's narrow escape from an assassination attempt (see Appendix A). Although the city gate was never built, Hartmann considered this design to be his best work, which, apart from its triumphant nature, probably explains why this is the concluding movement of the piece. Hartmann's pride in his work, as well as the majestic structure of the gate itself, can be heard in Mussorgsky's music. I found that the structure of this movement also seems to recapitulate the progression of the entire piece.

The opening chords of the movement are brilliant and stately, reminiscent of the pompousness of the opening Promenade. Ravel emphasizes the majestic quality of the chords by putting them in the brass for a bright, ringing sound. His use of the timpani and bass drums make this opening truly grandiose, which is, in fact, the marking at the top of both Mussorgsky's and Ravel's scores. Ravel's



*tenuto* markings in the woodwinds at Rehearsal 104 evoke confidence and deliberateness, showing that every detail of Hartmann's design is intentional and well thought-out. For this reason I prefer the slower tempo of the Chicago Symphony and the SUSO to Horowitz's quicker tempo. While a faster tempo is livelier, I think that it is more important to convey Hartmann's deliberateness and hard work as an architect.

The mood becomes much mellower at Rehearsal 106, with a slower pulse and sparser instrumentation (only clarinets and bassoon are present) in Ravel's score. Mussorgsky marks this section "*senza espressione*," or "without expression." This is reminiscent of the emptiness portrayed in the second Promenade due to Mussorgsky's overwhelming grief. The music is gentle, as if Mussorgsky is looking back on his friendship with Hartmann and is not quite able to comprehend the reality of his death. Horowitz plays this section with especially beautiful delicacy.

Then, the movement suddenly bursts into loud, energetic eighth notes at Rehearsal 107. This, I believe, reminds us of the Third Promenade, which illustrated Mussorgsky's anger over Hartmann's death. Ravel puts the running eighth-notes in the flute, oboe, clarinets, harp, violins, and violas in unison, which makes them very powerful. Horowitz, on the other hand, improvises by sometimes playing broken thirds instead of scalar patterns in the eighth-notes beginning in the fourth measure of Rehearsal 107, which makes them seem more trivial. However, he may do this in order to put more emphasis on the opening theme played by the left hand, which is now darker due to its low register. Both of

the orchestras pause for a moment before going on to Rehearsal 109, which I think is important because at this point the mood changes once again.

At Rehearsal 109, the mellow theme returns again, only this time Mussorgsky does not mark it “*senza espressione*,” which makes it a parallel to the emotional third Promenade. Ravel, however, reverses the use of the “*senza espressione*” marking, which I do not feel he should have done because it seems that Mussorgsky used that marking for the purpose of relating the different sections of this movement to the different Promenades. Even so, there is another relationship that I found between this section and the third Promenade in Ravel’s score: the flutes are the most prominent instrument in the third Promenade, and in the sixth measure of Rehearsal 109, flutes are added to the clarinets and bassoons.

Then, at Rehearsal 110 we are reminded of the fear of death conveyed in Catacombs. This section is dark and eerie until the breakthrough of the actual Promenade theme in the flute, oboes, and trumpets at Rehearsal 112. Now that Mussorgsky has reflected on everything he has felt while perusing the exhibition, it seems that he has come full circle and is beginning to embrace how he is going to continue to remember Hartmann. Then at Rehearsal 115, the opening “Kiev” theme returns with even greater stateliness. The triplet figures, for example two measures before Rehearsal 116, bring about an even greater air of pompousness and confidence. At Rehearsal 118, Mussorgsky begins to build energy and tension, which Ravel accentuates by using a doubled rhythm in the violins and violas, until this tension is finally released at Rehearsal 119. The *rallentando* that the SUSO makes is perfect because it illustrates that Mussorgsky is letting go of

negative energy and transitioning into a new state of mind. Musically, this transition is represented by the “Kiev” theme, which is played one last time at Rehearsal 121, now more majestic than ever. In the Chicago Symphony performance, the cymbal crashes are loud and brilliant, which nicely accentuates the positive energy in the music here. Horowitz draws out the grace notes in a grandiose way, and adds trills: first in the low register to show strength, and then in the high register beginning in the ninth measure to show the celebration of a beautiful life. Each of the performances portrays the majesty of Hartmann’s design for the gate at Kiev in different ways. This movement brings the entire piece, as well as Mussorgsky’s emotional journey, to a satisfying conclusion.

### ***Conclusions***

As I have shown, interpretive decisions made by performers can greatly affect the meaning conveyed in a piece of music. This may occur because a certain performance aspect increases the illustrative ability of the music, or it may occur because a musical decision gives the music a different meaning all together. For this reason, it is important to know background information on the composer and the piece, and within that context, determine the best way to interpret it. The performer has a responsibility both to the composer and to the listener to convey the message of the piece as accurately as possible.

Initially, the purpose of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* may not seem to extend past the narration of a visitor wandering through an exhibition and the representation of different drawings by Victor Hartmann. This programmatic

reading is the most obvious, and it is of course a very important aspect of the piece. However, it also seems to be a bit superficial, and it is surprising to me that most analyses do not go any further than this, especially when taking into account that all art, including music, is so often considered to be, as philosopher Thomas Munro states, “a process of self-expression” (Munro, 79). While the primary medium of music is the organization of sounds, “the secondary medium or subject-matter of pure music is human emotion and conation” (philosopher T.M. Greene in Munro, 254). It seems likely, then, that Mussorgsky must have had an emotional purpose in writing this piece: I would claim that it is his own emotional journey as he copes with the death of his friend.

It is essential that a performer of *Pictures at an Exhibition* bear in mind this aspect of self-expression throughout the piece. Whether it is the steadiness and persistence of “*Il Vecchio Castello*,” the release of anger in “*Tuileries*,” the lightheartedness of “*The Ballet of Chicks*,” or the description of the afterlife in “*Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua*,” every movement has a unique purpose in Mussorgsky’s emotional journey. If the performer has taken great care to make sure that each note of each movement serves to narrate that journey, the listener should be able to understand it in a way which applies to his or her own life. Many listeners may have never seen a Hartmann painting, but human emotion is something that can be understood by everyone. Mussorgsky even seemed to acknowledge this universality by putting the titles of the movements in several different languages: Italian, French, Polish, and Latin. If *Pictures at an Exhibition* is performed while keeping Mussorgsky’s purpose of self-expression in mind, it

should in fact have “an appeal to the many” and serve not only the memory of Victor Hartmann, but the memory of the loved ones of anyone who listens to this majestic piece. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but the beauty of music is that it says what cannot be expressed in words.

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*Appendix A*

**Figure 1.1:** Ballet of the Chicks



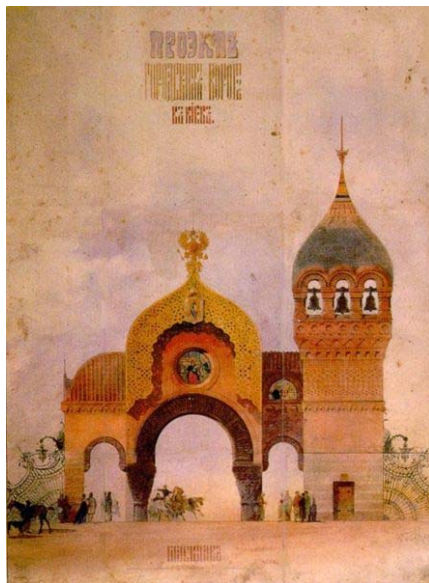
**Figure 1.2:** Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle



**Figure 1.3:** Catacombs



**Figure 1.4:** The Great Gate of Kiev



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