

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition Khovanshchina Prelude Stravinsky: Petrushka (1911)

New Philharmonia Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra
Charles Mackerras



alto

Modest Mussorgsky orch. Maurice Ravel

Pictures at an Exhibition

1	Promenade – Gnomus	3:43
2	Promenade – Il Vecchio Castello	5:03
3	Promenade – Tuileries – Bydlo	4:17
4	Promenade – Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks – Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle	4:04
5	Limoges, le marché – Catacombae – Con Mortuis	6:02
6	Baba Yaga (Hut on Fowls' Legs) –	3:12
7	The Great Gate of Kiev	5:31
8	Mussorgsky: Dawn Over the Moscow River (<i>Khovashchina</i> – Prelude)	5:24

New Philharmonia Orchestra

Igor Stravinsky

Petrushka (original 1911 edition)

9	Part I. The Shrovetide Fair – The Crowds –	5:13
A	The Charlatan's Booth – Russian Dance	4:40
B	Part II. Petrushka's Cell	4:12
C	Part III. The Moor's Room – Dance of the Ballerina – The Ballerina and the Moor	6:50
D	Part IV. The Shrovetide Fair, Near Evening – Dance of the Wet Nurses – Dance of the Peasant and the Bear – Dance of the Gypsy Girls –	6:14
E	Dance of the Coachmen and Grooms – The Masqueraders – Petrushka's Death	7:12

London Symphony Orchestra

Charles Mackerras, *conductor*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

In his younger years **Modest Mussorgsky** (1839—81) was an elegant army ensign who entertained fashionable gatherings with popular piano pieces. However following the emancipation of the serfs in the 1860s his family lost money; as a result Mussorgsky was forced into paid work with the civil service and his taste for strong alcohol rapidly led to a deterioration in both his health and appearance. Almost wholly self-taught, Mussorgsky did receive some tuition from Balakirev, but his individual style is evident in the operas *Oedipus in Athens* and *Salammbô* and the song cycles *The Nursery* and *Songs and Dances of Death*.

Mussorgsky was a friend of Victor Hartmann, known for his architectural drawings, water colours and designs. Hartmann died in 1873 aged just thirty-nine and an exhibition of his work was organised early the following year at the Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg by a mutual acquaintance, the critic Vladimir Stasov. Mussorgsky loaned some artwork for the exhibition and in June 1874 he began to compose his *Pictures at an Exhibition* for piano. Mussorgsky became completely absorbed in his work ('Sounds and ideas hang in the air...I can barely manage to scribble them down on paper') and in a few weeks the piece was finished. Mussorgsky's strikingly original score for *Pictures at an Exhibition* positively cried out for orchestration and over time many composers and conductors have attempted the task. By far the most successful has been Maurice Ravel's version which followed a commission from Serge Koussevitsky in 1922 who made the first recording eight years later.

Pictures at an Exhibition opens with *Promenade*, a stately theme depicting a visitor to the exhibition wandering around the gallery; variants of this theme recur at during the work. The first picture viewed (*Gnomus*) is that of a gnome, whose bandy-legged gait is superbly caught by the composer. The visitor then sees an Italian castle, outside which stands a troubadour (portrayed in Ravel's orchestration by a saxophone). Next is a lively scene in the Tuileries Palace gardens where children play under the watchful eyes of their nannies. For the next exhibit the visitor travels from

Paris to Poland: a large wagon (*Bydło*) is drawn over stony ground by heavy oxen and as the music reaches a thunderous climax it passes and fades into the distance. Moving forward, the visitor finds the *Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks*, creatures probably familiar to the composer from Petipa's 1871 ballet *Trilby*. The next painting concerns two Jews deep in conversation, one rich (Samuel Goldenberg), the other poor (Schmuyle). Several themes for their discussion have been advanced, the most popular being an unsuccessful attempt by Schmuyle (muted trumpet) to obtain a loan from Goldenberg (strings and woodwind). A busy marketplace outside Limoges Cathedral with shoppers and vendors is the setting for the following painting but the bright colours of the marketplace are swiftly replaced by the murky atmosphere of the Parisian catacombs as the composer depicts the artist Hartmann examining the skulls which 'begin to glow from within' (Mussorgsky), a muted version of the Promenade perhaps acting as a private tribute to the recently-departed artist. The supernatural theme, albeit a slightly comical one, continues into the following picture: *The Hut on Fowls' Legs*, a clock that springs to life in the form of the legendary Russian witch Baba Yaga. Bringing the work to a stirring conclusion, the final picture transforms the *Promenade* into a magnificent procession passing beneath the *Great Gate of Kiev*. Hartmann's picture depicts the Gate as a huge Slavic helmet but in fact no such Gate existed. In 1866 Tsar Alexander II, having just survived an assassination attempt, invited architects to design a huge gateway but the project was abandoned due to lack of funds and/or politics.

For his epic opera *Khovanshchina*, Mussorgsky was directed to a gruesome episode in Russian history by his friend Stasov. *Khovanshchina*, often translated as The Khovansky Affair, tells of the rebellion by Prince Khovansky, his elite *Streletsy* ('shooters') and the Old Believers against the Westernising social and religious reforms demanded by Tsar Peter the Great from 1682. Following brutal suppression, many of the rebels committed suicide by mass immolation. As with *Boris Godunov*, Mussorgsky fashioned his own libretto which he wrote alongside composition and this tortuous

process explains why, after eight years, so little of the actual scoring (just two scenes) was completed by the composer at the time of his death. Rimsky-Korsakov decided to complete the score, revising much of Mussorgsky's work in the process. Ravel and Stravinsky provided their own version for Diaghilev in 1913 (Stravinsky's finale is still occasionally played) and in 1958/9 Shostakovich restored some of the alterations to Mussorgsky's work made by Rimsky-Korsakov. The *Prelude* heard here is subtitled 'Dawn over the Moscow River'.

Whilst considering how to follow his successful ballet *L'oiseau de feu* (Firebird) in 1910, Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) conceived a scenario concerning the sacrifice of a young girl in pagan Russia which was later used for *Le sacre du printemps* (Rite of Spring) and he arranged to meet Diaghilev during the winter of 1910/11 to discuss the project. However he had also begun work on a concert piece for piano and orchestra and it was this music that he played to Diaghilev. This music now forms the closing moments of the first scene (tableau) of *Petrushka* depicting the puppet Petrushka coming to life, and the second scene. Diaghilev was so impressed that he asked Stravinsky and the designer Alexandre Benois to conceive a scenario for a ballet in four tableaux based on a familiar Russian folk tale. Stravinsky composed the work quickly, making generous use of Russian folk tunes and in the final tableau he also paid tribute to a favourite composer Chabrier whose *España* is quoted by the trombones. *Petrushka* was choreographed by Mikhael Fokine of the Ballets Russes and premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris in June 1911 with Vaclav Nijinsky (title role), Tamara Karsavina (Ballerina), Alexander Orlov (the Moor) and Enrico Cecchetti (Charlatan) and Pierre Monteux conducting. These first performances created a considerable stir amongst established musicians such as Debussy whilst Stravinsky's sound world with its constant change of metre began to influence a new generation of composers and its positive reception gave Stravinsky the confidence to push back the boundaries still further with his next ballet *Le sacre du printemps*, Stravinsky revisited *Petrushka* twice more; first in 1921 when he transcribed the work for piano

for Arthur Rubinstein; and then in 1946/7 he revised the orchestration, embellishing the piano part and varying the scoring. Set in Admiralty Square, St Petersburg at Shrovetide during the 1830s the curtain rises to a busy scene as hawkers and fairground visitors mill about the stage. They are entertained by an organ grinder (whose wheezy sounds are imaginatively recreated by the composer) with a dancing girl and then by a second girl with a music box who compete for the audience's attention. A drum-roll provides the cue for people to enter the booth belonging to a Charlatan who has invited the crowd to watch his puppet show. As the Charlatan plays his flute three puppets spring to life. They are a handsome Moor, an elegant ballerina and a clown, Petrushka. It soon becomes evident that the ballerina desires the Moor; Petrushka's attempts to woo her meet with ridicule. The *second tableau* takes place in Petrushka's sparsely furnished room. Having been kicked onstage by the Charlatan, Petrushka attempts to woo the ballerina beneath the mocking gaze of his master's portrait. However she finds Petrushka repulsive and having ridiculed him, flounces out. Thoroughly incensed, Petrushka curses the Charlatan's picture on the wall. The *third tableau* is set inside the Moor's exotically decorated room. The Moor's lavish furnishings are more to the Ballerina's taste and it is obvious that she finds him a more interesting proposition. Petrushka bursts in determined to challenge the Moor, who sends the clown packing. The *final tableau*, set outside the Charlatan's tent, finds the Shrovetide Fair in full swing: wet nurses dance to the tune of *Down the Petersky Road* and a dancing bear with its keeper entertain the crowd who join in the general festivities. Their merrymaking is abruptly curtailed as the Moor, brandishing his sharp scimitar, chases Petrushka across the stage, closely followed by a frightened Ballerina. Cornered by the Moor Petrushka is savagely cut down. The Charlatan reassures the appalled onlookers that Petrushka was just a stuffed puppet. However, after the crowd has drifted away, night draws in and Petrushka's ghost appears on the roof of the tent threatening the Charlatan who, scared witless, rushes off.

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Sir Charles Mackerras (1925-2010) began his career as an oboist with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra but subsequently achieved fame as both conductor and musical scholar. Following his arrival in Europe in 1946 he studied conducting in Prague and then worked on the staff of Sadler's Wells Opera for whom he conducted the first British performance of Janáček's *Káta Kabanová* in 1951. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he not only made numerous recordings with British orchestras, continuing his fine work at Sadler's Wells (later English National Opera), but also between 1966 and 1970 being closely involved with the Hamburger Staatsoper. In 1987 he was appointed Musical Director of Welsh National Opera and it was during his period with this company that he made his long-awaited Glyndebourne debut in 1990.

Mackerras's repertoire was varied but of especial note were his scholarly performing editions of operas of the baroque and classical periods, his championing of Czech music and of the works of Sullivan (Mackerras' ballet *Pineapple Poll*, skilfully arranged from Sullivan's music, has become a staple of the repertoire). Mackerras was awarded the Janáček medal in 1978 and was knighted for services to music in 1979.

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Alto ALC1263

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Mussorgsky recorded at All Hallows Church, Gospel Oak, London, in 1973 • Engineer: **Robert Auger** • Originally issued on Vanguard Classics VCS-10116 / VSQ 30032
Petrushka recorded at Watford Town Hall in 1973 (engineer uncredited) • Originally issued on Vanguard Classics VCD-71177 / VSQ 30021

Producer: **Seymour Solomon**

Mastered for alto by **Paul Arden-Taylor**

2026 digital edition produced by **Gene Gaudette**, [Urlicht AudioVisual](#)

Cover image: "The Great Gate of Kiev" by **Victor Hartmann** (1834-73), courtesy **wikimedia**

Design produced by [Imergent Images Ltd](#)

Reissue producer: [Robin Vaughan](#)

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