



Newsletter of the
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(Pictures at an Exhibition)

Association

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Major New Study by Alexander Flor

Austrian student, and IKVA member, Alexander Flor has completed an important new study of *Pictures*, covering Mussorgsky's life and work, a thorough analysis of *Pictures* itself, and an analysis of the piano performance versions by Sviatoslav Richter, Elena Kuschnerova, Sergio Tiempo, as well as an examination of the versions of Ravel, Horowitz, Leonard and others. This study runs to 82 pages, and is in German. Those who are able to read this language will want to obtain a copy from Herr Flor at alexanderflor89@hotmail.com, or may contact me, as I also have an electronic version that I can forward (by permission of the author).

IKVA's archive, as can be seen from the summary in the header, has now exceeded 800 different recordings of the numerous arrangements of *Pictures*. There are new recordings being issued on virtually a monthly basis, so the interest of performers and recording companies in this work continues unabated. I am working on a project to update the Wikipedia article on *Pictures* so that all of the arrangements known to me will be mentioned at this site (I will not include all of the performances, however). Only about 20% of the known arrangements are currently mentioned.

We are very pleased this month to be able to publish in this issue a scholarly article by the Australian composer and performer, Dr. George Galanis, whose arrangement of *Pictures* is also reviewed in this issue. Interested parties may contact Dr. Galanis at george@galanis.com.au.

These newsletters will probably be published semi-annually from here on out, as they do take a bit of time to compile, and my available time for projects that provide no remuneration for me is understandably (I trust) limited.

Best regards,

David DeBoor Canfield

Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.
Some Notes about the arrangement by George Galanis
(Copyright George Galanis 2008)

What more can one say with another arrangement of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*? Certainly Ravel's arrangement is stunning in its masterly orchestration, and there are numerous other arrangements that take different perspectives on the suite. Nevertheless, I have always had a recurring feeling that there was something missing in the arrangements I have heard in the past.

In terms of musical form, Mussorgsky's original *Pictures at an Exhibition* suite for solo piano reminds me of Scarlatti's sonatas. Scarlatti wrote five hundred and fifty five sonatas. Fundamentally Scarlatti's sonatas are a type of binary form. The first part of the binary structure introduces the first theme 'A', then modulates to a related key and introduces theme 'B'. Instead of a development (as we find in the later classical sonatas) there follows a 'mirror' (a short passage usually modulating back to the tonic key, and this passage represents a point of reflection). The second part of the binary structure is then theme 'B' followed, without modulation, by theme 'A' concluding the sonata. Of course, Scarlatti's sonatas have many variations around the fundamental binary structure—such as variations in the modulations and variations on the themes. However, the fundamental binary form is apparent throughout his sonatas. The famous American harpsichordist, Ralph Kirkpatrick, studied Scarlatti's sonatas extensively and he developed one of the common numbering systems of the sonatas used today. Kirkpatrick's numbering suggests that Scarlatti's early sonatas are self-contained units, but the later Sonatas were written in contrasting or complementary pairs with thematic relationships. Anyone interested in Kirkpatrick's ideas can find a detailed analysis in Kirkpatrick's treatise on Scarlatti. So one intriguing aspect that I explored was how readily Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* lends itself to an interpretation using some of the concepts used by Scarlatti in his sonatas.

For example, consider the following aspects of Mussorgsky's suite. The suite opens with the *Promenade*--stating the main theme of an extended sonata structure. The final movement in the suite, *The Great Gate* is a variation of the *Promenade* theme. Hence the *Promenade* theme represents the outer shell of an extended sonata form. The first two pictures (*Gnome* and *Castle*) are self contained in that they are separated by the *Promenade* theme. The following pictures occur in contrasting pairs—*Children & Cattle*; *Unhatched Chicks* and *Goldenberg and Schmuyle*. The last explicitly titled *Promenade* occurs after *Goldenberg and Schmuyle*. This last *Promenade* occurs around the middle of the suite and lends itself to treatment as a 'mirror' similar to Scarlatti's 'mirror' in a sonata. Following the last *Promenade* we now have the second half of the extended binary structure. The pairs of movements are now not separated by an explicit *Promenade*, but the pairings are still evident: *Market Place* and *Catacombs*; *Baba Yaga* and *Great Gate*. These two pairs are partitioned by *With the Dead in a Dead Language*, which is actually a variation of the *Promenade* theme. Notable in the second half of the suite is that the two variations of the promenade theme (*With the Dead in a Dead Language*, and, *Great Gate*) have become pictures rather than *Promenades*.

Thematically the pictures in the second part of the binary structure can be seen as reflections of the first part of the binary structure. Roughly speaking, the first *Promenade* (the beginning of a journey) and *Gnome* (confrontation with ugliness) are reflected in the second part of the binary structure as *Baba Yaga* (confronting the ugly witch of death) and the *Great Gate* (a triumphant conclusion heralding an ongoing journey). The other parts of the thematic reflection include, *Unhatched Chicks* (the possibilities at the beginning of life), *Goldenberg and Schmuyle* (actualities of wealth and poverty later in life). After the final *Promenade* these themes are reflected as *The Market Place* (actualities of money and trivialities) and *Catacombs* (the end of life and the wish for something further).

Although Mussorgsky may not have been consciously using Scarlatti's structures, the parallels in the progression of themes across movements suggests that Mussorgsky had a conceptual thread running through his suite. So when one discovers that many arrangements of *Pictures at an Exhibition* leave out some of Mussorgsky's pictures (movements) or *Promenades*, the question that comes to mind is whether these arrangers

were actually aware of what they were doing to Mussorgsky's conceptual structure. Even Ravel left out the final (fifth) *Promenade* because he considered it a redundant repetition. My studies of Mussorgsky's form (and that of Scarlatti's concepts) suggest to me that indeed there is a structural consideration that many of the traditional arrangements seem to miss.

The other interesting connection for me occurred from my exploration of the Emerson Lake and Palmer (ELP) interpretation of Mussorgsky's suite. The ELP interpretation does not follow Mussorgsky's structure closely, but rather uses a few of Mussorgsky's ideas as points of departure into the 'Progressive Rock' idiom. So at first I thought that there might not be much to be gleaned from ELP for a classical rendition. But on closer listening I found Emerson's s aggressive interpretation of *Gnome* highly suited to the 'mirroring' of *Gnome* with *Baba Yaga*. In addition, on listening to Keith Emerson's *Piano Concerto* (the recording on the original 1979 *Works* album) the opening of the final movement reminded me of the opening of *Baba Yaga*. The opening theme of Emerson's final movement sounds like an inversion of Mussorgsky's *Baba Yaga* theme. Emerson's piano concerto planted the seed in my mind of Mussorgsky's suite as something suitable for piano and orchestra.

Such an arrangement of Mussorgsky's suite would not be a 'Piano Concerto' in the ordinary sense and form, but rather, the interplay of the piano and orchestral colourings could highlight the 'sonata' structure that I described earlier. As I explored the piano and orchestra possibility further, the allocation of parts to piano and orchestra seemed to fall quite naturally into place. The orchestra focussed on the *Promenade* theme and became Mussorgsky (or we the listeners) focussed outwards looking at the pictures from a distance with other people walking about. The piano focussed on the pictures and became Mussorgsky (or we the listeners) introspecting on our own reactions to the pictures. Scarlatti's 'mirror' became the last *Promenade* (the fifth promenade) and far from being a mere repetition, the final *Promenade* becomes the point where the piano and orchestra become more integrated. This integration of parts then leads readily into the second part of the binary structure, where the allocation of themes to piano and orchestra are now reversed (or 'mirrored' as is also the progression of themes). The reversal of roles of piano and orchestra becomes most stark in *With the Dead in a Dead Language* (a variation of the *Promenade* theme) where the solo piano plays a variation of the *Promenade* theme. The reversal suggests that our own 'journey' (or *Promenade*) can become the focus of our introspection.

Looking at the suite in this way, I became aware of the spiritual journey that Mussorgsky seemed to be portraying in *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Mussorgsky's journey takes us from a denial of our existential finitude (the first part of the suite, where Mussorgsky introspects on his deceased friend's paintings) towards a triumphant integration of the self in the second part of the suite. Mussorgsky also seems to suggest that his journey is of mythical—if not Christlike--proportions. We should not be surprised by this. Mussorgsky's *St John's Night on the Bare Mountain* (the piece Mussorgsky wrote before *Pictures at an Exhibition*), is concerned with a mythical theme and journey as it's program. After I finished my arrangement of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I was surprised to find that Rimsky Korsakov's memoirs indicated that Mussorgsky had possibly intended *St John's Night on the Bare Mountain* as a piece for piano and orchestra. It is an intriguing possibility that around the time Mussorgsky was composing *St John's Night on the Bare Mountain* and *Pictures at an Exhibition* Mussorgsky was considering the combination of piano and orchestra as a vehicle for these programs. However, regardless of our speculations about Mussorgsky's intended instrumentation, it is clear that Mussorgsky was thinking of music as myth for these compositions.

Shifting then to a programmatic point of view, the structure of *Pictures at an Exhibition* includes children arguing around a nanny in *Tuileries*, reminiscent of Christ's 'Come to me as children'. *Goldenberg and Schmuyle* is reminiscent of Christ's interactions with both wealth and poverty. The *Market* is reminiscent of the market place dominating the temple in Jerusalem. *Catacombs* and *With the Dead in a Dead Language* (Latin) clearly sets the tone of Roman times. *Baba Yaga* is representative of the confrontation with death on the cross and *Great Gate* then becomes like Christ's resurrection. In the *Great Gate* Mussorgsky reinforces the biblical theme by twice quoting the Russian Christian Orthodox hymn *As you are Baptised in Christ so you are Clothed in Christ* (in my arrangement I allocate this hymn to a choir gently accompanied by the piano). In fact Hartman's design for the *Great Gate* was an entry into a competition to celebrate the Russian Tsar's triumph in

surviving an assassination attempt (indeed a triumph over death). Hartman's design also seems to suggest how such a triumph occurs. The *Great Gate* was designed in the form of a large helmet—suggesting that we have to think our way out of despair over a finite life. In this respect, *Pictures at an Exhibition* seems to contain all the elements of a modern existential philosophy. Hardly a coincidence considering that the Existential movement was just beginning in Europe and Russia around the time Mussorgsky was composing his work.

I hope you enjoy listening to my arrangement and performance as much as I enjoyed studying, arranging and performing Mussorgsky's great work of art.

Some Notes about the Production of the Recording

I am often asked, 'Was that a "real" piano in your recording?'. 'Did you use a "synthesizer"?' 'Was the recording performed in "real" time?' I have actually not made an issue of how the music has been produced because it is not what I wanted to make the focus of my work. I did not particularly want to draw special attention to the work as a 'synthesized' performance, even though it is 'orchestral' in nature. However, for those interested in the production of the audio, here are a few notes about how the recording was produced.

All the instrument parts were performed 'live' (in real time) by myself on keyboards. Real-time performances still seem to be the best way to breath 'life' into a recording (but that may change with improved software technology in the future). The piano and orchestral parts were layered using overdubbing and synchronisation was visually cued (just as an orchestra uses a conductor), or with a metronome when required. I used two types of keyboard for the performances: a Kawai digital piano and an M-Audio midi keyboard controller. I selected a Kawai digital piano, because Kawai uses the same keys and mechanisms found on their acoustic grand pianos. So from a pianist's point of view, you are seeing and feeling the same interface that you find on a grand piano. The M-audio midi keyboard controller was used where extra continuous control parameters were required, such as control of vibrato, tremolo or other parameters.

Regarding the question, 'Was it a real piano?' I would answer 'yes'. That may seem like an unusual answer, but a number of professional musicians that I have discussed this with have actually been fascinated by my explanation. The piano was real, in that I performed the piano parts on an actual Kawai keyboard. The process involved a real-time performance of the various piano parts, with the parameters of the key-strokes and pedalling being accurately recorded by a computer. To generate the sound that you hear, I then ran the key-stroke and pedalling information through Cakewalk's *Sonar* software and used a software instrument called *Ivory* developed by *Synthogy*. *Ivory* uses recordings of a 'real' piano. A 'real' Steinway, was set up in a 'real' hall and every key on the piano was recorded, using the best studio gear available. Each note was recorded at 10 different velocity levels and multiple release points. So *Ivory* responds to a key press by selecting the recording that corresponds to the key and velocity with which the key was struck. When a key is released the 'real' recording of the release is also heard. I used this approach mainly because it enabled me to obtain superior control over the piano sound in the studio environment. Everyone who has listened to my recording (including leading professional musicians) has said to me that the piano sounds 'real', and then are surprised when I tell them how the sound was produced. In using this technique I sometimes felt like I was following in the footsteps of Glenn Gould (the famous Canadian pianist) who back in the 1960s through to 1980s experimented with tape splicing, and unusual studio configurations in his recordings of classical music. If he were alive today, and could see what we can do with modern technology I am sure it would take his breath away; and he might even possibly been more innovative than I have been.

Regarding the orchestral parts, I took a similar approach. I used the *Orchestral* software instrument produced by *Edirol*. *Orchestral* provides samples of various orchestral instruments with a range of articulations. So all the orchestral parts you hear are based on recordings of 'real' instruments. Admittedly, the orchestration software was more limited in its ability to express all the possible articulations of 'real' instruments. I started production of the CD back in 2005, and of course there are now superior orchestral packages available. Computers have also since moved on, and new technologies are available. Two such techniques include 'Physical Modelling' (the physical response of a musical instrument to the players inputs is computed in real-time) and 'Morphing'

(enabling continuous interpolation between multi dimensional sound samples). I am using newer technologies for my next project. In that respect the audio production involved in *Pictures at an Exhibition* represents the tip of the iceberg of what is possible in future classical music recordings.

**Review of George Galanis' Orchestration of
Pictures at an Exhibition
Privately-produced CD
Available from www.galanis.com.au**

George Galanis was born in Melbourne in 1959. He started playing the violin when he was four years old, and the piano when he was five, eventually studying piano and music theory with Joan Voumard, a leading Melbourne pianist and teacher at that time. Listening to Dr. Galanis' arrangement for piano, orchestra, chorus and organ proves to be a fascinating experience: It is quite unlike any other orchestration that I have heard. Despite the size of the forces, the full ensemble is not often used, nor is the piano, which often takes a solo role, found in every movement. From almost the beginning, there are surprises: witness the unearthly glissandi at the beginning of "Gnomus."

Galanis proves to be an accomplished and sensitive pianist, to the point that I would welcome a solo piano version by him. Even though his recording, in some sense, cannot be considered a "live" recording (see his notes above), I would never have guessed that the piano portions were not recorded directly from someone playing the actual instrument. The orchestra parts are also very well done (being played also in real time by the arranger), but are recognizably not actual instruments. They are, at least, good synthesized approximations thereof, and in a few places (e.g., the beginning of Promenade 4), could almost fool me into thinking "real instruments." Galanis has taken some liberties with the score, rewriting occasionally ("Il vecchio castello"), fading out (as in the end of "Bydlo"), the very fast tempo of the middle section of "Baba-Yaga," etc., but to these ears it's all done in good taste, and piques ones desire to hear a live performance of this work done with real instruments. "Ballet of Unhatched Chicks" will provide another surprise in the exceedingly fast trills in the piano. I have no idea how these were accomplished: They seem superhuman. If there is any part of this orchestration that I have the least bit of hesitation about, it is "Limoges," wherein the interplay between solo piano and orchestra seems a bit arbitrary.

Given the success of many of the new arrangements, and many conductors' willingness to move away from the ubiquitous Ravel, Dr. Galanis ought to have no great difficulty in finding some enterprising orchestra willing to take this on. In the meantime, this CD is well worth exploring by anyone who is jaded either with the Ravel orchestration, or even by the exceedingly numerous original piano versions, and I can recommend it without reservation.

Pictures website of this issue: Barry Douglas conducts the final two movements on YouTube. Well-paced, exciting presentation:

<http://video.aol.com/video-detail/mussorgskyravel-pictures-at-an-exhibition-closing/2382473593>

Review of Veronika Iltchenko on EMS V1001
Mussorgsky: *Pictures at an Exhibition*
Babadjanian: Six Pictures; 3 Pieces
Ustvolskaya: Piano Sonata no. 5
Available from Excellent Music Society, www.veronikapiano.com
Price: 16 euros, postpaid

Veronika Iltchenko, a young pianist previously unfamiliar to me, is a worthy new entrant on the concert stages of the world. She exhibits musicality of the highest order throughout this interesting recital, coupling one war horse with relatively unknown works by two very interesting composers. Iltchenko, born in Russia, settled in Brussels after her studies with such pianists as Rian de Waal, Daniel Pollack and Alexei Lubimov. She has made successful concert tours throughout Europe.

Arno Babadjanian's romantic idiom is tinged with the eastern flavors of his native Armenia. This is music of substance, despite the brevity of the pieces, and Iltchenko caresses these pieces as befitting the musical gems that they are. An opposite stylistic approach is demanded by the dense and pointillistic Ustvolskaya *Sonata*, and Iltchenko makes the most of this idiom as well.

Her rendition of *Pictures* is well-conceived and executed. There are numerous touches of pianistic inspiration in her rendition, such as the hesitation of the right hand over the left in parts of "Gnomus," the fine pacing of "Ballet of Chicks," the winding down at the end of "Samuel Goldenberg." The technical challenges, numerous in this work, pose no problems for her. If I have any quibbles, they would come in "Il vecchio castello," which seems matter of fact to me, and in "Limoges," which is just too careful. This is a common fault in "Limoges" among pianists, who often forget that what is being depicted is a bustling market-place and not a queue for the opera! Thus, the pace ought to be frenetic and irregular, as if one shopper is pushing ahead of the next in order to beat her to the bargains at a particular stall. Nevertheless, these defects are minor, given the brilliance of the performance as a whole, and I can recommend this version as well worth pursuing. The only thing I'm at a complete loss about is the photograph of the "flying saucer" on the cover of the CD.