Pianistic Mastery of Modest Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition: Developing Associative Thinking through Analysis of Musical Texture

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PIANISTIC MASTERY OF MODEST MUSSORGSKY’S PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION: DEVELOPING ASSOCIATIVE THINKING THROUGH ANALYSIS OF MUSICAL TEXTURE

By

Ana Cristea

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

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the requirements for the degree of
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This essay is a detailed analytical and performance guide for pianists who seek musical, technical, and interpretational recommendations and answers during the process of learning Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The author of this study analyzes the composer’s manner of depicting visual images through pianistic texture and provides possible solutions for the work’s technical and interpretive challenges. The learning approach presented in this essay advocates associative thinking and musical creativity in accordance with the original score, the composer’s initial sources of inspiration, and his biographical context.

This study is organized into five chapters, with the first three serving a prefatory purpose (I. Introduction, II. Literature Review, and III. Method). The fourth chapter presents an overview of Mussorgsky’s life and selected piano and vocal works. It underlines the most important factors and events that have contributed to the formation of the composer’s aesthetic beliefs. The final, fifth chapter is dedicated to the textural analysis of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, examining elements of structure, articulation, dynamics, and phrasing. In addition, this chapter includes a discussion on each movement’s performance aspect, providing interpretive suggestions throughout the piece, and potential solutions for some of the work’s most technically challenging excerpts. For
the purpose of clarity and ease of reference, this essay includes several musical examples and the six available illustrations of Hartmann’s paintings that correspond to selected movements from Mussorgsky’s suite.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES ..................................................................................v

LIST OF TABLES .....................................................................................................xi

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS....................................................................................xii

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION ...............................................................................................1
   Statement of Problem .........................................................................................3
   Need for Study ....................................................................................................4
   Purpose of Study ...............................................................................................5

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................................................7
   Modest Mussorgsky’s Life and Works ..............................................................7
   *Pictures at an Exhibition*: Background and Analysis ..................................14

3. METHOD .........................................................................................................20
   Section I. Modest Mussorgsky’s Life and Works ...........................................21
   Section II. *Pictures at an Exhibition*: Analysis of Pianistic Texture and
   Extra-Musical Content; Suggestions for Technical and Musical
   Challenges ......................................................................................................21

4. MUSSORGSKY’S LIFE AND WORKS ..........................................................24
   Childhood and Youth ......................................................................................24
   The Five ..........................................................................................................29
   Populism, Realism, and the Commune .........................................................31
   Artistic Credo ..................................................................................................33
   Piano Works ....................................................................................................35
   Vocal Works ....................................................................................................37
   *Boris Godunov* ............................................................................................41

5. *PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION*: TEXTURAL ANALYSIS AND
   PERFORMANCE MASTERY .............................................................................44
   Promenade ......................................................................................................56
   I. Gnomus ........................................................................................................61
   Promenade (II) .................................................................................................66
   II. Il Vecchio Castello ......................................................................................68
   Promenade (III) ...............................................................................................73
   III. Tuileries (Dispute d’enfants après jeux) ..................................................75
   IV. Bydlo ..........................................................................................................81
   Promenade (IV) ...............................................................................................85

   iii
V. Balet nevylupivshikhsya ptentsov (Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks) ...........87
VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuýle .................................................................94
Promenade (V) ........................................................................................................102
VII. Limoges. La marché (La grande nouvelle) ..................................................103
VIII. Catacombæ (Sepulcrum romanum) ..............................................................111
Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua ..............................................................................114
IX. The Hut on Fowl’s Legs (Baba-Yaga) ...........................................................119
X. The Great Gate of Kiev ....................................................................................130

CONCLUSION .........................................................................................................142

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................144
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 4.1. *Intermezzo in modo classico*, mm. 1-4………………………………………37

Example 4.2. *The Marriage*, Act I, Scene I, mm. 5-11………………………………………39

Example 5.1. *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. II Vecchio Castello, mm. 6-15………………48

Example 5.2a. *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade, mm. 3-4……………………………48

Example 5.2b. *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 64-72………48

Example 5.3. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 12-18……………49

Example 5.4. Mussorsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 8-14………49

Example 5.5. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I), mm. 9-16………50

Example 5.6. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm 37-38……….51

Example 5.7. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm 218-219……51

Example 5.8a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm 1-4…………………………………………………………52

Example 5.8b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Chicks Unhatched Chicks, mm 23-27………………………………………………52

Example 5.9. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 9-10…………………………………………………………52

Example 5.10. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Promenade, mm. 1-4……….53

Example 5.11. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. II Vecchio Castello, mm. 1-5……………………………………………………………………54

Example 5.12a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 1-2………………………………………………………54

Example 5.12b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 9-10……………………………………………………54

Example 5.13. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 3-4……….55

Example 5.15. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (II), mm. 1-4……….57

Example 5.16. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I), mm. 3-4…….58

Example 5.17. Mussorgsky, *Boris Godunov*: Prologue, Glory, rehearsal 28……………..58

Example 5.18a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I)……………….59

Example 5.18b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I)……………….59


Example 5.20. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 1-11………….62

Example 5.21. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 19-24…………..63

Example 5.22. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 38-44………..63

Example 5.23. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 60-71………….64

Example 5.24. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 78-82………….64

Example 5.25a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 17…………….65

Example 5.25b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 60…………….65

Example 5.26. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 93-98………….66

Example 5.27a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (II), mm. 11-12…..67

Example 5.27b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 1-3……………………………………………………………………………67

Example 5.28. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (II), mm. 9-12…….68

Example 5.29a. Mussorgsky, *Songs and Dances of Death*, II. Serenade, mm. 34-38…..70
Example 5.29b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 26-36

Example 5.30. Mussorgsky, *Songs and Dances of Death*, II. Serenade, mm. 95-99

Example 5.31a. Mussorgsky, *Songs and Dances of Death*, II. Serenade, mm. 106-111

Example 31b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 100-107

Example 5.32. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (III), mm. 3-8


Example 5.34. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, III. Tuileries, “The Nanny” motif, mm. 14-23

Example 5.35. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, III. Tuileries, mm. 1–3

Example 5.36. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, III. Tuileries, mm. 6, 8, 20

Example 5.37. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydło, mm. 1.5

Example 5.38. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydło, mm. 35-38

Example 5.39a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydło, mm. 5-6

Example 5.39b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydło, mm. 42-43

Example 5.40a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (IV), mm. 1-2

Example 5.40b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (IV), mm. 3-4

Example 5.41. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (IV), mm. 5-6

Example 5.42. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (IV), mm. 8-10

Example 5.43. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 1-4

Example 5.44. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 5-8
Example 5.45. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 23-30

Example 5.46. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 31-38

Example 5.47. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 2

Example 5.48. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 1-2

Example 5.49. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 9-10

Example 5.50. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 15-16

Example 5.51. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 22-25

Example 5.52. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 9

Example 5.53. Mussorgsky, *Promenade (V)*, mm. 1-2

Example 5.54. Mussorgsky, *Promenade (V)*, mm. 10, 13

Example 5.55. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 3-4

Example 5.56. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 7-8

Example 5.57. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 13-18

Example 5.58. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 25-26

Example 5.59. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 36

Example 5.60. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 25-26

Example 5.61. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VIII. Catacombae. (Sepulcrum romanum), mm. 1-3; 11-13; 23-25

Example 5.62. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VIII. Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum), mm. 1-3
Example 5.63. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VIII. Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum), mm. 23-30

Example 5.64. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition, Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua*, mm. 1-3

Example 5.65. Mussorgsky, *Night on Bald Mountain*, piano arrangement by Konstantin Chernov, mm. 346-350

Example 5.66. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 41-47

Example 5.67. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 67-63

Example 5.68. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 15-24

Example 5.69. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 41-47

Example 5.70. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 95-98

Example 5.71. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 108-109

Example 5.72. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 117-122

Example 5.73. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 42-43; 51-52

Example 5.74. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 61-73

Example 5.75. Isidor Philipp, *Studies in Octaves after J.S. Bach*, Study No. 6, in A minor, mm. 1-2

Example 5.76a. Hanon, *The Virtuoso Pianist*, Exercise 51, Preparatory exercise for scales in octaves

Example 5.76b. Hanon, *The Virtuoso Pianist*, Exercise 57, Broken arpeggios in octaves

Example 5.77. Alberto Jonás, *Master School of Piano Playing and Virtuosity*, Book V. *Master School of Staccato, Octaves and Chords*, Triads

Example 5.78. Mussorgsky, *Boris Godunov* (piano reduction by K. Chernov), Prologue, Scene II, mm. 1-7
Example 5.79. Mussorgsky, *Khovanshchina* (piano reduction by K. Chernov), Prelude, mm. 38-44

Example 5.80. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 81-89

Example 5.81. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 1-6

Example 5.82. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 30-34

Example 5.83. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 81-89

Example 5.84. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 97-104

Example 5.85. Russian Orthodox hymn “As you are baptized in Christ”

Example 5.86. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 159-174

Example 5.87. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 64-65; 114-115; 162-164

Example 5.88. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 98-99

Example 5.89. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 114-119
LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, formal structure........................................................................................................69

Table 5.2. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, III. Tuileries, formal structure........77

Table 5.3. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydło, formal structure.........83

Table 5.4. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, formal structure.........................................................................................88

Table 5.5. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, formal structure.........................................................................................95

Table 5.6. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, formal structure......105

Table 5.7. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, formal structure….120

Table 5.8. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, formal structure........................................................................................................133
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 5.1. Victor Hartmann, drawing of a Christmas tree nutcracker…………….61
Illustration 5.2. Victor Hartmann, Canary Chicks in their Shells, a costume sketch for
   Gerber’s ballet Trilbi……………………………………………………………87
Illustration 5.3a. Victor Hartmann, A Rich Jew in a Fur Hat. Pencil, sepia, lacquer……94
Illustration 5.3b. Victor Hartmann, A Poor Jew. Pencil, watercolor…………………..94
Illustration 5.4. Victor Hartmann, Paris Catacombs. Watercolor………………………111
Illustration 5.5. Victor Hartmann, Baba-Yaga’s Hut on Hen’s Legs. Sketch for a clock in
   Russian style. Pencil…………………………………………………………119
Illustration 5.6. Victor Hartmann, Design for Kiev City Gate: Main Façade. Pencil,
   watercolor…………………………………………………………………………….130
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Music and painting developed a truly synergetic relationship at the turn of the nineteenth century. Musicians, such as Saint-Saëns, Debussy and Ravel, and painters—Monet, Gauguin and Van Gogh, enriched and remodeled their art through mutual exchange, culminating in the twentieth century evolution of abstract art, and creation of musical works directly inspired by paintings or visual elements.¹

The musical-artistic contact in European piano music was brought about in the nineteenth century, a time when the piano’s technical possibilities were expanded to its full potential, and the number of virtuoso performers and teachers were virtually scattered throughout the continent.² Romantic composers expressed non-musical events and extra-musical meanings through programmatic works, which were usually laid out as collections of miniature pieces with descriptive titles.³ Among the most illustrious piano works of such genre are Robert Schumann’s Carnaval, Op. 9, Kreisleriana, Op. 16, and Franz Liszt’s Années de Pèlerinage, and Mephisto Waltz.

In the late nineteenth century, a reaction against the Romantic excess of emotion initiated the Impressionist movement, which was developed in France concomitantly in the visual arts and music. Compared to composers from the Romantic Era, Impressionist composers focused on the power of suggestion and atmosphere rather than expression of


³ Ibid, 198.
strong emotion and/or depiction of a story.\textsuperscript{4} The composers most strongly associated with this movement were Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy (although Debussy rejected the attribution of the term).\textsuperscript{5} Debussy’s \textit{L’Isle joyeuse} and \textit{Preludes}, and Ravel’s \textit{Ondine}, \textit{Jeux d’eau} and \textit{Mirroirs}, are among the most representative Impressionist piano works that reflect visually inspired subjects.

One of the innovative figures in the world’s music scene of the nineteenth century, whose unique musical language reflected features of both Romanticism and Impressionism, was Russian composer Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky. His piano suite \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition} is one of the brightest examples of representation of painting in music. The work was inspired by an exhibition held in memory of the composer’s close friend, painter and architect Victor Hartmann, who had suddenly died at a young age. Vladimir Stasov, a highly regarded critic who brought the two artists together, reflected on Mussorgsky’s sorrow:

\begin{quote}
“Mussorgsky, who loved Hartmann passionately and was deeply moved by his death, planned to ‘draw in music’ the best pictures of his deceased friend, representing himself as he strolled through the exhibition, joyfully or sadly recalling the highly talented deceased artist (Promenade).”\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{6} Michael Russ, \textit{Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 16.
As stated by Michael Russ, the work not only depicts Hartmann’s paintings through musical means, but also brings them to life, “creating little scenes out of them, which, in turn, may carry messages about Russian culture and society.” Mussorgsky uses the illustrations as initial ideas, imbuing them with his artistic individuality, and his characteristics as a populist and realist. The work encompasses a deeper psychological layer filtered through the composer’s inner experiences and his emotional journey through the exhibition.

Statement of the Problem

Although *Pictures at an Exhibition* is now regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces in the piano repertoire, it was long after the composer’s death that it received international acclaim. At the time of its composition, performers rejected the work because of its apparent lack of bombastic pianistic virtuosity. It was considered as non-pianistic, not suitable for concert audiences.

Nowadays, *Pictures* is part of the standard piano repertoire, with many great recorded performances by the likes of Sviatoslav Richter, Maria Yudina, and Vladimir Horowitz. However, some interpreters’ perception of *Pictures* is often colored by the preconception that the work is too difficult technically and musically because of its non-pianistic writing. This preconception stems partly from falsely attributing the work’s difficulty to purely technical matters while undervaluing the possibility of technical solutions arising from a coherent musical interpretation. The suite’s musical subtleties

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7 Russ, preface to *Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition*, x.

that are often conveyed through simple and unembellished means, often lacking extensive developments and grandiose climaxes, are at times misinterpreted and underappreciated.

In Calvocoressi’s writings, Mussorgsky’s work has been criticized as being “less interesting than might have been expected.”⁹ *Pictures* in its original form is described as “rather characterless,” with no features that invite special comments.¹⁰ As stated by Sheveloff, recent writers continue to see *Pictures* as “unsympathetic for the piano, as a torso requiring orchestral clothes,” attacking the form of the whole and of the individual movements of the suite as “contorted, unrealized and unsatisfactory.”¹¹ Despite the latter, for over a century, *Pictures* has been performed by some of the greatest pianists of all time, and transcribed by numerous composers up to this day, including the masterful rendition by Maurice Ravel. After all, as stated by Russ, “it must be the strengths of the composition rather than its weakness […] which have attracted others to refashion it.”¹²

**Need for Study**

Although a vast body of literature has been written on the subject, analysis of sound imagery, pianistic texture, and technical challenges have been presented as separate entities. The aim of this study is to use extra-musical content as an aid to the process of technical and interpretive mastery. As a help for young performers toward achieving performance finesse, this essay provides analysis and discussion of sound

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¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sheveloff, 276.

¹² Russ, 86.
imagery through pianistic texture, the composer’s main means of expression, and the
technical challenges encountered throughout the suite. In addition, this study offers
interpretative options of the composer’s artistic intentions within each movement, and
addresses the technical and musical obstacles within the work from a performer’s
perspective. From a pedagogical point of view, this study is intended to serve as an
example for achieving musical and technical mastery through associative thinking and
textural interpretation for novice teachers.

As famous pianist and conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy stated regarding *Pictures*—
a work highly admired by him—the Russian mind is “suspicious,” in constant search of
deeper meanings that are beneath the surface. In order to fully understand and correctly
interpret the underlying concept of the work, it is important to explore and assimilate the
composer’s background, social context, his individuality as a person as well as an artist,
and his compositional principles in general. As a contribution to the latter, this study
provides information concerning the composer’s biographical events, the main elements
that influenced his artistic personality, and a description of the depictive quality of sound
in his piano (other than *Pictures at an Exhibition*) and vocal works.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to decipher the extra-musical content in Modest
Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*; analyze the manner in which the composer has
depicted visual effects through pianistic texture; and provide solutions for technical and
musical challenges that may be encountered throughout the work. In addition to
facilitating a pianist’s learning process of *Pictures at an Exhibition* from a technical

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13 Russ, preface to *Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition*, ix-x.
perspective, the proposed analysis intends to aid the performer’s interpretive choices by advocating associative thinking and musical creativity in accordance with the original score, the composer’s initial sources of inspiration, and biographical context.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

A vast body of literature including books, dissertation and scholarly articles, has been dedicated to Modest Mussorgsky’s life and works. The sources discussed in this chapter present the most important materials relevant to the composer’s biography, compositional style, and analysis of his suite for piano *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The literature review is organized in accordance with the two-part structure of the essay: I. Modest Mussorgsky’s life and selected works; and II. Analysis of texture and extra-musical content in *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The first section presents contextual background in anticipation for the second one, which comprises the larger part of the essay and intends to directly address the purpose of this study mentioned in Chapter I.

The factual and part of the analytical information presented in this essay is drawn from, but not limited to, the sources discussed in this chapter. The proposed solutions for the work’s technical challenges are based on the author’s own learning and performance experiences of the piece.

Modest Mussorgsky’s Life and Works

The current research makes references to three of the most extensive and valued biographical studies written in English to date on Mussorgsky by authors David Brown,14

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Oskar Von Riesemann,\textsuperscript{15} and Caryl Emerson.\textsuperscript{16} In addition, of invaluable importance for understanding and describing the composer’s personality and social context, are the three collections of letters and documents edited, translated and compiled by music scholars Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson,\textsuperscript{17} and by Alexandra Orlova.\textsuperscript{18, 19}

David Brown’s study of Mussorgsky’s life and works, published in 2002, is the first and most significant work to appear in English since M. D. Calvocoressi’s \textit{Modest Mussorgsky} (London, 1956). It is also the largest published research of such kind to have emerged outside of Russia. In the preface to the book, Brown states that his study represents a fresh and “straightforward biographical-and-critical narrative that can serve as an introduction to a composer whom he or she may be investigating in detail for the first time.”\textsuperscript{20} This extensive and comprehensive book of almost 400 pages, covers the most important and authoritative biographical facts of the composer’s life and career, and provides a discussion and analysis in separate designated chapters of some of Mussorgsky’s most representative works such as: \textit{St. John’s Night on the Bare Mountain}, \textit{Boris Godunov}, \textit{The Nursery}, \textit{Khovanshchina}, \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition}, \textit{Sunless}, and \textit{Songs and Dances of Death}. In addition to examining Mussorgsky’s works from a


\textsuperscript{16} Caryl Emerson, \textit{The Life of Mussorgsky} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{17} Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson, \textit{The Mussorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste Petrovich Mussorgsky in Letters and Documents} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1947).


\textsuperscript{19} Brown, preface to \textit{Mussorgsky: His Life and Works}, x.
technical and musical perspective, and highlighting the composer’s unique gift for conveying extra musical content through music, Brown succeeds in illustrating a clear and an in-depth portrait of the composer’s life, his individuality as a person and an artist.

An editorial review, published in the *New York Times*, writes about Oskar Von Riesemann’s *Mussorgsky*: “This very competent volume will be indispensable to all those who have felt the magic of Moussorgsky’s genius and wish to penetrate a little further into the recesses of his music. To others the book will prove a fascinating introduction to one of the giants of musical history.”

Originally written in German by Riesseman, this book was first published in 1929 as the second of the three volumes of monographs, entitled “Monographien zur Russischen Musik” (German: “Monographs on Russian Music”). Translated into English by Paul England, this extensive volume is another in-depth study of the composer’s life and works that uses as references the rarest publications on the subject written in Russian and a great number of exclusive manuscripts obtained directly from successors of Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, and Stasov.

Compared to Brown’s approach which presents concomitant elements of biography, musical and technical analysis, Riessemann’s study places greater emphasis on the biographical component, as an imperative factor for understanding and interpreting the composer’s works. This book is of particular importance for the current study, since it elucidates Mussorgsky’s life through the lens of his inner world and thus highlighting his emotional experiences, features of his character, attitudes and personal opinions.

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In contrast to the two previously described biographical studies, Caryl Emerson’s *The Life of Mussorgsky* represents a concise account of the composer’s life events with particular focus on the psychological, social and economic elements that influenced his successes and downfalls. In her book, Emerson—a passionate scholar and Professor of Russian Language and Literature—attempts to decipher the meaning of Mussorgsky’s much quoted phrase “art is a means for conversing with people.”22 The author examines the composer’s life in the social context and his interactions with society. His artistic credo is explored by Emerson through discussion of his letter-writing, his artistic bonding with other musicians, poets and artists, and his preference of musical style and genres. In addition to being a valuable source of biographical information, of particular interest for the current study is the last chapter “Musical Postlude: Appraising the Artistic Product,” by David Geppert. This chapter presents a concluding review of Mussorgsky’s compositional style, his artistic choices, and an engaging discussion on critical and conflicting opinions by other scholars.

There is a surprising wealth of preserved letters and documents surrounding Mussorgsky’s life. Fortunately, many of them have been translated into English and made available by musicologists and researchers in the field. These documents are invaluable to the present research, since they illustrate the composer’s most truthful mental portrait and reveal another dimension of Mussorgsky’s complex personality, which is often flattened by the familiar biographical sources.23

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22 Emerson, preface to *The Life of Mussorgsky*, xx.

23 Leyda and Bertensson, ix.
The Mussorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste Petrovich Mussorgsky in Letters and Documents, edited and translated by film historian Jay Leyda and music scholar Sergei Bertensson, is a compilation of documents and letters related to Mussorgsky’s life and compositional activity. The contained documents are arranged in chronological order and are drawn from their original sources, which include letters and reviews written to and by the composer himself, his family members, as well as his colleagues, friends and acquaintances (Balakirev, Cui, Stasov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Tchaikovsky, etc.).

Although Mussorgsky’s letters are made available for the English readers in other sources, many of them avoid translating the composer’s difficult and sometimes unsuitable choice of wording. The authors’ goal in this collection is to translate and address these documents in a maximally accurate manner by presenting them in English as close as possible to their Russian equivalents. At times, this means sacrificing smoothness and neatness for the purpose of preserving the general atmosphere conveyed by the originals. The letters dating around 1874 will be of special value for the current study as they offer contextual background and the composer’s personal insights during the writing of Pictures at an Exhibition.

Similar to Leyda and Bertensson’s chronicle, but covering an even greater body of primary sources, is Mussorgsky’s Days and Works: A Biography in Documents by Alexandra Orlova, translated by Roy J. Guenther. This is a newer collection of chronologically organized documentary accounts of Mussorgsky’s biography based on carefully attested primary sources. This thorough volume of close to 700 pages consists of carefully assembled materials such as: Mussorgsky’s manuscripts and works published in his lifetime; his letters including the most recently discovered; various documents
concerning the composer’s life and activities; letters, diaries and reminiscences, both published and unpublished, of Mussorgsky’s contemporaries; newspapers and journal articles and notices containing reviews of Mussorgsky’s compositions and of his concert performances.24

While following the same goal of exploring and discovering Mussorgsky’s personality as a creator and as a human being as by other researches of such kind, this book is particularly appealing through its careful consideration of all published materials in Russian to the date of publication about Mussorgsky. Chronicles and published monographs starting with the period immediately following the composer’s death were studied and critically assessed, creating an ultimate collection which encompasses a scope of views sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of Mussorgsky’s complex life and personality.

Another book that is a resourceful tool for finding the historical truth surrounding Mussorgsky’s life is Alexandra Orlova’s Mussorgsky Remembered—a collection of published memoirs from contemporary witnesses and their successors. The volume encompasses reminiscences and testimonies about Mussorgsky by thirty-six personalities associated with the composer: from Nikolai Kompaneiskii, Aleksandr Borodin, Vladimir Stasov and Milii Balakirev, to Nikolai Tcherepnin, Il’ia Repin, Liudmila Shestakova, and others. For the purpose of ease of access and discussion, the collection is classified into four general categories: memoirs that are verifiable as authentic and essentially objective; those that are authentic but biased; those written by persons who did not witness

everything they are reporting; and those by persons who were not themselves acquainted with Mussorgsky and who are reporting secondhand information.²⁵

Although the nature of these memoirs is often subjective, some of them do, quite convincingly, recreate the psychological atmosphere surrounding Mussorgsky’s life and give conclusive descriptions of the composer’s character and artistic skills. Information of great importance and that is most relevant to the current research is found in the reminiscences witnessed by Nikolai Kompaneiskii—a younger composer, singer and music critic who was educated in the same Cadet School of the Imperial Guards as Mussorgsky. Kompaneiskii writes:

“Mussorgsky was a first-class pianist; he was scarcely inferior to Rubinstein, especially when interpreting the essence of a composer’s music […] I think it is quite important to stress that Mussorgsky, most likely, never knew precisely what his compositions sounded like. He played them from memory, with slight changes each time. Thus, when he performed them, his rendering never followed the written score. I also think when somebody was singing and he was the accompanist, as he always was, he did not really hear the singer’s performance.”²⁶

Kompaneiskii’s recollections reveal a general idea about Mussorgsky’s skills as a pianist, his artistic intentions and flexibility when it comes to performance of his works and his opinion on the role of the piano within his vocal works. The latter will serve as one of the fundamental ideas underlying the second and third sections of the present study.

²⁵ Orlova, preface to Mussorgsky Remembered, x.

²⁶ Ibid, 4.
Pictures at an Exhibition: Background and Analysis

Pictures at an Exhibition has been a popular and controversial subject for discussion and analysis for over a century in reviews and scholarly writings by Stasov, Taneev, Rimskii-Korsakov, Calvocoressi, Von Riesemann and others. The younger generation of musicians, including pianists, composers, and other instrumentalists, have approached this work from various perspectives in articles, essays, theses, dissertations, and lecture recitals. Within this section of the current research, for the purpose of reference and comparison of contrasting perspectives, five fairly recent primary sources will be reviewed. Two of them are written by students as part of their academic requirement: a DMA essay by pianist Chen-Tien Lee, and a scholarly document written by violinist Meredith Laing. The remaining three sources are authored by distinguished scholars in the field: the previously mentioned esteemed musicologist and lecturer David Brown, an award-winning researcher Michael Russ, and eminent musicologist, Joel Sheveloff.

Chen-Tien Lee’s DMA essay aims to achieve a twofold goal: first, to provide analysis of the suite; and second, to address the technical challenges within the work and

27 Chen-Tien Lee, “Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition: An Analytical and Performance Study” (DMA essay, Ohio State University, 1993).

28 Meredith Laing, “More than Pictures: The Emotional Journey of Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition” (Honors Program Capstone Projects, Syracuse University, 2007).


supply possible solutions. The essay is organized into four chapters which discuss the following subjects: Mussorgsky and Hartmann’s background and significance as artists; compositional background of *Pictures at an Exhibition*; structural, harmonic, melodic and rhythmic analysis of the suite; and technical problems encountered by the author of the essay and problem-solving suggestions.

Generally, Lee’s work remains focused and concise, making relevant references to valuable sources and introducing several useful tables and diagrams that outline the formal and harmonic structure of the piece. It is certain that Lee’s essay will be a useful resource for the uninformed reader and many technical suggestions proposed in the last section would benefit many average pianists. Although this research seems to touch upon a great variety of aspects necessary for the process of learning *Pictures*, it provides limited information on each facet of the piece. Overall, the essay is extremely technical, lacking discussion on artistic interpretation and the composer’s aesthetic intentions within the piece.

In direct contrast to Lee’s study is Meredith Laing’s essay entitled “More than Pictures: The Emotional Journey of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*.” The paper compares three performances of *Pictures at an Exhibition* by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Syracuse University Symphony Orchestra, and Vladimir Horowitz. Based on the author’s own interpretation of the piece as “not only the musical depiction of pictures viewed at an exhibition but also as an emotional journey by Mussorgsky himself,”32 she provides an in-depth analysis of the three performances, determining the

32 Laing, abstract to “More than Pictures: The Emotional Journey of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*.”
positive and negative aspects in the interpretive choices. In addition to providing reviews on performances, the author concomitantly examines the depiction of Hartmann’s paintings and Mussorgsky’s expression of emotions within each movement. In essence, this essay takes a metaphorical perspective in an attempt to decipher Mussorgsky’s extra-musical message sent through the means of this piece.

Although the performance review aspect of this essay is generally irrelevant to the current study, an applicable idea is found in Laing’s motivation to find the essence in each movement that goes beyond the depiction of Hartmann’s drawings. This essence is, in Laing’s opinion, “the emotional journey which Mussorgsky illustrates along with the drawings.”\textsuperscript{33}

An overview and analysis of extra-musical content in \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition} is also provided in the thirteenth chapter of Brown’s previously discussed study of Mussorgsky’s life and works. The author discusses the piece within a biographical context, additionally referring to formal structure, extra-musical content, and comparison to other works by Mussorgsky. While the source’s metaphorically descriptive and informative sections can be useful for the interpretive-inspirational purposes of the current study, it lacks discussion and analysis of texture from a pianistic standpoint.

Published in 1992, \textit{Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition} by Michael Russ, today’s foremost scholar of the masterpiece, is a concise and comprehensive collection of historical, cultural, technical and critical information surrounding Mussorgsky’s piano suite. The book is very accessible through its clear content and compact layout. Within

\textsuperscript{33} Laing, abstract to “More than Pictures: The Emotional Journey of Mussorgsky’s \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition}.”
only eighty-six pages the author seems to touch upon every possible question one might ask regarding the work.

Each of the eight containing chapters addresses the piece from a different angle. The first chapter places the work within the context of Russian cultural life, and discusses the concepts of nationalism, populism and realism as central influences that define the work. Chapter two discusses the relationship between Mussorgsky and Hartmann, the architect’s stylistic characteristics, and a description of the actual pictures that inspired Mussorgsky’s work. The third chapter presents historical background on the work’s manuscript, publication, and description of performances by Horowitz, Moiseiwitsch and Ashkenazy. Chapter four is a brief structural and harmonic overview of individual movements and of the suite as a whole. The fifth chapter is a synopsis of individual movements where the author provides explanation of the titles, remarks and metronome markings by Stasov and Rimsky-Korsakov, and a brief discussion on the movements’ corresponding sketches. Chapter six explores the musical language of *Pictures*. The author discusses the various elements that influenced the main style of the piece: Russian folk, church music and bell sound. In addition, the author describes the role of the variation process within the structure of the piece. Chapter seven is a detailed analysis of the piece which addresses harmony, scales, tonality, and voice-leading. The author explores the varied compositional techniques employed by Mussorgsky, from a tonal and atonal perspective. The final chapter of the book is a description of the work’s orchestrations and transcriptions. Special emphasis is placed on Rave’s transcription of *Pictures*. 
Although some chapters in Russ’ study may be viewed as too succinct, in need of more elaboration and deeper understanding, the book is, unquestionably, a significant source of information and a must-read for every interested performer. For the current study, the book will be used as informative reference drawn specifically from chapters one, two, five and six.

The final and most compelling analytical and critical account on *Pictures at an Exhibition* is Joel Sheveloff’s engaging essay published as the ninth chapter in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music: Essays in Performance and Analysis*. Sheveloff presents an ardent argument against the mass of “insensitive judgment” that the piece has been subjected to, advocating *Pictures* as “the finest epic-scale solo piano work to come from the second half of the unwieldy Romantic century.”

This essay comes as an attempt to “repair the long-standing damage” caused to *Pictures* as a piano work by reassessing the greatest omissions and faults in some of the published evaluations and editions of the work. The latter materials, in Sheveloff’s opinion, “transmit short-sighted aesthetic judgments that contribute to the unending denigration of Mussorgsky’s achievement.”

The major subjects that face piercing criticism in Sheveloff’s article are Michael Russ’ book, which he calls “most often superficial;” the metronome markings assigned by Rimskii/Stasov that act against the Russian Romantic piano work, which is naturally prone to *rubato*; Harold Bauer’s “most profligate” recomposition of the Great Gate of Kiev in the 1922 Shirmer Edition; and the large number of performers that are

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34 Sheveloff, 276.

influenced by Ravel’s orchestration in their interpretation of the piece, which Sheveloff calls “an intimidating situation.”36

Although the author of the current research would not be as categorical in some of the criticism presented in Sheveloff’s essay, his study is one of the most relevant to the present investigation. The reason is in that his argument is presented from a pianistic perspective for advanced or virtuoso pianists, critics, aestheticians and musicologists. One might consider Sheveloff’s study as too harsh and at times too subjective, but in reality, his argument is quite revealing and eye-opening, uncovering an entirely new dimension of Mussorgsky’s monumental work. Shefeloff’s work will be widely considered in the current study.

36 Sheveloff, 278-280.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This study intends to decipher the extra-musical content in Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*; analyze the manner in which the composer has depicted visual images through pianistic texture; and provide solutions for the technical and musical challenges that may be encountered throughout the suite. In addition to facilitating a pianist’s learning process of *Pictures at an Exhibition* from a technical perspective, the proposed analysis intends to aid the performer’s interpretive choices by advocating associative thinking and musical creativity in accordance with the original score, the composer’s initial sources of inspiration, and his biographical context.

The current study is organized into two main sections. The first one aims to present background material in preparation to the subsequent section, which is concerned exclusively with addressing the purpose of study outlined in chapter one. The information contained in the first section focuses on Mussorgsky’s life and works. It underlines the most important facts surrounding the composer’s life and career, the major influences on the formation of his compositional style, and the unique features that set him apart as one of the brightest and innovative composers of the nineteenth-century. Section two concentrates exclusively on analyzing the techniques of musical expression and pianistic mastery within Mussorgsky’s piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In addition to providing background information on the work, this section presents an extensive analysis of texture, a decoding of sound imagery and extra-musical content, and identification of technical and musical challenges within each movement. As previously mentioned, facts related to Mussorgsky’s life and works, and some analytical views
presented in this study are drawn from, but not limited to the sources discussed in chapter two. The proposed solutions for the work’s technical challenges are based on the author’s own learning and performance experiences of the piece, using all of the above information.

**Section I. Modest Mussorgsky’s Life and Works**

This section presents a biographical overview that aims to highlight the following matters: Russian folklore as a direct influence on the development of Mussorgsky’s unique compositional style; his first compositional experiences under the guidance of Mily Balakirev; the young composer’s formation of democratic views and his experiences as a member of the “Mighty Five;” the influence of Populism and Realism on Mussorgsky’s compositional style; an overview of the first depictive features in selected works for piano other than *Pictures*, his song cycles *The Nursery*, *Sunless*, and *Songs and Dances of Death*; and the implementation of democratic beliefs in *Boris Godunov*.

**Section II. Pictures at an Exhibition: Analysis of Pianistic Texture and Extra-Musical Content; Suggestions for Technical and Musical Challenges**

Being exclusively dedicated to the investigation of Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the second and largest section of the essay constitutes the focus of this study. It implicates a two-fold goal: to present a thorough analysis of the techniques of musical expression through pianistic texture and its underlying extra-musical content; and propose possible solutions for the technical and musical challenges that may be found throughout the piece.

Following a brief introductory section on the work’s background, the actual analysis of *Pictures* embodies two perspectives: description of musical content, and
identification of technical challenges. The former approach is devoted to the interpretation of Hartmann’s paintings and the elements that go beyond the visual illustrations. It refers to the composer’s own emotional journey through the “exhibition,” and the characteristics of his compositional style that are derived from his Russian-Nationalist beliefs. The technical perspective encompasses an analysis of texture characteristics within each movement (e.g. chordal, scalar, in unison, recitative-like, etc.), identification of potential technical problems and suggestion for possible solutions. The discussed pianistic aspect refers to issues such as: fingering, dynamics, phrasing, articulation, and timbre and color production.

Within the analysis described above, the author also brings out various characteristic features of the piece, such as: originality of form; use of a Refrain—the “Promenades” (the first of its kind within the pianistic repertoire); and juxtaposition of contrasting characters, timbres, and harmonies. In addition, in order to highlight the influence of selected vocal and operatic works on the creation of *Pictures*, the author draws parallels between some of the movements within the suite and his earlier vocal compositions by presenting and discussing inter-related musical excerpts (e.g. *Pictures at an Exhibition*, “Promenade” and “The Great Gate of Kiev” versus *Boris Godunov*, “The Coronation Scene”).

Throughout this chapter, for the purpose of clarity and ease of reference, several musical examples are inserted. Also, the available illustrations of Hartmann’s paintings—“Gnomus,” “The Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks,” “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle,” “Catacombae,” “Baba-Yaga,” and “The Great Gate of Kiev”—are drawn from
Nagachevskaya’s study (2009)\textsuperscript{37} and presented at the beginning of each movement’s analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUSSORGSKY’S LIFE AND WORKS

Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky is recognized as one of the greatest Russian composers in the history of music, not only for his masterful depiction of Russian life through music, but also for being a brave innovator, whose music was far ahead of its time. Throughout his entire life, Mussorgsky was in constant search for new elements in his music. The composer’s unique personality, together with his deep interest and affection for Russian peasant life, traditions, folk songs, and popular tales defined his artistic credo and paved the path for his entire compositional career.

Childhood and Youth

Mussorgsky was born on March 9, 1839, in Kraevo, Pskov province. His father, Pyotr Alexeyevich Musirskoy, and mother, Yulia Ivanovna Chirikova, were descendants of an ancient gentry family. Until the age of ten, Mussorgsky lived with his parents in Pskov. This was the period when the young composer first developed an affinity for Russian nature, life, and traditions. His parents’ country estate was surrounded by a picturesque landscape: “green fields sown with flax and dotted with birch coppices, pine forests, and countless little lakes with low, flat shores.” As a child, he played with the boys and girls from the neighboring villages, from whom he acquired a deeper insight of the customary Russian peasant life. Like most children in upper class families, Mussorgsky had a Nanny, or a Nyanya (In Russian: “Няня”). The elderly peasant woman

38 Emerson, 1.

would often tell young Modest old Russian fairytales, which remained engrained in his mind for the rest of his life, later to be reflected in his compositions.

From an early age, Mussorgsky showed exceptional aptitudes for music. The composer’s only account of his childhood, found in the opening paragraph of his autobiography, *Musiklexicon*, revealed his first steps into the music world:

“Son of an ancient Russian family. Under the direct influence of his nurse, he became familiar with Russian fairy tales. The acquaintance with the spirit of folk-life was the main impulse of musical improvisations before he had learned even the rudimentary rules of piano-playing. His mother gave him his first piano lessons and he made such progress that at the age of seven he was playing small pieces by Liszt, and at nine played a grand concerto by Field before a large audience at his parents’ house. His father, who worshipped music, decided to develop the child’s ability – and entrusted his further musical education to An. Herke in St. Petersburg.”

In 1849, Mussorgsky and his family moved to St. Petersburg, where he spent almost his entire life. There, he began his formal education at the German school of St. Peter-and-St. Paul. Throughout the years of studies, young Modest was an exemplary and enthusiastic student, showing great interest in philosophy, history, and foreign languages. But most of all, he was successful in music. Mussorgsky began his musical training with the well-known Professor Anton Herke, with whom he continued taking piano lessons even after joining the School of Guards’ Ensigns in 1852. Mussorgsky’s contemporary, Nikolai Kompaneisky, recalled the composer’s experiences under Herke’s tutelage:

“Herke introduced the young Russian virtuoso to German piano literature exclusively. The virtuoso loved to improvise, guided only by his ear and his imagination, without the slightest idea of how to put down his thoughts on paper.

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40 Leyda and Bertensson, 416-417.

41 Zetlin, 91.
or of the most elementary rules of music. In the School of Guards Ensigns the young pianist was always compelled to bang out dances endlessly to humor the cadets, varying his repertoire with his own improvisations.”

By the time he graduated and was posted to the Preobrazhensky Foot Guards, the young composer had already written his first piano piece, Porte-Enseigne Polka (from French: Ensign Polka), proudly published by his father.43

Two years after being appointed to the prestigious Preobrazhensky Imperial Guard, Mussorgsky resigned the military position and decided to dedicate his entire life to music. Modest was seventeen years old when he was first introduced to Alexander Dargomyzhsky’s salon—an event that had a major impact on his future development as a musician, and which gave him the first insight into the genuine musical culture.

At the time, Dargomyzhsky was considered the most important musical personality of the older generation in St. Petersburg.44 His house hosted musical soirées on Mondays and Thursdays, where a small circle of music lovers spent their time performing Russian music “simply and sensibly, without fanciful effects.”45 The music that was performed consisted mainly of romances, and excerpts from operas by Glinka and Dargomyzhsky. Upon Mussorgsky’s first arrival to his house, the host greeted him:

“Welcome to my house! Here you will find all the devotees of real art, all those who are not bound by their jobs, their careers, official favor or official views, in other words—all the independent musicians of St. Petersburg! We are not very

42 Leyda and Bertensson, 2.
43 Russ, 1.
44 Von Riesemann, 21.
45 Brown, 9.
numerous but there is equality here and friendliness, in short—a genuine republic of arts!”

The new musical entourage brought about a turning point in Mussorgsky’s life. It was in Dargomyzhsky’s house, in 1957, that he became acquainted with Vladimir Stasov, César Cui, and Mily Balakirev—personalities of historical importance for the development of Russian music, and who later became his colleagues, friends, and music companions.

Stasov was an influential art critic, an eminent functionary in the St. Petersburg Imperial Libraries, and an ardent advocator of Realism in Russian music. He showed great admiration for Mussorgsky’s work, and remained his enthusiastic supporter for the rest of his life. Cui, an officer in the artillery regiment, with some training in music theory and piano, gained Mussorgsky’s instant recognition, and later became his lifelong friend. At Dargomyzhsky’s gatherings, they would play duets at the piano and mutually share their own compositions. It was Cui who first introduced Mussorgsky to Balakirev. Mily, as Balakirev was affectionately called by his peers, was a self-trained musician, and a leading figure in the Russian national music. His brilliant and vivid improvisations at the piano deeply impressed Mussorgsky. Soon, he asked Balakirev to give him composition lessons.

Under Balakirev’s guidance, the composer continued to perfect his musical education. During their lessons, they played in four hands works by Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Liszt, and Berlioz. Although Mussorgsky

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46 Zetlin, 93.
47 Emerson, 3.
48 Zetlin, 97.
showed great interest in learning new and unexplored elements in music, Balakirev insisted on studying the Classical traditions, regarding them as an essential element in one’s musical development. Despite the fact that Balakirev was an admirable improviser, a brilliant pianist, and a respected composer, he had never gone through courses in harmony and counterpoint, considering them unnecessary. His music instructions to Mussorgsky consisted mainly of explaining the significance and meaning of certain works within the context of music history, and discussing musical form. In a letter to Stasov, Balakirev described his music lessons with Mussorgsky:

“As I am no theorist, I could not give Mussorgsky instruction in harmony, […] so I confined myself to explaining the different forms of composition; with this object we played through all Beethoven’s symphonies and many of the works of Schumann, Schubert, Glinka, and others, as piano duets. I pointed out the technical structure of these compositions as we went through them, and got him to analyze the various musical forms. So far as I remember, there were few actual professional lessons; these came to an end, for one reason or another, and were succeeded by friendly exchange of opinions.”

The composers’ “exchange of opinions” was mostly held at Balakirev’s house. Every Saturday evening, Mily hosted musical gatherings, where his friends and pupils shared artistic ideas, discussed and performed works by Schumann, Beethoven, and Glinka. Rimsky-Korsakov described these musical soirees as “seminaries of practical musical anatomy.” Within the Balakirev circle, Mussorgsky was regarded as an interesting, unique, talented, and enigmatic personality. By many, he was considered the best

49 Von Riesemann, 26.

50 Ibid, 25.

51 Ibid, 29.

52 Orlova, Mussorgsky’s Days and Works: A Biography in Documents, 162.
pianist among the attending group of musicians. Nikolai Kompaneiskii described his impressions of Mussorgsky’s performances: “He was a first-class pianist, scarcely inferior to Rubinstein, especially when interpreting the essence of a composer’s music. [...] At the piano, Mussorgsky was an inimitable humorous storyteller.”\footnote{Orlova, \textit{Musorgsky Remembered}, 4.} Along with being a remarkable pianist, Mussorgsky was also a singer, with “a baritone voice that was small, but pleasant.”\footnote{Orlova, \textit{Mussorgsky’s Days and Works: A Biography in Documents}, 162.} In a letter, Nadezhda Rimskaya-Korsakova wrote:

“His singing delighted us. [...] His expressive ability, his keen understanding of all the nuances of emotional gestures, and, at the same time, his simplicity and sincerity devoid of the slightest exaggeration or affectation—all of this fascinated us. [...] Besides that, he was an excellent pianist; his playing combined brilliance, power, and style with humor and enthusiasm.”\footnote{Ibid.}

\textbf{The Five}

In the 1860s, the most active participants in Balakirev’s musical gatherings, who shared his musical philosophy, formed a group known as \textit{Balakirevtzi, The Five, The Mighty Handful, or The New Russian School}. Its comprising members—Cui, Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin—under Balakirev’s leadership and with Stasov as artistic adviser, sought to achieve one goal: create a genuine national school of Russian music, free of the influence of Italian opera, German lieder, and other western European forms.\footnote{“The Five,” \textit{Encyclopædia Britannica}, http://iiiprxy.library.miami.edu:16214/EBchecked/topic/208976/The-Five (accessed January 10, 2015).} The group was initiated as a reaction against
the Imperial Music Society, founded by Anton Rubinstein and with Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna—aunt of Czar Alexander II—as chair.\textsuperscript{57} Firstly, Balakirev’s Circle revolted against Rubinstein’s poor treatment of their idol, Mikhail Glinka. Moreover, Rubinstein, as leading conductor, promoted and showed distinctive inclination toward performing works by “third rate Germans,” for whom The Five had little admiration. In his 1861 \textit{Chronicles}, Rimski-Korsakov described the tastes and attitudes of the Balakirev circle:

“Eight of Beethoven’s symphonies occupied a relatively insignificant position with the circle. Mendelssohn, except for the overtures \textit{Midsummer Night’s Dream} and \textit{Hebrides} and the finale of the Octet, had little of their respect and was frequently referred to as ‘Mendel’ by Mussorgsky. They considered Mozart and Haydn out-of-date and naïve. They thought of J. S. Bach as fossilized, nothing more than a musical mathematician of an unfeeling and lifeless nature, who wrote like a sort of machine. […] Balakirev compared Chopin to a nervous society lady. The beginning of his Funeral March (in B-flat minor) elicited admiration, but the rest of it was thought to be worthless. They liked some of his mazurkas, but the majority of his output was considered as nothing more than a kind of filigree-work. They had great respect for Berlioz, whose works they were just beginning to know. Liszt was relatively unknown and, in a musical sense, was deemed affected and unnatural, sometimes even as a caricature. […] Their attitude towards the Russian composers was as follows: They respected Dargomyzhsky for the recitative passages in \textit{Rusalka}; his three orchestral fantasies were regarded as mere curiosities; his romances ‘The Paladin’ and ‘Oriental Air’ were highly esteemed by them. […] Rubinstein had earned a reputation as a pianist, but as a composer he was considered untalented and insipid. […] The sole work by Mussorgsky acknowledged in the circle then was the chorus from \textit{Oedipus}.”\textsuperscript{58}

For the members of The Five, the piano was the least suitable instrument to express the national features of the new Russian school. They believed the piano was associated more with the salon music of the West. In the first half of the nineteenth-century, only a small number of piano compositions by Russian composers existed.

\textsuperscript{57} Zetlin, 123-124.

\textsuperscript{58} Orlova, \textit{Mussorgsky’s Days and Works}, 97-98.
Mikhail Glinka, who had a major impact on the development of Russian opera, wrote only a few piano works. Essentially, they are miniature pieces such as mazurkas, waltzes, impromptus, and variations. Among the composers of The Five, Mily Balakirev was distinguished as a virtuoso pianist who developed a pianistic style that followed the traditions of Clementi, Weber, Field, Chopin, and Liszt. Balakirev’s most famous composition for piano is the oriental fantasy *Islamey*. Other noted piano works written by composers of The Five are Rimski-Korsakov’s Piano Concerto (1883), Borodin’s *Petite Suite* (1885), and Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874).

**Populism, Realism, and the Commune**

Ever since 1840, the Russian cultural life began to follow two distinct paths. The first, represented by the so-called “Westernizers,” followed the traditions of the West. In music, this movement corresponded to Rubinstein’s principles, advocated in his newly established Conservatory of Music under the Imperial Music Society. On the other hand, the “Slavophiles,” strongly associated with the school of thought within the Balakirev Circle, believed that Russian culture is unique and above Western civilizations. Their music idealized old native folk elements and the Russian peasant commune.

In the 1860s, the philosophy of the Slavophiles gave rise to another movement that sought to glorify Russian peasantry, called Populism. For Populists, “the peasant commune was seen as a model, and the people, despite their degradations and sufferings, were regarded by the intelligentsia as a source of nobility and morality.”

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60 Russ, 8.
Mussorgsky was the only true Populist. His populist facet was at once fully awakened after his visit to Moscow in 1859. In a letter to Balakirev, he writes: “I feel a sort of inner regeneration. Everything Russian seems suddenly near to me and I would be somehow upset if people took no account of Russia; I believe I’m really beginning to love her.”\textsuperscript{61} From this point on, every sound in his music was created to illustrate the social and psychological thought of peasant Russian life and its people.

Along with being a Populist, Mussorgsky was also a representative figure of Realism in music. The composer formed his realist aesthetic values under the direct influence of Nikolay Chernyshevsky, who was at that time a revolutionary Russian democrat, socialist, and writer-philosopher. For Chernyshevsky, “true beauty resides in life and the primary purpose of art is to reproduce reality. […] The artist is not simply a passive recorder; in his selection and creation he explains and passes judgment on the reality he portrays, and thus gives art a moral dimension as well.”\textsuperscript{62} In Mussorgsky’s compositions, reality was expressed through sounds and rhythms that imitated the truthfulness of speech-tones, and real scenes from peasant life.

In 1861, the emancipation of the serfs was proclaimed by Czar Alexander II. This political measure brought about a tremendous economic decline and eventual ruin to the Mussorgsky family. As a result, at the age of twenty-four, Modest was forced to return to official duties, obtaining a position at the Main Department of Engineering of the Ministry of Communication.\textsuperscript{63} At that time, Mussorgsky lived in an apartment with a

\textsuperscript{61} Zetlin, 106.

\textsuperscript{62} Russ, 10.

\textsuperscript{63} Zetlin, 152.
group of five young men who worked for different government departments. The six men jokingly called their friendly circle “The Commune.”

Mussorgsky’s experiences as part of the new group of comrades changed his social as well as artistic environments. The members of the Commune were all “intelligent and educated; each practiced his preferred scientific or artistic interest.” After being released from their duties, they would gather to listen to Mussorgsky play or sing, to read, and exchange knowledge and impressions on matters such as arts, science, philosophy, and literature. According to Vladimir Stasov, “the three years of a new way of living with these young people were […] among the best of their lives. And for Mussorgsky—in particular.” It was during that period that Mussorgsky strengthened and forever established his social and aesthetical beliefs. “…that bright view on ‘equity’ and ‘inequity,’ on ‘good’ and ‘evil’ […] he never altered thereafter,” Stasov wrote.

**Artistic Credo**

Throughout his entire compositional career, Mussorgsky has defined his artistic credo as such: *Iskusstvo est’ sredstvo dlia besedy s liud’mi*—“art is a means for conversing with people.” The composer goes on to describe his belief of what true artistry meant for him: “To depict the finest traits of human nature and of the masses of mankind, to delve insistently, tirelessly into these unknown lands and to conquer them—that is the genuine vocation of the artist. Forward toward uncharted shores!” As a

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64 Leyda and Bertensson, 57.

65 Ibid.

66 Emerson, preface to *The Life of Mussorgsky*, xx.

67 Zetlin, 151.
musical realist, Mussorgsky considered that compositional elements such as melody, harmony, form, and rhythm should not subdue the underlying meaning of the work that aims to describe reality. He believed that music must convey real life events and should not be overshadowed by its form.\(^68\) Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, Russian musicologist and one of Mussorgsky’s leading publicists, defined Realism as follows:

“A realist is one who attempts to present facts and express feelings exactly as they are, without distortions, embellishments, or exaggerations of any kind. Realism treats all subjects the same, regardless of their pleasant or unpleasant characteristics. Instead of embellishing a subject by stylizing it, the realist’s goal is to maximize the specific characterization while minimizing the stylization. Realism deals with treatment of a subject, and ways of conveying emotions. The realist does not dwell upon resulting emotions from his subject, but emphasizes the subject itself and believes this will produce the right emotions.”\(^69\)

Mussorgsky’s compositions have been most often defined by free harmonic and formal structures—a distinctive characteristic that was criticized by his contemporaries, and associated with his lack of formal education in music theory. Instead of following conventional practices of harmony and form, Mussorgsky’s unique compositional style was comprised of elements drawn from traditional Russian folk music: free recitative-like melodies, church modes, unresolved dissonances, whole-tone scales, tritones, irregular meter, and etc.\(^70\)

\(^{68}\) Lee, 7-8.


Mussorgsky’s aesthetic belief influenced him in all aspects of artistic personality: his inclination toward theatricality in music, his talent for performing his own works, and his preference for vocal works over instrumental or symphonic mediums. Although he was an outstanding pianist, throughout his entire compositional career, Mussorgsky had written a relatively small number of works for solo piano. He was primarily interested in creating vocal music, and such genres as sonatas, concertos, and preludes were not as appealing to the composer. Most of his piano works are character pieces that are associated with ideas of storytelling or depiction of certain images. Calvocoressi described Mussorgsky’s exceptional gift to illustrate visual impressions through music as “special sensitivity to motor-images and the ability to transmute them spontaneously into musical shapes.”

**Piano Works**

Despite rejecting classical forms and traditions, following Balakierv’s advice, Mussorgsky experimented with the genres of sonata and scherzo in the early stages of his career. However, the composer himself considered these forms “[…] of a lower artistic level. The ideal for him was a synthesis of arts. It is for this reason that Mussorgsky’s principal and most favored genre was opera, which combines dramatic action, music, and literature.” Perhaps the only work for piano solo where Mussorgsky was able to freely and fully express his artistic credo is the programmatic suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Considered Mussorgsky’s greatest works for piano, *Pictures* places the composer among

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72 Pavel Lamm, preface to *M.P. Mussorgsky: Complete Collected Works*, vol. VIII (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1931), vii.
the most important innovators of the nineteenth-century piano music, through his
discovery of unique and entirely new means of expression through pianistic texture.

Prior to writing Pictures, Mussorgsky composed several salon piano works such
as Souvenir D’enfance (1857), and Intermezzo in modo classico (1st version - 1861, 2nd
version - 1867). His first attempt to write illustrative piano music, and an early
experiment of musical realism was reflected in a series of miniature pieces written on the
composer’s beloved theme of childhood, and dedicated to his deceased mother: Nanny
and I and The First Punishment from the collection Memories of Childhood (1865). On
the same subject were the Ein Kinderscherz (German: “A Child’s Joke,” 1859) and a
playful scherzo, Impromptu Passionne (1859). Among the few piano compositions of
traditional classical genres are his Scherzo in C-sharp minor (1858) and the Piano Sonata
in C Major for four hands (1860). One of Mussorgsky’s most pianistic works, apart from
Pictures at an Exhibition, is the small and vivid Scherzino—The Seamstress (1871).
Other notable piano works from Mussorgsky’s later compositional period include On the
Crimea’s Southern Shore (1879), Meditation (1880), Une Larme (French: “A Tear,”
1880) and Au Village, Quasi-Fantasia (French: “In the Village,” ca. 1880).

A great contrast to Mussorgsky’s youthful illustrations of real life images through
music is his Intermezzo in modo classico. The piece was considered by the composer
himself as Classical and its main theme written in Baroque style (Example 4.1), with no
recorded programme. However, Stasov’s writings reveal that the work was inspired by a
picturesque scene of peasant life, and aimed to depict exactly that:

“In the winter of 1861 he was in the country with his mother, in the Pskov
government, and one beautiful, sunny winter day—a holiday—he saw a whole
crowd of peasants crossing the fields and plunging heavily through the snow-
drifts; many of them fell down in the snow and then extricated themselves with
some difficulty [...] ‘This picture [said Mussorgsky] flashed into my head in a musical form and unexpectedly there shaped itself the first ‘stepping up and down’ melody à la Bach; the jolly, laughing women presented themselves to me in the shape of a melody from which I then made the middle part or Trio. But all this—in modo classico, in accordance with my musical preoccupations at that time. And that’s how my Intermezzo say the light of the day.’”

Example 4.1. Mussorgsky, Intermezzo in modo classico, mm. 1-4.

Apart from Pictures at an Exhibition, Mussorgsky’s compositions for piano are often described by musicologists as inferior to his vocal and orchestral output. Despite his brilliant pianism, Mussorgsky’s piano works do not represent the stronger side of his compositional achievements. All of his artistic intentions were focused on his vocal works—operas, choral works, romances, and songs.

Vocal Works

Mussorgsky’s success and prosperity in vocal composition was greatly aided by his remarkable talent as an accompanist. His accompaniment parts not only imitate the declamatory melodies of the vocal lines, they also enrich and complement the soloist’s part with significant details. Within the circle of The Five, Mussorgsky was highly

73 Calvocoressi, Mussorgsky, 202.
74 Lamm, vii.
75 Ibid.
admired particularly for his ability to improvise and render the accompaniment part for entire operas on frequent occasions and performances. Daria Leonova, a singer with whom Mussorgsky collaborated, commented on his talent: “He brought the art of accompaniment to the level of artistic perfection, to a degree of virtuosity that was unknown to the musicians that came before him. Through his artistry as an accompanist, he demonstrated his importance and tremendous contribution toward the integrity of an artistic performance.”

As a young composer, Mussorgsky was particularly applauded by his colleagues for his songs, which were most often set on his own text. In the article The Musical Season, Cui wrote:

“[Mussorgsky’s] declamation is remarkable; he has a biting sense of humor, a wistful heart, and lots of comic character. He is extraordinarily original, […] realistic, and truthful. In a word, in his declamatory romances he is worthy of being Dargomyzhsky’s successor.”

Mussorgsky’s vocal works are the most representative of his realist nature. Speech-like intonations are among the main musical elements that were used in his vocal compositions. Mussorgsky described his goals in one of his operas, The Marriage (1868), (Example 4.2):

“This is what I would like. For my characters to speak on the stage, as living people speak, […] my music must be an artistic reproduction of human speech in all its finest shades, that is, the sounds of human speech, as the external manifestations of thought and feeling must, without exaggeration or violence, become true, accurate music, but artistic, highly artistic.”

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76 Lamm, viii.


78 Leyda and Bertensson, 111-112.

One of Mussorgsky’s works for voice and piano that represents the composer’s characteristic realist style is the song cycle *The Nursery*, written between 1868 and 1872. It represents a series of five pieces written on Mussorgsky’s own text that aim to depict a child’s world—innocent, naive, timid, and fearful. In the *St. Petersburgskie vedomosti*, Cui reviewed *The Nursery*:

“The musical task…is completely new, but has been executed with unusual success and talent. It is impossible to convey with words the entire fundamental truth of these sounds: sometimes naive, sometimes capricious, at other times frightened and surprised, but without exception unique and remarkably fresh. The perfection of the declamation vividly reminds one of the sharply changing intonations of a young child’s undeveloped voice. Besides this, the picturesqueness of the accompaniment, the harmonic beauty, and the rich musical content all complement the fascination and make out of *The Nursery* a veritable
chef d’oeuvre, a completely unique creation. [...] there are almost no unnatural harmonic turns, and, whenever they do occur, they are artistically motivated and necessary for a more fitting portrayal of a child’s uniqueness.”

During his late compositional period, Mussorgsky wrote two of his most notable song cycles that represent his mature style: Sunless (1874), and Songs and Dances of Death (1875-1877). Both works were written on poems by Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov, Mussorgsky’s close friend. Composed in the same year as Pictures at an Exhibition, but of striking stylistic contrast to the piano suite, Sunless consists of six romances of intense introversion and deep psychological content. They reflect intimate sentiments of hopeless longing and emotional solitude, typical for the circle of Russian intellectuals during the 1870’s. Sunless has been called “a diary of a Russian man of the seventies,” and is Mussorgsky’s most lyrical, and least realist works.80 The songs present the hero as a solitary romantic disappointed in love, whose life is explored from an inner perspective, rather than seen from the outside, real-word existence.

Mussorgsky’s last song cycle, Songs and Dances of Death, is defined by a similar somber character and stylistic approach. It is another example of the composer’s evolution of lyricism in his vocal works in contrast to musical realism, reflected in his earlier compositions. Prompted by Stasov, Mussorgsky chose to set the music on Kutuzov’s most promising poems that were concerned with portraying various situations where people are confronted with death: the death of a rich man, a proletarian, a grand lady, a high official, the tsar, a young girl, a peasant, a monk, a child, a merchant, a

79 Leyda and Bertensson, 277.

80 Brown, 242-243.
priest, a poet. Out of all, only four poems were set to music: 1. “Lullaby,” a song for an infant, sung by the Death, disguised as a nanny; 2. “Serenade,” where a beautiful young woman is seduced by the song of the Death, who takes the appearance of a charming prince; 3. “Trepak,” represents a poor peasant man, caught in blizzard, and trapped in a wild folk dance (Trepak) with the figure of Death; 4. “The Field Marshal,” a narrative of Death itself, disguised as an officer, commanding the troops of the dead armies after a furious battle. Death exclaims: “The battle’s done! I have conquered all! ...” In *Songs and Dances of Death*, the composer illustrates the image of Death as means to redeem the grim life of unfortunate human souls.

*Boris Godunov*

*Boris Godunov* is Mussorgsky’s masterpiece, his greatest musical drama, and his only finished opera. The opera was intended to be the first part of a trilogy based on historical subject matter: I. *Boris Godunov* (1968-1873), II. *Khovanshchina* (1872-1880), and III. *Pugachevshchina* (never written). *Boris Godunov* was the only opera completed and performed during the composer’s lifetime. *Khovanshchina* was left unfinished, although a complete piano score was preserved. The work was later orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov, Shostakovich, and Stravinsky. No sketches survived from *Pugachevshchina*, which presumably remained at the level of an idea.

Based on Aleksandr Pushkin’s dramatic chronicle of the same title, Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* is concerned with depicting the social and political tragedy during the Time of Troubles, in the early seventeenth-century Russia. The composer masterfully and

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81 Emerson, 125.

creatively reflects the conflict between the interests of the peasants and the tsarist autocracy. The opera, for the first time, illustrates the image of the Russian peasants as revolutionary, rebelling against the unbearable oppression. Mussorgsky’s greatest artistic innovation was his representation of the people as one of the leading roles in his musical drama. The composer described his goals in the preface to the opera: “I see the people as one absolute personality, who embodies a single, and unified idea. This was my task. I tried to solve it in this opera.”

The original version of *Boris Godunov* (1869), consisting of only seven scenes, was rejected in February 1871 by the authorities of the Imperial Theaters. The judges were repelled by the unusual character of the music, and lack of traditional features of the genre: a prima donna and first tenor, a love story, and dancing scenes. All of it was comprised of grim dialogues and choruses. In the second, expanded version (1872), Mussorgsky adopted a more sentimental tone, acquiring a warmer, more lyrical quality. Although still neglected by the Imperial authorities, the production of *Boris’* first three acts at the Maryinsky Theater in February 1873 was an enormous success. Cui wrote of the performance: “Never within my memory had such ovations been given to a composer at the Maryinsky.”

The influence of Mussorgsky’s vocal output on his piano works is of significant importance. His unconventional compositional style is often reflected through unique

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84 Calvocoressi, 37.

85 Ibid, 146.

86 Ibid, 42.
textural figurations and distinctive sound colors, which were uncommon for the Romantic style of the West at the time. The composer’s musical realist facet is seen in his flexible speech-like melodies, unusual harmonies, dramatic changes of dynamics and tempi, and his implementation of unique sound effects. All the latter characteristics are deeply instilled in Mussorgsky’s greatest work for piano, *Pictures at an Exhibition*—an epitome of musical representation of a preconceived image through pianistic texture.

During his lifetime, Mussorgsky’s brave and innovative aspirations were extremely unusual, at times misunderstood and neglected even by his friends and colleagues. His artistic output spurred debate and did not receive its due recognition long after the composer’s death. It was not until the dawn of the twentieth century that Mussorgsky’s genius began to be fully acknowledged. The legacy of his creative artistry prospered in the new century under the hands of Prokofiev (in his operas), Shostakovich, and others.

The power of Mussorgsky’s output exists in an organic and inseparable connection to his contemporary world. His music is rooted in the national culture of the composer’s homeland, which makes it deeply thoughtful and emotionally complete. Modest Mussorgsky’s works are a national treasure, comparable to that of such Russian masterminds as Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Mikhail Glinka, Alexander Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Lev Tolstoy.
“Hartmann is boiling as Boris boiled; sounds and ideas have been hanging in the air; I am devouring them and stuffing myself—I barely have time to scribble them on paper. I am writing my 4th number—the links are good (on ‘Promenade’). I want to finish it as quickly and securely as I can. My profile can be seen in the interludes. I consider it successful to this point… The titles are curious: ‘Promenade (in modo russico),’ No. 1, ‘Gnomus’—intermezzo (the intermezzo is untitled); No. 2, ‘Il vecchio castello’—intermezzo (also untitled); No. 3, ‘Thuilleries’ (dispute enfants après jeux); right between the eyes, No. 4, ‘The Sandomirzsko bydlo’ (le télègue) (le télègue, obviously, is untitled, which is between us). How well it is working out…”

Modest Mussorgsky’s letter to Vladimir Stasov, June, 1874.87

Although Pictures at an Exhibition is now regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces in the piano repertoire, it was long after the composer’s death that it acquired international acclaim. At the time of its composition, performers rejected the work because of its apparent lack of bombastic pianistic virtuosity. It was considered as non-pianistic, not suitable for concert audiences. It is well known that Pictures is a challenging piece for a performer in its musical as well as technical aspects. Many fragments in the work are, indeed, non-pianistic and can be motivated by the composer’s predominantly symphonic compositional thinking. This chapter aims to provide an analysis of pianistic texture, discuss interpretative aspects, and suggest possible solutions for some of the most technically challenging episodes in the piece. The analysis of the work’s interpretive challenges will focus on sound imagery depiction, performance of intended genres and their stylistic features. In addition, the study will highlight analogies

87 Orlova, Mussorgsky’s Days and Works, 416.
of *Pictures* not only with other compositions by Mussorgsky, but also works by other composers.

It took nearly thirty years after the completion of *Pictures* for it to be performed as originally intended—at the piano. Only in 1903, pianist Grigoryi Nikolaevich Beklemishev was the first to perform the work on a concert stage. At the time, along with Beklemishev, a fine interpreter of *Pictures* was acclaimed pianist Gavril Romanovich Romanovskyi. During the 1920s, the work gained increased popularity and became a part of the standard piano repertoire. Throughout mid to late twentieth century, *Pictures* was performed and recorded by legendary pianists such as Vladimir Horowitz, Svetoslav Richter and Maria Yudina. Today, *Pictures* is one of the most iconic and authentic piano works that represents Russian realism in music.

In the nineteenth century, with the development of the instrument’s technical possibilities, the art of piano playing expanded considerably. Due to the increased popularity of public performances, audiences were highly entertained especially by the virtuoso pianists, who followed the new trend of brilliant and entertaining pianism. Many great composer pianists such as Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms were against this movement. They implemented virtuosic passages in their works, however, exclusively as means of artistic expression. Their virtuosic writing was strongly associated with emotion, ardor, and the passionate temperament of the Romantic Era. Modest Mussorgsky’s artistic credo was defined by a totally different system of beliefs and ideas. His guiding principles were highly influenced by the Russian critical realism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the composer’s artistic goal was to depict life events

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88 Siryatskyi, [Modest Mussorgsky as a reformer of pianistic mastery](Kharkov: Fact, 2003), 51.
and truths as they appear. His aim was to create a sound that is rigorous, concrete, and is designed specifically for the purpose of depicting a predetermined image. Alfred Schnittke wrote:

“The founding elements of Russian realist program music are: precision of artistic intentions and a strict forethought of the whole; aspiration for maximal clarity of musical imagery, drawn from deep understanding of the Russian culture; and, finally, the mastery of depiction through comprehensive musical means of expression.”

The latter characteristics stand at the core of Pictures at an Exhibition.

Texture

As previously stated, the work has been regarded as non-pianistic for a long time. In his book Modest Mussorgsky as Reformer of the Piano Art, author Viktor Siryatskyi writes: “Up until the middle of the twentieth century some performers were questioning the pianism of the suite.” Today, however, pianists and music critics realize that Mussorgsky’s revolutionary piano work was ahead of its time, anticipating many features of future pianism. Pictures is characterized by a massive inner force, free of brilliant passages and an effective external appearance (with a few exceptions as seen in the technically challenging “Limoges” and “Baba Yaga”). Sudden changes in imagery, character, and genre, together with the juxtaposition of contrasting timbres and registers create challenges of a different nature than sheer technical virtuosity. The pianist must demonstrate an ability of great sound control, flexibility in timbre and tone production. In

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89 Schnittke, 329.

90 Siryatskyi, 62.
addition to being able to use the instrument at its full coloristic potential, the performer must possess knowledge of all the stylistic features defining the piece.

In many ways, Mussorgsky is the creator of a new type of pianistic texture. The stylistic writing of *Pictures* is substantially different than that of its Western contemporaries—Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt. For the Romantics, brilliant virtuosity of texture is not only a tool for conveying tumultuous emotions, but also an integral part of the Romantic pianistic style. In Mussorgsky’s work virtuosity interacts with various techniques of expression, for the sole purpose of depicting a certain preconceived image. For that reason, the pictorial and illustrative qualities of texture ascribe *Pictures* the title of a concert piece.

Analysis and understanding of texture within *Pictures* is of utmost importance in a pianist’s journey toward interpreting and finally performing the piece. Moreover, a clear insight into Mussorgsky’s intentions behind his idiosyncratic writing can aid the performer’s interpretative choices. By asking and answering questions such as “why did the composer choose this specific kind of texture in this episode?” a pianist is more likely to find solutions and achieve the desired musical outcome within his or her interpretation.

Mussorgsky’s preference for vocal musical genres had an immense impact on his stylistic decisions in *Pictures*. Some of the suite’s movements sound as piano transcriptions of pieces originally intended for voice with accompaniment, as in, for instance “Il Vecchio Castello” (Example 5.1), or choir acapella in some sections of the “Promenade” (Example 5.2a) and “The Great Gate of Kiev” (Example 5.2b).
Example 5.1. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 6-15.

Example 5.2a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade, mm. 3-4.

Example 5.2b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 64-72.

One of Mussorgsky’s signature choices of pianistic texture in *Pictures* is the unison. The way the composer incorporates this textural figuration throughout the entire cycle is reminiscent to the compositional techniques of the Medieval and Renaissance Eras. Although at a first glance it may not seem to have huge possibilities for harmonic richness, Mussorgsky masterfully expands the unison’s coloristic range to its full potential. Depending on the intended image, the composer makes use of the unison in
various forms: as a single line, doubled or even tripled. Most frequently, Mussorgsky uses this texture for depiction of fictional characters. For example, “Gnomus” (Example 5.3) and “Baba Yaga” (Example 5.4) are almost entirely built on this specific compositional device.


Example 5.4. Mussorsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 8-14.

Throughout the piece, the composer does not use embellishments and textures characteristic to the Romantic pianistic style. Even popular compositional techniques such as arpeggios or arpeggiatos are absent.\(^91\) The expansion of harmony through arpeggiated chords seemed unnecessary to the composer. Strict pillars of blocked chords are used as the main means for presenting harmony and in some instances, melody (Example 5.5). Such compositional technique—the use of massive chords in a moderately fast melodic and harmonic movement—is one of the typical pianistic

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\(^{91}\) *Arpeggiato* refers to a type of a broken or rolled chord in which its comprising notes are played progressively faster.
challenges within the piece. It is clear that a pianist with a smaller hand will require more effort and agility to accurately perform this type of texture.

Example 5.5. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I), mm. 9-16.

In most cases throughout *Pictures*, each chord is functionally different—an original use of chordal texture that differs from the compositional traditions of the Impressionist and Romantic eras. Mussorgsky’s use of chords reflects his orchestral and choral approach to composition where all voices are equally important, without being polyphonic. He uses this type of texture for doubling or tripling the melodic line and adding intervals (usually seconds, sevenths, perfect fourths and fifths, and tritones) in between the melodic unisons. Thus, he creates an impression that melody and harmony are inseparable and equally important entities for the representation of a musical idea.

In contrast to Mussorgsky’s style, the Impressionists used chordal texture for achieving coloristic sound effects, without implementation of melodic material or emphasis on harmonic importance. For the Romantics, melody was distinctly dominating over harmony and was usually placed in the top voice, or another clearly defined layer. The rest of musical texture (chordal, scalar, or arpeggiated) played an accompanimental
role, thus following the standard homophonic paradigm. Polyphonic texture in the Romantic piano music was, however, not excluded. It was certainly present in some sections, which were clearly meant to be written as fugues (e.g. Liszt’s B minor Sonata, Brahms’ Handel Variations).

Another technique used in Pictures, seen at the end of “Limoges” and throughout “Baba Yaga,” is the martellato (Example 5.6 and 5.7), a figuration highly favored by Liszt.

Example 5.6. Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition, VII. Limoges, mm 37-38.

Example 5.7. Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm 218-219.

Compared to their use in the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods, embellishments in Pictures—such as trills or grace notes—are rarely encountered. When present, they are not used as means for decorating a melody, but are rather designated to illustrate an intended image. Such an example can be observed throughout the “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks” (Example 5.8a and 5.8b) and “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle” (Example 5.9).
Example 5.8a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm 1-4.

Example 5.8b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm 23-27.

Example 5.9. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuýle, mm. 9-10.

**Articulation**

A close analysis of the piece reveals Mussorgsky’s detailed attention to articulation markings. The composer meticulously and precisely notates the principal sections where articulation is a decisive factor in conveying a concrete musical image or character. From the very opening of the piece, the composer clearly acknowledges his musical intentions. The *tenuto* marking over each quarter note suggests a fixed
interpretation of the Promenade, warning the performer to resist the temptation of playing
the movement too fast and light. In addition, the recurrent *tenuto* over the unison melody
balances the ensuing chordal answer (Example 5.10, mm. 3-4). In the first two measures
of the Promenade (Example 5.10, mm. 1-2), the lack of *tenuto* on the eighth note F may
have a secondary purpose: it underlines the construction of the melody which places B-
flat as the tonal center, with G-F and C-D adjacent on both sides (Example 5.12, mm. 1).


This episode can be interpreted as a contrasting acoustical juxtaposition of a
question and an answer. The performer might choose to play the answering chordal
episode softer and more connected on *mf*, for instance, justifying it by the absence of
*tenuti*.

An abundance of articulation markings can also be observed in the second
movement of the piece “Il Vecchio Castello” (Example 5.11), where each note in the
accompaniment is intended to be played in a very specific way and thus maintained
throughout the movement. In this case, the pianist is encouraged to find the
corresponding approach which will underline the acoustical difference between all the
articulation markings in the example below: the first G-sharp – D-sharp perfect fifth on
*pp*, three repeated notes on *staccato* (mm. 2), three notes marked *portato* (mm. 3), and a
five-note *legato* melodic segment (mm. 5).
Example 5.11. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 1-5.

As mentioned in chapter four, Mussorgsky intended to depict human speech in many of his vocal as well as piano works. In *Pictures*, articulation is often used to place emphasis on certain notes that are intended to imitate the finest details and expression of human narration and dialogue. Such examples can be observed in “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle” (Example 5.12a and Example 5.12b) and “Limoges” (Example 5.13).


Example 5.12b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, mm. 9-10.
Example 5.13. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 3-4.

**Structure**

Compared to many other compositions of this genre, *Pictures* can be perceived as a unified non-cyclical work. Structurally and stylistically, the piece does not have an analogous among the European Romantic piano repertoire. The only examples of a similar suite-like form can be found in Robert Schumann’s “Papillons” Op. 2, “Carnaval” Op. 9, and “Kreisleriana” Op. 16.

Johannes Brahms’ Fantasies Op. 116 can also be associated with this type of structure. Although the cycle consists of seven separate and thematically unrelated numbers, Brahms correlates the outer movements tonally: No. 1 and No. 7 are both in D minor. Movements 4 and 6 are interconnected through a delicate lyricism and the key of E Major. The structural integrity of Brahms’ Op. 116 is especially emphasized in the last Capriccio, where the composer brings back the triple meter, rhythmically and melodically connecting it to the opening number. In Mussorgsky’s *Pictures* the role of such connecting material is played by the Promenade, which is constantly varied according to the image of the adjacent movements. Below is a closer look at this material.
Promenade

According to Stasov, in the Promenades, Mussorgsky depicts “himself as he strolled through the exhibition; joyfully or sadly recalling the talented deceased artist […] he does not hurry, but observes attentively.”92 Special attention must be paid to the Promenades, since they represent the key element in determining the structural and symbolic meanings of the work. Alfred Schnittke wrote: “The Promenades reflect a national and epic image—Mussorgsky’s thought and emotion. The music of Promenades is permeated by human raw feeling and lyrical warmth.”93

Due to the restatements of the Promenades as a kind of refrain, the structure of Pictures might be also interpreted as a rondo. It is, however, certain that the work is far from following the classical standards of the rondo form. Many pianists and musicologists, as for instance Viktor Bobrovsky, analyze the structure of Pictures as a synthesis between elements of a suite and rondo.94

Certain features of the Promenade’s occurrences throughout the piece are particularly interesting. As the work evolves, the Promenade appears less often, and after its fifth statement, the main theme is implemented within the texture of the “Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua,” the Andante subsequent to the eighth movement “Catacombae (Sepulcrum Romanum)” (Example 5.14). Thus, the Promenade’s motif—which

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92 Russ, 35.

93 Schnittke, 331.

represents Mussorgsky himself—possibly shows the composer immersing into the picture’s image, switching from the role of a spectator to being an integral part of the exhibition. Hence, Mussorgsky’s own words written in pencil following the *attacca* at the end of the eighth movement: “NB: Latin text: with dead people in a dead language. A Latin text would be a good idea: Hartmann’s creative spirit leading me to the skulls, summoning me to them, the skulls gently glowing.”


![Example 5.14. Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition, VIII. Catacombe (Sepulcrum Romanum): Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua, mm. 1-2.](image)

The Promenade reflects elements of the Russian national spirit. The folk character is expressed through its tune and the rhythmic alteration: 5/4 and 6/4. In addition, Mussorgsky masterfully depicts the national folk features through choral polyphonic and heterophonic imitation (Example 5.15).


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Thematically, the Promenade in *Pictures* (Example 5.16) can be associated with the main elements in the coronation scene from the composer’s opera *Boris Godunov* (Example 5.17). Schnittke expressed his opinion on this matter:

“It is indicative that certain elements from Promenade and its general character in the middle section of *Pictures* show common features with the famous “Glory.” This is reflected in the similarity between both themes’ general flow, their communality of fundamental melodic points and the general majestic character of sound.”

Example 5.16. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I), mm. 3-4.


[ In the sky to the red sun glory, glory! ]

**Performance aspect**

As previously mentioned, from the very first Promenade the pianist is faced with the technical challenge of playing thick chordal texture. The secret to developing a good chordal technique is in the ability of saving the energy while playing. In order to find a good balance between effort and relaxation, it is necessary to apply force directly at the

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96 Schnittke, 332.
moment of the strike and release the tension immediately after, without lifting the fingers off the keys. Such skill will allow a pianist to control hand tension and minimize fatigue while performing not only the Promenade, but also other movements of the cycle with similar texture.

While performing the Promenade, a pianist must avoid overwhelming the principal melody with the underlying massive harmonic structures. Furthermore, taking into consideration the uniformity of texture, a performer might consider flexibility of dynamics and tone color. For example, a possible antiphonal effect might be portrayed in the middle section of the first Promenade, in measures 9 and 10 (Examples 5.18a and 5.18b).

Example 5.18a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I) mm. 9.  
Example 5.18b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (I) mm. 10.

Although the tempo is marked *Allegro*, a slower pace is advised for the Promenade. Otherwise, the calm pace of Mussorgsky’s walk through Hartmann’s exhibition might transform into a somewhat clumsy dance. An artistic performance of the massive texture in the first and fifth Promenades might become a challenging task, since the musical material has to maintain its melodic nature. Possibly, attempting to play this movement *legato* would help the performer achieve expressiveness of phrasing as
well as accuracy in large leaps. As paradoxical as it may sound, the gesture of lifting the hands off the keyboard too early in order to prepare for the next chord might not always lead to the desired outcome.

Instances of such a technical challenge can be found in a multitude of works from the advanced piano repertoire. Examples 5.19a and 5.19b show episodes from the third movement of Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto in D minor. In these cases, as it is in Mussorgsky’s *Pictures*, if the chords are sustained through their entire note value, it is more likely that a performer will achieve the intended accuracy and musical goal.


![Example 5.19a](image1)


![Example 5.19b](image2)
I. Gnomus *Sempre Vivo*)
(From Latin: “The Gnome”)

Illustration 5.1. Victor Hartmann, drawing of a Christmas tree nutcracker.

Stasov described “Gnomus” as “a child's plaything, fashioned, after Hartmann's design in wood, for the Christmas tree at the Artists' Club (1869). It is something in the style of the fabled Nutcracker, the nuts being inserted into the gnome's mouth. The gnome accompanies his droll movements with savage shrieks.”

“Gnomus” is one of the brightest examples of Mussorgsky’s mastery of expressionistic use for musical characterization. In this movement, along with portraying the personage’s external appearance—the Gnome’s clumsy gait and frequent stumbling—the composer reveals the character’s contrasting inner feelings: anger, desperation, and plea for sympathy. For a performer, it is very important to choose the right balance between the character’s conflicting states of mind. Whether the gnome will

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97 Description by Stasov found in the exhibition catalogue, cited in program notes for Boston Symphony Orchestra, sixty-first season.
be depicted as sad, angry, or perhaps more vulnerable and gentle—is almost entirely up to the performer’s individual artistic interpretation.

“Gnomus” is comprised of three main thematic elements, each of them embodying a distinct facet of the Gnome’s personality. The first theme’s precipitous turns, leaps of augmented and diminished intervals (dim. 7ths, tritones), and rhythmic instability create sonorities that represent this mystic character (Example 5.20).


The second theme conveys the Gnome’s confusion and bitter grief (Example 5.21). The bass line is once again built on augmented and diminished intervals. The theme’s sequences of descending suspended chords can be associated with intonations of sighs, and its syncopated rhythm and heaviness of sound portray an impression of the character’s stumbling walk.

The movement’s first and second themes incorporate a fairly large amount of *sforzandi* and almost lacks other dynamic markings, with the exception of the opening’s echo effect *ff – p*. The absence of other dynamic indications allows the performer the freedom in choosing the appropriate sound color for depicting the desired musical image.

The third theme (Example 5.22), marked *Poco meno mosso, pesante*, gains a lamenting quality and an amplified density of expressiveness due to the melody’s setting in octaves, played a tenth apart.

Example 5.22. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 38-44.

The third theme’s development leads to a dramatic culmination, where the Gnome’s anger and despair are expressed through exaggerated harmonic and dynamical intensity. The *fortissimo* octave melody is based on a descending chromatic movement in
both hands, altered by a series of tritones (Example 5.23). For a moment, one may forget that the image is only that of a Christmas tree decoration, as seen in Hartmann’s painting.

Example 5.23. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 60-71.

A small episode that follows the climax is comprised of material from the movement’s second theme, juxtaposed over a series of accelerating trills in left hand (Example 5.24). In this case, the trills are meant to create a sonority of noise and agitation, which eventually leads to the Gnome’s brisk disappearance in the final passage (Example 5.26). The depiction of a similar musical image through such textural language can be found in Ravel’s “Scarbo.”

Example 5.24. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 78-82.
Performance aspect

The Gnome’s constantly changing moods are expressed through a wide variety of contrasts in texture, dynamics, and articulation. While performing sudden shifts of registers on acute articulation markings at an extremely fast tempo (Examples 5.25a and 5.25b), it is very important to have the maximum concentration and focus of finger tips. Awareness of free arms and active fingers is one of the key elements for success in performing large and uncomfortable leaps within this movement. It is suggested to interpret this particular episode of octave leaps (Example 5.25a) as three accented points rather than one singular motion from the first note to the last. A pianist should not try to pass quickly through the octaves, but instead, make an emphasis on each of them. After a number of repetitions, playing it as three separate but important points at an increased tempo will not affect the accuracy.

Another suggestion would be to think of the leaps as a substitution of the fifth finger with the first, instead of thinking that both fingers are leaping through the range of the entire octave in parallel motion.


Example 5.25b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 60.

The ending of “Gnomus” constitutes a rapid passage marked *velocissimo, con tutta forza* (Example 5.26). Technically, this episode is arguably one of the hardest from the entire cycle. A fine performance of this passage would require superior independence
and clarity of fingers, and rhythmic command of fingertip *non-legato*. In addition, it is suggested to establish any possible patterns or turns in this passage in order to create points where a pianist can concentrate his or her attention. For example, a performer can observe that the first three notes in each measure follow a particular pattern of moving in the same or opposite direction in both hands. Finding logical figurations in every measure that make both hands do a single task will help memorize the passage, as well as organize fingering stability and visual control. Alternative fingering for this passage is illustrated below.


\[ \text{Example 5.26. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, I. Gnomus, mm. 93-98.} \]

**Promenade (II)** (*Moderato commodo assai e con delicatezza*),

The next movement of the cycle is the second Promenade, which is marked by a peaceful and tranquil tone. It ends on an E-flat Major chord in first inversion (the enharmonic equivalent of D-sharp Major), harmonically connecting it to the next movement “Il Vecchio Castello,” as the dominant of G-sharp minor (Examples 5.27a and 5.27b). This kind of harmonic interdependence implies a dramaturgical connection between the two movements. In addition to its harmonic preparation for “Il Vecchio

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\[98\] The fingering option marked in blue is suggested by pianist Tian Ying.
Castello,” this Promenade plays the role of an atmospheric and acoustical introduction to the next movement. Rather than treating it as a separate entity, the pianist is encouraged to interpret this Promenade as an arch that connects the two pictures, not only structurally, but also expressively. Therefore, the approach to the tempo and tone should correspond to the mood of the subsequent movement. For example, the pianist may choose to incorporate longer, delayed pedals, thus creating and echoing type of sonority, similar to that one in the next picture.

Example 5.27a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (II), mm. 11-12.
Example 5.27b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 1-3.

The harmonization of the melodic line in the second Promenade largely features parallel chords in first inversion (Example 5.27a). This type of polyphonic texture was widely used by early Renaissance composers such as Guillaume Dufay and John Dunstable. This simple technique of harmonization, also called *faburden* (in French: “Fauxbourdon”), involves a principal melodic line (*Cantus firmus*) accompanied by two other voices, moving in parallel a fourth and a sixth below.

**Performance aspect**

Taking into consideration the singing quality of the movement, it is absolutely necessary to perform the right hand’s chordal texture with maximum flexibility and
fluidity. In order to achieve the desired *legatissimo*, careful choice of individual fingering for each chord is highly important. It is suggested to minimize the use of the same fingers moving from one chord to another as it will create small gaps in voicing. Another suggestion is to avoid fully relying on a pedal *legato*, and physically hold every chord as long as possible before moving to the next one. Finger substitutions are suggested (5\(^{th}\) to 4\(^{th}\) and vice versa) to help lead the top melodic line within the chordal texture. At the same time, the long accented notes in measures 9 – 12 (Example 5.28), played against the main theme, imply a sound imagery of ringing bells and therefore, ought to be performed as a contrapuntal independent line, rather than as part of the melody’s harmonic structure.

Example 5.28. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (II), mm. 9-12.

II. Il Vecchio Castello (*Andantino molto cantabile e con dolore*)
(From Italian: “The Old Castle”)

In his comments, Stasov indicated that Hartmann’s picture illustrated a medieval castle in front of which a troubadour is singing.\(^99\) While the composer assigned the title for this movement in Italian, there is no registered information that the castle from Hartmann’s painting reflected features of Italian architecture. However, Mussorgsky’s

\(^{99}\) Russ, 37.
musical representation of this picture is based entirely on a Sicilian rhythmic figuration (below). 100

![Sicilian Rhythmic Figuration](image)

Although the texture in “Il Vecchio Castello” is homophonic, it is comprised of three clearly divided layers, where the melodic line plays the principal role and is accompanied by two secondary voices: a pedal point on tonic in the bass, and an independent melodic line in the middle voice.

Due to its resemblance to an accompanied vocal piece and its folkloric nature, this movement can be structurally analyzed as a song with alternating refrains and strophes of irregular lengths. An illustration of the movement’s structure is represented in table 5.1.

| Table 5.1. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, formal structure. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| section | Intro | Refrain A | Refrain A | Strophe A | Strophe A’ | Refrain B | Strophe B | Refrain B’ | Strophe B’ | Strophe A” | Refrain C | Coda |
| mm. no. | 1-7 | 8-18 | 19-28 | 29-37 | 38-45 | 46-54 | 55-69 | 70-73 | 74-86 | 87-94 | 95-100 | 102-107 |

It should be noted that one year after completing *Pictures*, Mussorgsky used a similar type of serenade, with even greater expression, in the second movement (II. Serenade) from his song cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*. There is an apparent melodic

100 Russ, 37.
and rhythmic similarity between “Serenade” and “Il Vecchio Castello.” Examples 5.29a and 5.29b illustrate the rhythmic resemblance between the two movements.

Example 5.29a. Mussorgsky, *Songs and Dances of Death*, II. Serenade, mm. 34-38.

Example 5.29b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 26-36.

This type of similarity is also observed in the two movements’ setting of an ostinato in the bass (Example 5.30), which serves as foundation for expressive and dissonant harmonies in the top voices.

Even the closing phrases in both cases are very much alike: the vocal part from “Serenade” and the right hand melody from “Il Vecchio Castello.” In both movements, the concluding statement is expressed through a desperate leap in the top voice. Below is an illustration of the two examples (Examples 5.31a and 5.31b).

Example 5.31a. Mussorgsky, *Songs and Dances of Death*, II. Serenade, mm. 106-111.

Example 31b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, II. Il Vecchio Castello, mm. 100-107.
Performance aspect

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the soprano melodic line, which can be associated with a vocal solo, possesses a singing quality. The melody and its accompanying Sicilian rhythmic foundation have to be heard as two independent lines, both being fully expressive but in different ways. In addition to controlling the difference in dynamics, a pianist should pay attention to the color, tone, and depth of the sound he or she would prefer to use for melody versus accompaniment. A successful performance of the melody requires an ability to produce a singing tone based on fingered legato, a skill that allows connecting melodic and chordal textures with practically no pedal. A successful interpretation of the accompanimental line will require a controlled execution consistent in its static dynamic level, as well as its continuous and almost monotonic sustainability.

One way to underline the melody over the accompaniment is to interpret it as a constantly flowing vocalized line, with dynamic growths and points of stresses within its phrasing. In contrast to the latter, the strictly static and directionless accompaniment will provide a great background and counter material for the melody. This task would make the performer face the challenge of complete control and independence of each textural layer, giving each hand individual tasks, as if two different musicians would play two separate parts. In some cases, attempting to synchronize notes that are meant to be played together between the hands could actually mar the overall execution. In order to avoid the latter, it is suggested to treat and shape each hand as separate entities who follow a third party, which in this case is the performer him or herself. This counteraction should create
an organic density between the movement’s various textures, and therefore fulfill the piece with more expressiveness.

Another problem that may most likely occur closer to the end of a pianist’s preparation process is finding a suitable pace for “Il Vecchio Castello.” Out of all, this particular movement can acquire an undesirable monotonic and dragging quality due to its simplicity, length, and repetitiveness. One of the possible solutions for this issue could be careful and logical planning of each phrase’s shape and direction. It is not recommended to shape the melody in a similar way when it is repeated two or more times, even if the first time is a successful one. While staying true to the composer’s markings, all the subtle nuances of the melody—dynamic contours, accents, and timing—should be reinterpreted by the performer at every repetition. In this case, it is suggested to imply different texts to all the repeated melodic episodes and experiment with how interpretation of different words or phrases can affect the melodic shape and its intonation.

**Promenade (III) (Moderato non tanto, pesamente)**

The third Promenade serves as a preparation for the subsequent movement, harmonically and expressively. However, compared to the previous Promenade, this one presents a sudden change of character, which occurs only in its last two measures. It is as if Mussorgsky would suddenly become attracted to another picture, thus interrupting his impression of the previous image, or stop his walk through the exhibition. If this were the case, this is an opportunity for the pianist to create a sudden shift to a completely different character, thus surprising the audience.
This movement’s texture is comprised of two widely spaced imitative parts, with the main theme stated in octaves, against a series of massive chords in the opposite hand. Harmonically, the piece transitions from the key of G-sharp minor, to its relative B major—the key of the next movement, “Tuileries.” Toward its ending, the Promenade’s texture is reduced to unison, on *diminuendo* and *ritardando* (Example 5.32), thus creating an atmosphere of eager expectation for new material. The textural and dynamic changes at the closing of the third Promenade offer the performer the opportunity to use shorter articulation, thus anticipating the entirely different character of the following movement.

Example 5.32. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (III), mm. 3-8.

Performance aspect

Although at a first glance this Promenade does not seem to contain apparent pianistic difficulties, the movement’s texture and setting of registers may present challenges in voicing and shaping the two simultaneously moving layers. There is a possible risk of overwhelming the main melody with the massive sonority of the accompanying chordal part in the right hand. The pianist must not interpret the texture as polyphonic, giving both voices the same importance. The main theme must be clearly
projected at all times throughout the entire Promenade. In addition, it is important to notice that the overall dynamic of the Promenade is only *forte*, and not *fortissimo*. In order to ensure constant awareness of the main theme’s shape, it is suggested to practice playing the melody on an exaggerated and at the same time expressive sonority, while keeping the chordal countermelody extremely soft. Another way to practice the latter is to physically sing the main melody, while playing the accompanying chords with the desired shape and tone quality.

One possible way to interpret the third Promenade’s texture, is to connect the melody and countermelody, as if played on a singing *legato*—an articulation reminiscent of the previous movement. As previously mentioned, such articulation can be achieved by mastering a fingered *legato*, practicing without pedal and using finger substitution. Therefore, the performer will avoid any type of undesired sonorities, not suitable for this particular Promenade: bell effect, accents, or over exaggerated grandeur. In addition, the pianists should mentally anticipate the entrance of every new voice, in order to underline them with a different color, as if representing different orchestral instruments.

**III. Tuileries (Dispute d’enfants après jeux) (Allegro non troppo, capriccioso)**

[From French: “Tuileries (Dispute between children at play)”]

Throughout the vast body of biographical literature on Mussorgsky, we find ample proof that the composer has always loved and was loved by children. Varvara Stasova-Komarova, Dmitri Stasov’s daughter, recalled:

“He came into our child life as ‘Musoryanin’ as our elders called him and as we children began to call him deciding that this must be his real name… he wasn’t hypocritical with us and never talked to us in that false way that grown-up people who are friends of the family usually talk to children… [he] always kissed our
hand as if we were grown-up ladies, saying ‘Good day, young lady’ or ‘your hand, young lady’- strange and astonishing it seemed to us, and amusing, so we came to talk with him quite freely, as with an equal.”

The composer’s interest in child-related themes is reflected in several of his compositions: two miniature piano pieces I. Nanny and I and II. The First Punishment from Memories of Childhood (1865), Ein Kinderscherz (German: “A Child’s Joke,” 1859), and a playful scherzo Impromptu Passionne (1859). As mentioned in previous chapter, according to Cui, Mussorgsky’s greatest depiction of a child’s world and one of his best compositions is the song cycle The Nursery (1868-1872)—a series of five pieces that show the composer’s mastery of declamation through music.

According to Stasov, Hartmann’s painting illustrated an avenue in the garden of the Tuileries, with a swarm of children and nurses. Since the picture is now lost, it is unclear whether it depicted the gardens, or the children as the primary focus. Michael Russ suggests that the children in Hartmann’s painting were only a detail within the picture. Thus, Mussorgsky’s “Tuileries” is a reinterpretation of the original, which places emphasis on what drew his attention the most. Alfred Schnittke wrote about the incredibly bright imagery of the “Tuileries:”

“The acting personages within this miniature become suddenly individualized by Mussorgsky. The nannies’ deeply affectionate voices and their persuasive intonations in alternation with the children’s lively play are heard throughout the entire movement. The movement’s outer sections involve a combination of persistent pleads, gentle complaints and children’s cries.”

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101 Leyda and Bertensson, 133-134.
102 Calvocoressi, 204.
103 Russ, 38.
104 Schnittke, 334.
Structurally, “Tuileries” can be treated as a scherzo—a rounded binary AA'BA'' form with asymmetrical lengths for each section (Table 5.2). The movement is comprised of two motifs: the children’s motif (Example 5.33) and the nanny’s motif (Example 5.34). The first motif is defined by a playful character, represented by short chordal replicas followed by a series of staccato sixteenth-note passages in right hand. According to Rosa Newmarch, author of various books on Russian music, this motif might have been inspired by the children’s calling “Nyanya, nyanya!” (From Russian: “Nanny, Nanny!”).105 All the A sections of the piece are entirely built on this theme, presented in different harmonic variations. The second motif is stated only in the B section and is characterized by a more melodic and lyrical tone. Here, the children’s motif appears only partially in measure 15, as if interrupting the nanny’s call.

Table 5.2. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, III. Tuileries, formal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section A’</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-7</td>
<td>mm. 8-13</td>
<td>mm. 14-22</td>
<td>mm. 23-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s motif</td>
<td>Children’s motif</td>
<td>Nanny’s motif</td>
<td>Children’s motif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Major- C# Major</td>
<td>A Major-B Major</td>
<td>D# minor-G Major</td>
<td>A major-Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


105 Brown, 237.
The aim of realistically conveying the diversity and flexibility of the human voice undoubtedly inspired the composer to use interesting and unexpected harmonic progressions, especially within the middle section of the movement (Example 5.34). The sudden changes of harmony and articulation require quick physical reaction, and emotional sensitivity to the movement’s constantly changing musical events.


Performance aspect

From a pianistic standpoint, “Tuileries” is one of the most technically challenging movements out of all in the suite. The brisk shifts of slurred chords combined with fast passages on *staccato*, both in the right hand, represent the movement’s main technical challenge. If approached incorrectly, this technical task can potentially be physically harmful. Therefore, a pianist seeking a successful result and a productive way of
practicing should be very careful and patient in choosing the right method and amount of practice time. The difficulty of this kind of technique is that it forces the hand to simultaneously perform two different tasks, being at the same time in a very unnatural, uncomfortable, and extended hand position. All pianistic challenges that require one hand to do two or more actions simultaneously involve physical stress and need to be carefully thought of before and while actively practicing.

In the case of “Tuileries,” the wide hand position, a fast tempo, and the constant change of articulation make the material especially difficult, technically and physically. It is recommended to use the composer’s dynamic markings as an opportunity to overcome technical challenges, as well as to create a suitable character for this lively, light movement. Even though the sixteenth-note line requires a clear and detached articulation, it does not necessarily have to be overly dry and sharp. Therefore, a pianist may experiment with lightening up the fingers to the point when the passage is still clearly projected, but not accented or underlined in any way (Example 5.35). In order to find the most comfortable way of executing the lightened *staccato* articulation, the pianist may consider a couple of approaches. One way is to compare the short attacks to the plucking of strings with the smallest possible finger motion, whenever the fingers are not in actual contact with the key. Another way of producing the desired articulation is to ensure that the fingers do not stay on the keys longer than actually needed to produce the sound. In order to further simplify the task, a pianist should eliminate any possible habitual processes such as making a *crescendo* or play the slurred chords too heavily and too connected. In order to release the tension for the right hand top fingers and achieve an absolutely even and steady *staccato* sixteenth-note run (Example 5.35, mm. 2), the
second of the two slurred chords or intervals can be treated as shorter than a full eight note. The only rhythmical stress that is suggested should be executed on the first beat, as if placing all the weight at the beginning and releasing the tension throughout the rest of the measure. It is important to use the adjacent measures with only chordal texture as relaxing points (Example 5.35, mm. 1 and 3), accumulating the energy and concentration of the entire hand for the next challenging episodes.

Example 5.35. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, III. Tuileries, mm. 1–3.

Many *staccato* passages in the right hand within this movement have to be played by the fourth and fifth fingers. In order to accurately execute the prevailing *staccato* articulation, it is necessary to find the correct length for each note in the passage. Playing the notes with an extremely sharp touch at a fast speed will be a tremendously difficult task, if not impossible. At the same time, overly connected runs will not satisfy the movement’s character, and the piece will lose its capricious and scherzo-like qualities. It is necessary to find an approach that will provide a sharp enough sound, and will be obviously contrasting from the more *legato* material. At the same time, it should not be played with an extremely short articulation that might create unsolvable challenges for the performer. In the first place, instead of aiming for an exaggerated virtuosity, it is suggested to consider the original tempo marking—*Allegretto non troppo, capriccioso*—which implies a moderately fast tempo, emphasized by the composer as *non troppo* (from
Italian: “not too [fast]”). A performer may achieve a good, polished result in all aspects of this movement at a certain tempo, which will vary from one performer to another. Therefore, ineffective attempts to go faster than one’s possibilities allow, may subside all successful outcomes and even result in a hand injury. Alternative fingering for some of the more difficult passages in this movement is illustrated in Example 5.36.

Example 5.36. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, III. Tuileries, mm. 6, 8, 20.

“Tuileries” ends on a quiet and playful note and is followed (*attaca*) by the immensely contrasting and massive “Bydlo.”

**IV. Bydlo (Sempre moderato, pesante)**
(From Polish: “Cattle”)

According to Stasov, Hartmann’s painting illustrated a Polish peasant wagon on enormous wheels, harnessed by oxen, producing noise and blast. “Bydlo” represents another great example of the composer’s creative approach in musically conveying the image described by Stasov. Texture, dynamic, and overall sonority in “Bydlo” are specifically chosen to depict motion through music, and in this case—the lumbering ox-cart from Hartmann’s painting.

The meaning of Mussorgsky’s remarks to Stasov regarding this particular picture remains a mystery: “Right between the eyes ‘Sandomirzsko bydlo’ (*le télégue*) [from
French: “the cart”] it stands to reason that le télègue isn’t named, but this then is between us.”\textsuperscript{106} It is certain, however, that the composer’s words “right between the eyes ‘Sandomirzsko bydlo’” implies the sudden appearance of Bydło (in both Polish and Russian means “cattle”), which is supported by the composer’s original $ff$ marking at the very opening of the movement. The latter is in direct contrast to Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s 1886 edition of Pictures, where the $ff$ is replaced by $pp$ followed by a gradual crescendo, reaching the desired $ff$ only toward the end of the movement. Compared to Mussorgsky’s original intentions, Rimsky-Korsakov’s choice of dynamics implies a different interpretation of the picture—one of a cart gradually approaching from distance. Therefore, it is highly recommended for a pianist to make a careful choice of the score’s editions, since even a minor alteration of dynamics or articulation can drastically change the composer’s original intention, and therefore, relay a completely different musical image.

The melody in Mussorgsky’s “Bydło” resembles a song which seems to express pain and sorrow, in a dramatic and at times ferocious way. According to Emiliya Frid, editor of the score’s facsimile edition, the movement’s main tune contains “not so much Polish as Ukrainian features.”\textsuperscript{107} This is perhaps due to the two regions’ territorial overlap over centuries, which directly influenced the intermingling of their traditions and cultural values. Of course, the piece can be directly interpreted as depicting the poor animal, suffering the pain of dragging a heavy cart. From a different perspective, the tragic character and tension of the piece might imply a symbolism of “Bydło” as

\textsuperscript{106} Russ, 40.

\textsuperscript{107} Brown, 237.
representing the Polish people in general, and the way they were treated by the Russophiles during that time.

Structurally, the movement is set in a ternary form ABA' (Table 5.3). Its texture consists of a grieving melody in the right hand, over a thick, slow ostinato in the low register of the piano, consisting of chords moving in minor thirds (Example 5.37).

Table 5.3. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydło, formal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-20</td>
<td>mm. 21-37</td>
<td>mm. 38-64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme stated twice, with varied endings</th>
<th>New, developmental material</th>
<th>Main theme, amplified to octaves, and in a higher register</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G-sharp minor</td>
<td>A Major (unprepared, Neapolitan of the original key)</td>
<td>G-sharp minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 5.37. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydło, mm. 1.5.

Despite its repetitive nature, rather short length, and a general lack of melodic and harmonic contrasts, “Bydło” involves a powerful climax which begins in the measures leading to the restatement of the A section (Example 5.38). The movement’s last section—*sempre pesante e poco allargando, con tutta forza*—is one of the most powerful, and emotionally poignant episodes from the entire suite. This time, played in a slower tempo and maximum power (*con tutta forza*), the main melody is amplified by octaves in a higher register, while the bass line is altered from only two, to four ascending chords (Example 5.39a and 5.39b). The ascending motion of the bass line in measures 42
and 43 creates an impression of increased struggle and tension. The movement’s ending presents fragments of the main theme on \(p\) and \(pp\), gradually fading away (perdendosi), over the ostinato reduced to a single line in the last two measures.

Example 5.38. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydlo, mm. 35-38.

Example 5.39a. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IV. Bydlo, mm. 5-6.  

**Performance aspect**

When it comes to interpreting and practicing this movement, there are a few observations that a performer is encouraged to consider. One of them is the risk of playing the piece with an overwhelming force, exaggerating the dynamics and overpowering the approach to sound production. The heaviness and width of the texture together with the tragic and at times desperate character of the melody can, undesirably, easily be transformed into a noisy and overly aggressive musical event. At the same time, making this particular movement in any way “attractive,” by gently shaping the phrases
and using a warmer tone reminiscent to that of the Romantic pianistic traditions, is not appropriate either.

While practicing, any accents that may occur within the melodic line as well as the accompanying layer should be eliminated. With the exception of a few sforzandi in measures 35-37, throughout the entire movement, both lines are marked only with tenuti and legato indications. A pianist is encouraged to experiment with finding the difference between unwanted harsh, accented sound, and a more weighty connected tone on tenuto and a fortissimo dynamic. Another challenge in this movement is to find a pace and dynamic stability that are as even and continuous as possible. From an allegorical perspective, the pace in “Bydło” can be compared to the process of raking the soil, rather than walking through dirt or snow. It should move slowly, heavily, and evenly. A performer is encouraged to listen carefully and notice if any of the chords in the melody or the accompaniment are articulated in a different way, standing out from the rest of the texture. By aurally eliminating the uneveness of sound at first, a pianist will acquire better physical control of the keyboard, and the ability to evenly distribute the weight for each hand. Therefore, the risk of playing a note or chord too loud or too soft will diminish.

Promenade (IV) (Tranquillo)

Generally, this Promenade’s carachter can be interpreted as an emotional reaction to the atmosphere of the antecedent movement. It represents one of the breaking points in the entire suite. This is the first time that the Promenade’s main theme is stated in a minor key, thus reflecting contemplative intonations of sorrow. Each one of its phrases ends on
the dominant, without a resolution (Example 5.40a and 5.40b), thus creating the impression of an unanswered question. In addition to its wondering and melancholic character, the movement presents a great harmonic contrast to the preceding movement by switching from the key of G-sharp minor (in “Bydło”) to the new, entirely foreign—D minor (a tritone apart from G-sharp).


Example 5.40b. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (IV), mm. 3-4.

Compared to its previous versions, this Promenade incorporates inverted segments of the main theme, based on tritones, as seen in measures 5 through 8. (Example 5.41).

Example 5.41. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (IV), mm. 5-6.
In contrast to the previous Promenade (III), where the ending gradually prepares the image of the next movement, the closing of the fourth Promenade incorporates a musical quotation from the ensuing “Ballet of Unhatched Chicks” (Example 5.42). Thus, instead of being gradually approached by the composer, it is as if the picture itself interrupts his walk, intruding the Promenade.

Example 5.42. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Promenade (IV), mm. 8-10.

V. *Balet nevylupivshikhsya ptentsov* (*Scherzino vivo, leggiero*)
(From Russian: “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks”)

Illustration 5.2. Victor Hartmann, Canary Chicks in their Shells, a costume sketch for Gerber’s ballet Trilbi. Watercolour, 17.6×25.3 cm.\(^{108}\)

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\(^{108}\) Russ, Plate 1.
Stasov described the painting that inspired Mussorgsky’s “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks” as Hartmann’s design of the costumes for the staging of the ballet Trilbi at the Maryinsky Theater, St. Petersburg. The cast included a number of boys and girls from the theatre school. Some of them were dressed as canaries, and others as eggs. The ballet was based on Charles Nodier’s “Trilby or the Elf of Argyle” story, coreographed by Marius Petipa on music by Julius Gerber.

Mussorgsky chose to depict Hartmann’s illustration through a charming and brilliant scherzino. Yet again, the composer proved his absolute mastery at portraying real life images through music: the chicks’ clumsy first steps into the world, their chirps, and flapping of wings. This movement is written in a ternary ABA form with a short coda, and with the B section labeled as Trio (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, formal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B (Trio)</th>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-22</td>
<td>mm. 23-38</td>
<td>mm. 1-22</td>
<td>mm. 39-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>F Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to the previous movements, where each section and their comprising phrases varies in length, the “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks” follows a strict ABA format, with perfectly symmetrical four-measure phrases. Despite its transparency and apparent structural simplicity, the movement contains an intriguing harmonic palette, thus creating a thrilling musical image of the original picture.

The A section consists of two melodic ideas, four bars each (Example 5.43 and 5.44). The two themes are stated twice, in alteration. While the first segment stays the

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109 Ibid, 41.
same in both length and melodic content in its repetition (mm. 9-12), the second one is restated on a higher pitch level and is extended by four measures. Its extension leads to the climax of the piece—an acutely accented D-flat in the higher register. The note is marked with a fermata and a $f$—the only such dynamic in this movement (mm. 21).

Generally, the A section contains an abundance of grace notes, which precede almost every chord or interval within this episode. The first theme is exclusively comprised of chordal texture, played in a *martelatto* manner.

Example 5.43. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 1-4.

The second phrase consists of a series of ascending minor and major thirds played on the weak beats by the right hand, over an ascending line in the left hand.

Example 5.44. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 5-8.

Similarly to the A section, the middle Trio presents two melodic ideas, each of them eight measures long (Example 5.45 and 5.46), both being marked with a repeat sign. The texture in this episode is particularly captivating. The first melodic segment (mm.
23-30) consists of five independent layers which, played together on \textit{ppp}, create an enchanting musical image of the chicks trying their wings for the first time. The right hand plays the top two layers: an uninterrupted trill on various pitch levels, accompanied by the second layer, a third or a fourth below. The left hand includes two ostinato lines on the tonic F in the outer voices, and a melodic line in the middle voice (Example 5.45).

Example 5.45. Mussorgsky, \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition}, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 23-30.

The second half of the Trio (Example 5.46) reinstates the grace notes, which, this time, approach the down beats from larger intervals: M3, m6, P4. The texture is reduced to three layers: a playful and capricious line in the right hand, comprised of a series of three-note melodic segments; an ostinato on the tonic F, played on the weak beats in the top voice of the left hand; and an independent melodic line in the lower voice.
Example 5.46. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 31-38.

**Performance aspect**

A fine performance of this movement can be achieved by developing ease, clarity and flexibility of touch within the texture of quickly changing chords. First of all, while practicing this movement, the performer is urged to carefully observe its tempo and articulation markings. An accurate interpretation of the composer’s indications will greatly impact the entire practicing process as well as the quality of the final performance. It is recommended to treat the *vivo, leggero* as a connotation of the musical character, rather than that of the movement’s tempo. The choice of tempo for this piece will also depend on the performer’s observation of the complete absence of *staccato* markings throughout the movement. The fact that the composer did not include short articulations, despite the *leggiero* and *scherzino* indications, implies a technical approach to sound production that will not allow a pianist to play the movement too fast. This is, of course, if the performer approaches the music score accurately, and is not seeking the simplest and fastest way to interpret the piece. A more connected or *non-legato* articulation will require more time for the fingers to stay on each chord, thus dictating the
pace of the music. An articulation that is too short is a sign of playing the movement too quickly.

A successful execution of the movement’s frequent grace notes depends on the pianist’s mastery of independence between the fourth and fifth fingers. At the same time, the grace notes should be approached and thought of as being part of the subsequent chords. Accordingly, even before playing the grace notes, the hand should be placed in the position of the chord. Mentally and visually, the latter will reduce a number of leaps. For example, the texture in the right hand involves two kinds of hand motions: one that moves from a grace note to the ensuing chord, and the other—from the chord to the next grace note. If this figuration (grace note and the following chord) is perceived as a single entity played as a broken chord, then the number of hand motions will be reduced by a half.

One of the technical challenges within this texture is found on the third and fourth beats of the second measure, where the right hand plays two consecutive leaping chords, with a grace note preceding the second one (Example 5.47). There are two possible ways to solve this technical issue. One way is to play the first chord with fingers one, two, and three, while anticipating the ensuing hand position and placing the fifth finger on the grace note D (without actually pressing the key). Thus, the D-flat major chord on beat three can be released sooner, and the same fingers (1, 2, and 3) used for the next chord (beat four), after playing the grace note D. The second way is to play the lower note of the chord (D-flat) with the left hand and use fingers one and three for the F and A-flat in the right hand (Example 5.47).
Example 5.47. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, V. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, mm. 2.

A sound of special beauty is produced by the trills in the movement’s middle section—Trio. The challenge in performing this texture is transitioning from one trill to another, where accents must be avoided. The technical difficulty is greatly amplified by the composer’s marking of triple $p$. The extremely soft dynamic together with the absence of accents leave the pianist very limited options of how to handle the episode. It is recommended to begin practicing the trills in a slower tempo, establishing a precise number of notes for each trill (e.g. eight notes per measure). While playing the trills in this manner, the pianist should ensure that at every change of pitch, the trill does not accelerate, increase in sound, or lose stability. As much as possible, the right hand should maintain eveness and rhythmic steadiness, in order to avoid undesired accents and discontinuity when playing this passage at faster tempos in performance situations outside of the practice room. Another way to technically facilitate this episode is to release the sustained lower notes in the right hand slightly before leaping to the next trill. This may help eliminate any accents especially in cases of moving from one finger to the same one.

In addition to the technical recommendation mentioned above, to add extra velocity and smoothness to the entire section, it is suggested to use a more delayed pedal,
changing it slightly after the strong beat. There are two reasons that validate this type of pedaling: one is that pedal, in general, lightens the action of the instrument and thus facilitates execution; the second reason the delay is useful is because the accumulated sonority by the addition of pedal compensates for the slight accent by the change of hand position. This type of pedaling approach might surprisingly help the pianist acquire better control of this type of texture and perform the movement with more physical ease.

VI. “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuýle”
(Andante. Grave-energico – Andantino – Andante. Grave)

Illustration 5.3a. Victor Hartmann, A Rich Jew in a Fur Hat. Pencil, sepia, lacquer, 25.6×19.9 cm.

Illustration 5.3b. Victor Hartmann, A Poor Jew. Pencil, watercolor, 14×10.5 cm.

Hartmann created the two portraits while traveling in Sandomir, a small town in Poland. The illustrations of the two Jewish men seem to represent two opposite social classes: one is rich, confident, imposing, and well composed, while the other seems to be
poor, fragile, and enfeebled. Mussorgsky was particularly fond of the two drawings and received them as a gift from Hartmann.¹¹⁰

This movement makes special emphasis on Mussorgsky’s skills as a composer-dramatist. Undoubtedly, the composer’s long experience in the field on musical theater and his exceptional ability to design bright musical impersonations of real life characters have helped him create the unique images within “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuýle.”

Structurally, the piece is divided into three sections: ABC (juxtaposition of A and B) with a coda (Table 5.5). The movement’s formal organization is specifically designed to depict a dispute between the two characters.

Table 5.5. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuýle, formal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section C (A+B)</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-8</td>
<td>mm. 9-14</td>
<td>mm. 15-21</td>
<td>mm. 22-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Goldenberg monologue</td>
<td>Schmuýle monologue</td>
<td>Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuýle dialogue</td>
<td>Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuýle dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-flat minor</td>
<td>D-flat minor</td>
<td>B-flat minor/D-flat minor</td>
<td>B-flat minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first section introduces Samuel Goldenberg’s monologue, marked *Andante Grave-energico* (Example 5.48). In order to convey the man’s imposing speech, Mussorgsky uses short melodic ideas, separated by rests of varied durations. The texture is comprised exclusively of unison, played an octave apart by the two hands. The overall dynamic of the section is *f*, accompanied by extremely precise articulation markings. In order to emphasize the climactic points of the character’s declamatory talk, the composer incorporates *tenuti, sforzandi, crescendo, and diminuendo* markings. Harmonically, the

section is based on the B-flat harmonic minor scale with a raised fourth degree (E natural). Thus, the scale incorporates two augmented seconds: D-flat – E, and G-flat – A. The latter alteration of the original scale is incorporated to underline the Middle Eastern flavor of the Jewish folk music.\textsuperscript{111} Overall, Samuel Goldenberg’s loud and slow speech possesses an air of arrogance, resembling a rhetoric that shows no need for a response, rather than a friendly dialogue between two people.

Example 5.48. Mussorgsky, \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition}, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuîyle, mm. 1-2

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example.png}
\end{center}

The B section introduces Schmuîyle’s theme (Example 5.49), in complete contrast to that of Samuel Goldenberg. The episode is marked \textit{Andantino}—a slightly faster tempo than the first section’s \textit{Andante Grave}. The poor man’s phrases are defined by pleading and almost weeping intonations. Compared to Goldenberg, Schmuîyle’s melody is continuous, lacking rests entirely. The texture in this episode is comprised of four layers: the top voice presents a series of fast repetitions on descending pitches, embellished with grace notes and mordents; the middle two voices move in parallel thirds, creating a simple and sorrowful melody; the lowest voice is a pedal point on D-flat. Harmonically, the section shifts to the unusual key of D-flat minor.

\textsuperscript{111} Evgeny Trembovelsky, \textit{The style of Musorgsky: Mode, Harmony, Structure}. (Moscow: Composer Press, 1999), 185.
Samuel Goldenberg and SchmuYLE’s dramatic dispute is developed in the movement’s third section, marked *Andante, Grave* (Example 5.50). Texturally, this episode is based on the juxtaposition of the two characters’ individual themes, presented in the preceding sections. SchmuYLE continues his pleading intonations in the higher register of the piano, this time stated in octaves. Every strong beat in the right hand is marked by an acute accent, thus creating an effect of increased intensity and tension between the two men. Samuel Goldenberg’s theme retains its self-assured and vigorous character. In this section, his voice acquires a more furious tone through longer phrases, the presence of more *sforzandi*, and its setting in a lower register. It is worth noting the unique harmonic organization of this episode. Both characters maintain their own key: rich man—B-flat minor, and the poor man—D-flat minor. Through this kind of clashing bitonality, the composer creates an amplified sense of argument and anger between the protagonists. The last chord of the section, an accented augmented triad (D-flat – F – A), symbolizes the characters’ failure to reach a compromise.
Example 5.50. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuŷle, mm. 15-16.

An expressive, laconic and sorrowful coda (Example 5.51) is introduced after a long moment of silence, marked by a rest and a fermata. It is comprised of two short phrases, melodious and hopeless. Samuel Goldenberg concludes the piece with two powerful statements, symbolically implying the sad truth of life that the wealthy will always dominate the poor.

Example 5.51. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuŷle, mm. 22-25.

**Performance Aspect**

This movement presents a number of interpretational challenges which should be carefully approached and practiced by the performer as meticulously as any technically difficult passages. Pianists who might consider this movement, or at least its A section,
simple enough technically, may find it unnecessary to spend much time working on its actual challenges, or even overlooking them altogether.

Although the first section is entirely stated in unison and written as a *quasi-recitative*, the performer should avoid treating the melodic material in a completely free, *rubato*-filled manner. The section’s complex combinations of rests and diverse note values may lead the performer to think that freedom of interpretation is implied. However, the episode is organized in an extremely precise metrical way for a specific purpose, as if wanting to micro manage the exact inflections of the protagonists’ voices. In order to recreate Mussorgsky’s vision of this particular picture, the pianist must approach the score truthfully and follow every single one of the composer’s rhythmic indications, avoiding alteration or addition of time.

One of the difficulties in this section is balancing the unison in such a way that the dynamic level and articulation are perfectly voiced and precisely synchronized into a single, unified melodic line. In order to articulate, release, and project in absolute unanimity, it is recommended to practice using exactly the same approach to sound production between the two hands as much as possible. Additionally, it is suggested to interpret all the thirty-second and sixty-fourth notes as expressively sung melodic notes, rather than as fast pickups, mordents, or embellishments. Therefore, the tempo should be chosen according to the instrument’s projecting possibilities as well as the pianist’s abilities to articulate and “sing” every note at such a high speed. In addition, the performer is urged to shape the movement’s phrases adhering solely to the composer’s dynamic indications, avoiding additional expressive devices (e.g. *crescendo, diminuendo,*
accents, *accelerando, ritenuto*, etc.). The melody should be carried out by a finger *legato* throughout, and must not be released sooner or later than the occurrence of a rest.

The second section introduces a series of technical difficulties as well as a change of approach in sound production. It is suggested to treat the repetitions in the top voice as secondary material which plays the role of coloring the melody stated in the middle voice. The constant accents on the strong beats in the top voice can be slightly projected, as they double the melody, and thus add a special timbral effect to its overall sonority. However, the accents should not be underlined as an individual voice. They are implemented as an expressive device to bring out the characteristic ringing intonations of the Jewish singing.

In some cases, depending on the quality of the instrument at the time of the performance, it is safer to use a single finger for all the repetitions within this section. For instance, the second finger can be used for the five repeated notes, followed by the third finger for the upper neighboring note. Another possibility is to use two fingers simultaneously (in this case fingers one and two) for playing the fast repetitions, moving the hand inward along the key (Example 5.52). The finger substitution technique (seen in most editions of *Pictures*) is possible if the action of the instrument is satisfying for this particular type of technique.
Along with aiming for immaculate precision and absolute response, another possible challenge lies in the extended length of those sections that include repetitions. This may become very tiring for the hand, especially when the repetitions are stated in octaves later in the movement. In order to overcome the latter, it is necessary to find a physically comfortable way to approach this pianistic texture when practicing, which may vary from one pianist to another. Some of the factors that usually cause muscular exhaustion are: overly fast tempo, loud tone production, aggressive sound attack, sudden unprepared moves, and unnecessary adherence to set hand positions and angles. In order to acquire the desirable endurance that will provide a comfortable and controlled performance of the repetitions, a pianist is encouraged to practice considering the latter factors and always be ready to change and adjust his or her physical approach to practicing as soon as tiredness or pain occurs.
Promenade (V) *(Allegro giusto, nel modo russico, poco sostenuto)*

The fifth Promenade is the final one to appear as an independent movement in the cycle. Hereafter, its theme will occur only as an integral part within the texture of the eighth number—“Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum).” This Promenade is almost an identical restatement of the opening one, with a few textural, harmonic, and rhythmic alterations. Generally, the texture here becomes thicker due to the doubling of the main theme (Example 5.53), and an extended bass line placed in a lower register in measures ten and thirteen (Example 5.54).

Example 5.53. Mussorgsky, Promenade (V), mm. 1-2.

![Example 5.53](image)

Example 5.54. Mussorgsky, Promenade (V),

mm. 10, mm.13

![Example 5.54](image)

At the end of the movement, the composer includes an additional measure which sustains B-flat in the top voice, thus creating a pivot note to the next movement (the tonic of the Promenade becomes the dominant of E-flat Major, the home key of “Limoges”). Compared to its first version, the fifth Promenade’s tempo marking omits the *senza allegrezza* indication (From Italian: “without joyfulness”). The latter might imply the
composer’s change of mood and perspective as his journey through the exhibition progresses. Therefore, the two Promenades must be approached and interpreted differently. Although the *poco sostenuto* marking is maintained in both cases, a pianist might choose to play the second one at a slightly faster pace, with a more elevated spirit, thus anticipating the liveliness and vigor of the subsequent movement.

**VII. Limoges. La marché (La grande nouvelle)** (*Allegretto vivo, sempre scherzando*)
[From French: “The Market at Limoges (The Great News)"

Mussorgsky was a highly attentive nature. His visual impressions of surrounding images have always inspired his artistic activities. In his letter to T. A. Kyun, Mussorsky wrote: “I was observing women and men—extracted some appealing features… It will all be useful, but the women—simply a treasure. It is always the same for me: I would observe some cultures, and then, on the first occasion, adorn. It is so much fun!”

Stasov described Hartmann’s illustration: “Old women quarrelling at the fair in Limoges [a city in west-central France].” Although the painting is now lost, Mussorgsky himself gives a detailed description of the events depicted in his musical interpretation of the original source. The two notes—both in French—were inscribed in the manuscript by the composer, and later crossed out. The first one, written in a form of a dialogue, reads as follows:

“La grande nouvelle:
Mr. Pimpant de Panta-Pantaléon vient de retrouver sa vache ‘La Fugitive.’
—Oui, ‘Maàme,’ c’était hier.

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113 Brown, 238.
—Non, ‘Maàme,’ c’était avant-hier.
—Eh bien, oui, ‘Maàme,’ la bête rôdait dans le voisinage.
—Eh bien, non ‘Maàme,’ la bête ne rôdait pas du tout
—etc.”

Alfred Frankenstein translated the note:

“The great news:
Monsieur Pimpant de Panta-Pantaléon has just recovered his lost cow ‘The Fugitive.’
—Yes, ‘Maam,’ that was yesterday.
—No, ‘Maam,’ it was the day before yesterday.
—Oh, well, ‘Maam,’ the beast roamed all over the neighborhood.
—Oh, no, Maam, the beast never got loose at all.”

The second, more elaborated note is written as a narrative:

“Mr. de Puissangeout vient de retrouver sa vache ‘La Fugitive.’ Mais le bonnes
dames de Limoges ne sont pas tout à fait d’accord sur cet sujet, parceque Mme de
Remboursac s’est appropriée une belle denture en porcelain, tandis que Mr de
Panta-Pantaléon garde toujours son nez gênant—couleur pivouane.”

Michael Russ translated it as follows:

“The big news: Monsieur de Puissangeout has just recovered his cow ‘The Fugitive.’ But the good wives of Limoges are not interested in this incident
because Madame de Remboursac has acquired very fine porcelain dentures while
Monsieur de Panta-Pantaléon is still troubled by his obtrusive nose which remains
as red as peony.”

“Limoges” is another example of Mussorgsky’s ingenious interpretation of
Hartmann’s design. In this movement, the composer brings the picture to life, creating a
colorful and vivid illustration of the noisy crowd, and a brilliant psychological portrait of

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114 Brown, 238.
115 Frankenstein, Foreword in Paul Lamm, ed., *Pictures at an Exhibition*.
116 Brown, 238.
117 Russ, 45.
the Limoge’s gossippers chattering at the market. The piece represents a scherzo in ternary form (ABA’) with a one-measure introduction and a coda (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, formal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A’</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1</td>
<td>mm. 2-11</td>
<td>mm. 12-26</td>
<td>mm. 27-36</td>
<td>mm. 37-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
<td>D Major</td>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to depict the atmosphere of agitation and excitement, Mussorgsky sets “Limoges” in a *perpetuum mobile*, toccata-like manner. The movement’s texture, which is entirely built on fast moving sixteenth notes, creates a sense of motion and urgency within the gossippers’ overlapping chitchatting. Generally, the piece does not include any moments of rests, even in transitory episodes from one section to another. The only instance of silence within the piece occurs at the end of the A’ section before the coda, where a quarter-note rest is marked with a *fermata* (Example 5.59).

In order to convey the various inflections of the gossippers’ voices, Mussorgsky meticulously marks constantly changing articulations in every measure of the piece, on a dynamic spanning from *mf* to *ff*. The women’s high-pitched voices are relayed through the texture that is set in the middle and high registers, with both hands notated in the treble clef. The perpetual sixteenth notes are mostly played *staccato* or slurred in groups of two, four, six, or eight. The abundance of *sforzando* in “Limoges” plays the role of underlining exclamation points in the women’s shouts and screams (Example 5.55).
From an allegorical perspective, the A section represents the gossipers’ introduction of the great news. The texture here is mostly homophonic, with the accompaniment placed in the left hand, and a lively melodic line played by the right hand. The only elements of dialogue in this section is found in measures six through eight, where altering melodic segments are played by both hands (Example 5.56).

Example 5.56. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 7-8.

The B section is marked by a change of melodic and harmonic material (Example 5.57). The key signature of E-flat major is eliminated, providing a free platform for a series of intriguing harmonic structures. Although its opening and closing measures establish a clear D major, the section presents a number of chromatic modulations, thus creating an increased sense of instability and an atmosphere of chaos and ambiguity.

Example 5.57. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 3-4.
The B section is entirely dedicated to depicting the women’s teasing argument, in a somewhat humorous way. The melodic material here is equally divided in between the two hands, musically conveying the insistent overlapping of the gossippers’ screams and shouts. The fiery argument comes to its peak in measures twenty-five—the only place in the entire movement where the texture is reduced to unison, and the dynamic reaches fortissimo (Example 5.58). The last measure of the section calms the spirits through a descending chromatic line in the left hand on diminuendo, leading to the reinstatement of the A section in its original key of E-flat major.

The adventure at Limoges seems to come to a halt in the last measure of the A’ section (Example 5.59). The gossippers’ exciting debate ends on an insistently repeated dominant chord, leaving an impression of the women’s failure to reach a compromise.
Example 5.59. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VII. Limoges, mm. 36.

![Example 5.59](image)

After a long moment of curious anticipation, the chaos returns in the movement’s closing measures. Although it is marked *meno mosso, sempre capriccioso*, the feeling of excitement in the coda is greatly amplified through shorter note values, *fortissimo* dynamic, and *martellato* texture (Example 5.60). The short episode seems to illustrate the women packing their things and frantically chasing each other out of the market. The piece ends on an ascending chromatic passage, marked *poco accelerando*, colliding into the next movement without preparation (*attacca*).


![Example 5.60](image)

**Performance aspect**

From a technical perspective, this movement is arguably the most challenging of all from the entire suite. Although “Limoges” consists of toccata-like elements and could be interpreted as a virtuosic and percussive composition, a pianist should avoid overstressing this stylistic facet of the movement. An important factor that will determine the level of sophistication and success in performing this piece is the pianist’s careful
analysis and observation of all its musical components that go beyond the obvious technical ones. In other words, the more musical details a pianist will discover before and during the process of preparation, the more choices and possibilities he or she will possess for building the desired interpretation, and eventually, the necessary technique.

There are three factors that make this movement anti-toccata. First, it is the vast number of articulation markings, which demands great flexibility in sound approach, dynamic gradation, and tone quality. The second is its light and capricious character that calls for a constantly changing musical interpretation of the fast repetitive writing. The third factor is the movement’s melodious language. Despite the fact that there are no obvious melodic lines and the texture is not a clear homophonic type that divides it into more and less important layers, there are hidden melodic segments intermingling with the fast and motoric passages of the music.

From a technical perspective, a successful depiction of the intended musical image hinges upon the pianist’s vast arsenal of pianistic skills: wrist staccato, wrist legato, finger non-legato, finger staccato, etc. It is only through immediate changes of articulation in a fast tempo that a pianist can achieve the inferred effect of the various characters’ perpetual chattering in a crowded market. The repeated intervals (predominantly seconds, thirds, and fourths) in the left hand require special attention and polishing, since they constitute the textural foundation of the entire movement. While working on refining such type of technique, it is advisable to organize the repeated intervals in groups of four, in a way placing the arm’s weight on the first sixteenth note, thus avoiding wrist tension for the remaining three notes of the group. It is certain that while practicing this movement, maintaining the arm free of tension by the precise
engagement and release of just the right muscles is one of the key factors for achieving a positive pianistic and therefore artistic result.

A performer should also be aware of the cumulative physical stress that derives from the length of the piece and the perpetual movement that does not allow for muscle relaxation. In order to overcome or at least reduce physical fatigue, it is recommended to adjust the position of the wrist in a way that will minimize the movements when pressing and releasing the keys. In addition, keeping the hands as close as possible to the keyboard and maintaining constant finger contact with the keys will help avoid uncontrolled and incidental motions, and therefore aid performance accuracy. It is also recommended to use the _sf_ and _crescendo_ markings as the only dynamically and rhythmically stressed points, and the only moments where muscle energy is spent intentionally. Without losing the musical energy, the slurred passages should be used as points of muscle relaxation, changing the approach from vertical to horizontal.

It is desirable to articulate certain passages by exclusively using finger action, grouping as many notes as possible within one hand motion. For instance, instead of using two separate wrist motions of going up and down, the passages where two slurred notes are followed by two _staccato_ notes (e.g. mm. 1) can be played with one hand motion with wrist going slightly upward, and at the same time be perfectly articulated. Generally, in “Limoges,” a pianist’s goal should be to relate the difference between the slurred and non-slurred notes, rather than the degree of shortness in _staccato_. A very short _staccato_ requires more energy and a quicker release, and using it in fast tempos is a potential risk for undesired accents, hand tiredness, and rhythmic instability.
Next in Mussorgsky’s suite, amidst the heat of events and sounds, the music suddenly shifts to a completely different world. The agitation stops abruptly, yielding to an image of death and cold fear. Thus begins the next movement—“Catacombae.”

According to Stasov, the painting illustrated Hartmann himself and his friend Vasily Kenel, accompanied by a guide with a lantern.\footnote{Ibid, 45.}

The main textural role in this movement is played by vertical harmony, which is related through long, sustained blocked chords. Schnittke wrote: “The movement lacks a clearly defined melody as expressive means of depicting the reality of the human world and his ethos. It is because the Catacomb’s protagonist is not a human, but an image of Death.”\footnote{Schnittke, 335.} The texture in “Catacombae” is purely atmospheric and captivates the listener through its multiple sound effects, which are created through sustained sonorities, abrupt

\footnote{Russ, Plate 4.}
dynamic changes (from \textit{ff} to \textit{pp} and \textit{sf} to \textit{p}), and unusual, dissonant harmonic shifts.

These elements create a chilling and surreal musical image.

As described by Joel Sheveloff, “Catacombae” is “a unitary form, unfolding like a Baroque prelude reduced to its very essence.”\textsuperscript{121} The movement does not have a clearly defined structure, nor a definite harmonic foundation. The only clues that may unveil a structural and harmonic outline of this movement are the rests in measures eleven, twenty two, and thirty. In essence, the rests divide the movement’s three phrases. Although Mussorgsky did not include key signatures for “Catacombae,” there is an apparent emphasis on G—a note that is present at the beginning of each phrase, always tripled as unison (mm. 2 and mm. 23), or as part of a G major chord (mm. 11) (Example 5.61).

Example 5.61. Mussorgsky, \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition}, VIII. Catacombae.

\begin{align*}
\text{mm. 1-3,} & \quad \text{mm. 11-13,} & \quad \text{mm. 23-25.}
\end{align*}

\textbf{Performance aspect}

The main difficulty in this movement is to acoustically connect all the chords moving from one measure to another without interrupting the sound. In this case, it is recommended to practice the transitions by playing the next chord while sustaining the previous one entirely or partially as much as possible, and releasing the latter slightly

\textsuperscript{121} Sheveloff, 288.
after the new sonority appears. In instances of octave leaps (mm. 1-3, 13-14), it is suggested to sustain at least one note of the octave when connecting it to the next one. When applicable, certain voices of the octaves could be transferred to the other hand (Example 5.62).

Example 5.62. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VIII. Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum), mm. 1-3.

Finger substitution is also encouraged, especially in a slow tempo such as it is in “Catacombae.” The latter will help transition from one chord to another with more ease, thus avoiding disconnection of sound by leaping or stretching the hand (Example 5.63).

Example 5.63. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, VIII. Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum), mm. 23-30.

Another detail in “Catacombae” which should be observed and underlined by the performer is the difference between the chords that are marked with *fermatas* and those that are not. These indications are important clues given by the composer which can significantly influence a pianist’s approach to framing the movement’s pace and phrasing.
structure. In addition to working on phrasing, dynamic, and articulation markings, a performer should pay special attention to pedaling. It is important to find its appropriate length and level of depth that would only color the tone, rather than create echoing and overlapping sonorities. As a tool of connecting moving texture, pedaling is recommended only in those instances where finger legato is impossible.

“Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua” *(Andante non troppo, con lamento)*
(From Latin: “With the Dead in a Dead Language”)

The introspective atmosphere of “Catacombae” somewhat dissipates in the next movement—“Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua.” As previously mentioned in the chapter, Mussorgsky penciled in a remark in the right margin between the two movements: “NB: Latin text: with the dead in a dead language. A Latin text would be a good idea: the creative genius of the late Hartmann leads me to the skulls and invokes them; the skulls begin to glow.”¹²² This phrase is the key to deciphering the meaning behind both movements. Mussorgsky’s attention was drawn to this painting on a more profound, almost surreal level, bringing out the grim side of his inner world. Compared to the rest of the pictures, in this case, instead of watching the illustration from aside, he emotionally becomes part of it. It is perhaps due to the composer’s unceasing sorrow of losing his close friend that he felt connected to this specific image. “Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua” represents his closer attention to the illustration’s lower right corner, where the wall of human skulls is illuminated by the lantern, almost as if bringing them to life.

¹²² Russ, 46.
Texturally, this movement is based on the juxtaposition of the “glowing skulls” motif and the Promenade’s main theme (Example 5.64). The “glowing skulls” motif is represented in the right hand tremolos, played in the high register of the piano. For the second time within the cycle, the Promenade’s melody is written in a minor key, marked con lamento. Despite its mysteriousness and emotional weight, the theme seems to convey warmth and sincerity. The movement gradually transitions from the key of B minor to its parallel B major, symbolically conveying a sentiment of optimism and hope for life after death.

Example 5.64. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, *Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua*, mm. 1-3.

**Performance aspect**

Despite its slow tempo and rather short length, “Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua” possesses three substantial pianistic challenges, which will be addressed in the subsequent paragraphs. In order to successfully deliver the movement’s underlying message, these challenges should be recognized and meticulously practiced. All the technical difficulties within this movement are greatly amplified by the unchanging pianissimo dynamic, since expressive intonation of any type of texture under such circumstances is particularly demanding.
The first challenge is represented by the perpetual octave tremolo in the right hand. Maintaining evenness and continuousness within this textural layer throughout the piece requires great physical control and endurance. The addition of chords within the octaves (in mm. 11-20) makes the task even more challenging. One possible way to overcome this type of technical difficulty involves several stages of practicing. It is suggested to begin the practicing process by rhythmically interpreting the tremolo as strictly measured, playing eight thirty second notes per beat. While doing so, the dynamics, pedaling and tone of sound should not differ from the intended final interpretation. However, the rhythmic precision should be slightly exaggerated for the purpose of clearly hearing every note, and creating a physical habit of stability within the tremolos. When such habit is acquired, the performer is advised to reduce the precision of sound by playing the tremolo with a slower attack, while keeping the even and easy hand motion from one note to the other. Thus, the rhythmic pulsation will be diminished, and the stable vibration and controlled sonority maintained. A pianist should consider playing the tremolos with an “into-the-keys” approach. In order to save time and additional hand motions, it is recommended to never fully lift the fingers from the keys, pressing them from half way down, using the awareness of the escapement point. This technical approach, together with the practice strategy mentioned earlier in this paragraph might help the pianist maintain a satisfying tone and pace of the tremolos, without experiencing physical fatigue.

The second challenge is present within the left hand’s chordal melodic line. A three-voice chorale texture played by the left hand is generally a less often encountered phenomenon in the piano literature and therefore, may not be a common skill in every
pianist’s technical arsenal. The challenge in this case is to thoroughly hear and project each voice within the chords, and deliver every layer as if played by three different instruments, on a warm tone and firm legato. The quality of legato will depend on the pianist’s ability to flexibly move the fingers from one chord to another with the smallest possible amount of gaps within each moving line. While the right hand’s tremolo is closer by its nature to impressionistic sound effects and therefore can rely more on the sustaining pedal, the legato in the chordal melodic line in the left hand should not be achieved by simply using the pedal. There is a significant difference between holding the keys while pedaling, and sustaining the sound on the pedal alone. In order to successfully perform a three-voice chorale texture, a pianist should analyze the positioning of each chord and plan the weight-balancing between each moving finger accordingly. A suggested practice strategy is to underline one of the three voices as a main melody, while playing the other two as an accompaniment. This activity is encouraged to be applied for every one of the three voices. The latter will ensure that each finger develops enough strength and control over the entire melodic line, as well as help identify and adjust its weak points within the melody.

The third challenge is to combine both hands into a unified, balanced, and physically comfortable process, since the texture in each hand involves two entirely different pianistic tasks. A performer should be careful in not letting one of the hands undermine the other in any way, and keep control of both layers without allowing any of them dominate over the other. Both parts require constant mental and physical concentration and if too much attention is given to one of the voices, it is likely that the other will lose its importance and prominence. The previously mentioned suggestion of
practicing hands separately can be applied to any stages of the preparation process, however, when it comes to this particular challenge, it is recommended to practice hands together only, preferably in a slower tempo. In this case, a performer should concentrate on the aspect of collaboration between the two hands (i.e. combining different tasks into a single presentation), rather than their separation (i.e. divide their responsibilities in order to underline the difference and characteristic features of both parts). The latter can be achieved through physical control of the whole body and aural sensitivity and perception of the entire texture. The pianist should closely monitor the practicing process and identify the moments when he or she feels physical discomfort or loses aural concentration over one or both lines. Such moments will most likely occur due to the constant conflicting elements between the two hands, which are represented through contrasts in dynamics, phrasing, sound execution, and melodic direction. The performer will benefit from isolating and investigating these instances, locating the precise type of conflict that causes mental and physical dispersion, and therefore, strengthening the musical outcome.
IX. The Hut on Fowl’s Legs (Baba-Yaga) (*Allegro con brio, feroce*)

Illustration 5.5. Victor Hartmann, Baba-Yaga’s Hut on Hen’s Legs. Sketch for a clock in Russian style. Pencil, 23.5×31.8 cm.123

Stasov described the illustration: “Hartmann’s drawing depicted a clock in the form of Baba-Yaga’s hut on fowls’ legs. Mussorgsky added Baba-Yaga’s flight in a mortar.”124 This movement is another confirmation that Hartmann’s paintings were used by Mussorgsky only as an impulse for embodying his creative genius within a musical work. Inspired by the original concept, he transformed it into a fictional story that depicts through sound one of the most famous personages in Russian folklore—Baba-Yaga. According to Russian musicologists such as Shirinian, Houbov, and Trembovelsky, Mussorgsky’s “Baba-Yaga” does not intend to portray Hartmann’s static sketch of a clock, which by no means connects with the wild and ferocious character of the music.125

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123 Russ, Plate 5.
125 Nagachevskaya, 154.
In this movement, Mussorgsky felt free to musically depict the memories of the tales he so often heard from his beloved “nyanya” as a child. Author W. R. S. Ralston describes Baba-Yaga’s characteristic traits:

“[Baba-Yaga] is generally represented under the form of a hideous woman, very tall in stature, very bony of limb, with an excessively long nose and with disheveled hair. Her nose is sometimes described as being of iron, as also are her long pendent breasts and her strong sharp teeth. As she lies in her hut she often stretches across from one corner to the other, and her nose goes right through the ceiling. Her usual habitation is a cottage which stands on fowls’ legs, that is, on slender supports. The door looks towards the forest, but when the hut is adjured in the right words it turns round, so that its back is towards the forest and its front towards the person addressing it. [...] When the Baba-Yaga goes abroad, she rides in an iron mortar. This she propels with the pestle, a sort of club, and as she goes, she sweeps away the traces of her passage with a broom.”

“Baba-Yaga” is the largest movement from the entire suite and is written in ternary ABA' form (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, formal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Section A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-94</td>
<td>mm. 95-122</td>
<td>mm. 123-211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baba-Yaga’s flight</td>
<td>Baba-Yaga’s magic spells</td>
<td>Baba-Yaga’s flight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The movement’s outer sections remind of the Witches’ Sabbath and resemble elements from the composer’s symphonic poem *Night on Bald Mountain* (Example 5.65). Although it is a work written for orchestra, its piano transcription shows an apparent rhythmic, textural, and melodic similarity to “Baba-Yaga” from *Pictures* (Example 5.66).

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Example 5.65. Mussorgsky, *Night on Bald Mountain*, piano arrangement by Konstantin Chernov, mm. 346-350.

Example 5.66. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 41-47.

The A sections can also be interpreted as depicting Baba-Yaga’s flight on a mortar, as described by Stasov. Generally, the texture here is defined by vertical writing and is largely comprised of octaves and massive chords, frequent leaps and quick changes of registers over the entire keyboard (Example 5.67).

Example 5.67. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 67-63.

In order to depict the witch’s fierce and evil nature, Mussorgsky uses an ingenious rhythmic scheme. The personage’s impatient, angry steps are portrayed through metric
displacement, with an abundance of sf markings, altering between the strong and weak beats (Example 5.68). As previously mentioned, the texture in this movement does not involve clearly defined melodic lines. Similar to “Gnomus,” “Baba-Yaga” is largely comprised of unison texture—doubled, tripled, or quadrupled. For the most part, the music presents a series of smaller or larger sequences. Almost every phrase within this section is either repeated, or stated on a different pitch level. The repetitiveness of the musical material and the constantly growing dynamic create an impression of Baba-Yaga approaching its pray, ready to capture.


Baba-Yaga’s wild dance is vividly illustrated in the middle part of the A section. Her aggressive motions, frantic screams and shouts, and the chaotic atmosphere are relayed through abrupt octave leaps in both hands, ff dynamic, and dissonant harmonies comprised of juxtaposed tritones and diminished chords (Example 5.69).
Baba-Yaga’s frantic activities come to a halt at the end of the A section (mm. 84-94). The transition to the next episode depicts the witch’s sudden shift of attention as she focuses on secretly plotting another evil plan. The B section, quieter and more mysterious, is a musical illustration of the witch’s magic spells. The music relays an atmosphere of frozen languor and an impression of an obscure moment of witchcraft, as if all previous actions are suspended in anticipation of another frightening event.

Texturally, the entire B section is based on two layers: one that is comprised of constantly “sliding” tremolos, played by both hands in alteration; and the second consisting of an enigmatic melodic line stated in octaves in the lower register of the piano. The mysterious sonority is instantly created by the overall $p$ dynamic, the perpetual, chromatically descending tremolo, and the non-legato melodic line which places emphasis on the A-sharp − E tritone at its opening (Example 5.70).
Example 5.70. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 95-98.

In the second half of the B section, while the melody stays mostly the same, with the only addition of two ascending diminished chords in the higher register of the piano, the tremolo is accelerated from sixteenth to sixty-fourth notes, thus amplifying the feeling of danger and fearful anticipation of an evil event (Example 5.71).


The section ends on a gradually descending tremolo in the low register of the piano, finally reaching a triple *pianissimo* on a G augmented triad (Example 5.72). In measures 119 and 120, the tremolo is played against an ascending octave-jump gesture, repeated twice with a very specific dynamic marking of “*f, cresc. sf.*” The latter might be interpreted as depicting the witch’s evil laughter and her acknowledgement that she is finally ready to take action and realize her wicked plan.
Example 5.72. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 117-122.

The movement ends with a powerful octave *martellato* passage which eventually bursts into the first chord of the cycle’s last movement (*attacca*).

**Performance aspect**

This movement is arguably one of the most Impressionistic of all in the suite, as its purely depictive quality reflects compositional intentions directed entirely toward illustrating an image through music. Therefore, it is of great importance for a pianist to become acquainted with Baba-Yaga’s distinctive features. It is worth mentioning that the personage is a historical figure in the world of fairytales; her look, habits, behavior, and other characteristics have not changed from Mussorgsky’s times until present. Knowing all the authentic aspects of Baba-Yaga’s personality will expand the performer’s imaginative possibilities and will lead to a more expressively accurate interpretation of the piece.

One of the potential risks when interpreting this movement is overwhelming the texture with an excess of musical and artistic ideas in an attempt to make the piece sound more expressive and exciting than originally intended. Some of the most common
interpretive missteps could be: to play the movement too fast in order to create a virtuosic climax of the cycle; to organize the structure and pace of the music according to its comprising harmonic or melodic material in order to emphasize the importance of harmony or attempt to find hidden inflections of vocal lines; to use an overly sharp approach to sound production and play entire episodes on *staccato* in order to add more effect and bravura to the movement. These and other examples of misinterpretation of the piece’s textural language and original source of inspiration may turn Mussorgsky’s “Baba-Yaga” into musical material that is much more complicated to prepare and eventually perform than it really is.

From a technical perspective, the wide octave leaps in both hands represent the main difficulty within this movement. Some of the most challenging octave passages occur in the second half of the A sections (Examples 5.73 and 5.74). In order to minimize the difficulty of the leaps seen in example 5.73, it is recommended to divide the four octaves into two groups of two descending fourths. This will help the pianist reduce the number of physical gestures. In most cases, the last octave of the group of four anticipates a wider ascending leap. In order to avoid missing the first note of the next four-note melodic segment, this octave should be released sooner and the hand moved to the next note immediately.

Example 5.73. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga,
The same practicing method can be applied to the passages shown in example 5.74. A possible grouping pattern is illustrated below:

Example 5.74. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, IX. Baba-Yaga, mm. 61-73.

The latter ought to be practiced in a slow tempo for acquiring physical stability and control over the intervals within certain groups of octaves. Eventually, this will aid accuracy and equal projection of each octave in a faster tempo. Generally, it is important to find a hand and wrist position that will allow the performer to play the passages with minimum rigidity and enough freedom and muscle relaxation, otherwise, the hand as well as arm might become tired and less responsive for the rest of the movement.

It is entirely possible for a pianist who is otherwise ready to tackle the difficulties of this piece to not have encountered the octave passages with this level of bravura in other repertoire before. This should not be a reason to not play the piece as there are many effective exercises that can be used to develop good octave technique. An interesting method of mastering this type of technical skill is mentioned in Kasyanenko’s book: “[Emil] Gillels polished his octave technique by playing J. S. Bach’s two part
inventions by doubling each voice.” It is possible that Gillels was inspired by Isidor Phillip’s “Studies in Octaves after J.S. Bach.” An excerpt from Phillip’s book which might be useful for mastering octave figurations found in “Baba-Yaga” is illustrated in Example 5.75.

Example 5.75. Isidor Philipp, *Studies in Octaves after J.S. Bach*, Study No. 6, in A minor, mm. 1-2.

A variety of useful exercises can be found in C. L. Hanon’s collection of exercises *The Virtuoso Pianist* (Examples 5.76a and 5.76b). In order to avoid muscle fatigue and other physical complications, these examples should be approached carefully and slowly.


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127 Lyudmila Kasyanenko, *Работа Пианиста над Фактурой* [A pianist’s mastery of texture], (Kiev: НМАУ, 2003), 47.

Some interesting remarks and suggestions regarding playing octave passages are found in the *Master School of Piano Playing and Virtuosity* (Book V: *Master School of Staccato, Octaves and Chords*) by Alberto Jonás—Spanish virtuoso pianist and one of the most esteemed pedagogues at the beginning of the twentieth century:

“With the wrist-stroke only, one will never acquire real virtuosity in the playing of octaves. Needed, besides, are the so-called ‘arm-stroke’ and the ‘vibration’ octaves, obtained by a rapid vibration of the wrist and arm. [When playing octave passages], the wrist should be held on a level with the keyboard; at times a little lower, but not higher. A wrist held higher than the back of the hand occasions stiffness of wrist and of arm, brings about early fatigue, [and] a hard, inelastic touch. […] It should be remarked, though, that in some cases, to raise the wrists is unavoidable, especially for small hands, and that at times it may even be desirable; for instances, in short chromatic runs in octaves or when slurring octaves. […] As in every other feature of piano playing, attention should be given, when playing octaves, not only to the accuracy of the playing but also to the quality of the tone. Octaves should sound clear, ringing, elastic and without hardness in ff; clear, and bell-like in pp. A rebound of the hand, or of the forearm, accomplished easily and naturally, helps to beautify the tone and promotes ease of execution. Speed comes gradually and is often only the result of nerve power.”

A large part of Jonás’ fifth volume of technical exercises is dedicated to developing octave technique in various contexts, approached from different perspectives. One of the examples extracted from this volume, which would best suit the purpose of

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128 Alberto Jonás, Preface to *Master School of Piano Playing and Virtuosity*, Book V. *Master School of Staccato, Octaves and Chords.*
preparing the octave passages in Mussorgsky’s “Baba-Yaga” is shown in example 5.76.

For this particular exercise, Jonás gives the following indication: “The wide skips make of this feature a difficult performance, which calls for absolute accuracy. […] The arms should remain supple while the hands play back and forth.”

Example 5.77. Alberto Jonás, Master School of Piano Playing and Virtuosity, Book V. *Master School of Staccato, Octaves and Chords, Triads.*

X. The Great Gate of Kiev (*Allegro alla breve. Maestoso. Con grandezza*)

Illustration 5.6. Victor Hartmann, Design for Kiev City Gate: Main Façade. Pencil, watercolor; 42.9×60.8 cm. 

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129 Jonás, 74.

130 Russ, Plate 6.
Hartmann’s “Design for Kiev City Gate” is one of the six paintings created for a competition that aimed to pay tribute to Tsar Alexander II’s escape from assassination in 1866. Despite the fact that the competition was cancelled and the gate was never built, Hartmann’s work received public acclaim and was considered by the architect himself as his finest work. Stasov described the painting:

“Hartmann’s project [The Great Gate of Kiev] turned out to be unusually original; supporting the low arch of the gate are columns which are more than half sunk into the ground, as if they belonged to very ancient times. Crowning the arch is a wide, gigantic, wooden kokoshnik [old Russian woman’s headdress], entirely covered with painted and engraved Russian Patterns. The bell tower… has been arranged with bricks which bear all sorts of ancient Russian figures on the edge and corner. The top of the tower has the appearance of an ancient Slavic pointed war helmet.”

Mussorgsky’s “The Great Gate of Kiev” represents a monumental grand finale of the suite, musically and symbolically. It is a glorification of the Russian national spirit—the country’s social and cultural values through history, its heroes, the people’s faith in God and their devotion to the Tsar. Stasov wrote:

“[The Great Gate of Kiev is] a majestic picture in the manner of ‘Slavysya’ and in the style of Glinka’s Ruslan Music. There is a particularly lovely church motif: ‘As you are baptized in Christ,’ and the ringing bells—are in a completely new style.”

131 Russ, 48.
132 Orlova, Mussorgsky’s Days and Works, 387
133 Nagachevskaya, 164.
134 Russ, 48. “Slavysya” is a chorus from A Life for the Tsar—Mikhail Glinka’s patriotic-heroic tragic opera based on historical events in Russia.
Calvocoressi described the movement: “The Heroes’ Gate of Kiev, which makes an imposing crown to the work, is most Mussorgskian in the middle: the bell effect reminiscent of the “Coronation Scene” in Boris and a passage in the introduction to Khovanshchina.” There is no doubt that many artistic ideas developed by Mussorgsky during the writing of Boris Godunov were later implemented in Pictures. The use of the piano as a percussive instrument was a strikingly innovative phenomenon in the piano literature at that time. The composer’s findings of expressive means to depict the ringing of the bells in the “Great Gate of Kiev” greatly resembles the orchestral interlude to the “Coronation Scene” from Boris Godunov. Examples 5.78, 5.79, and 5.80 demonstrate the similarities in sound effects, registers, articulation, and note values between excerpts from Boris Godunov, Khovanshchina, and “The Great Gate of Kiev.”

Example 5.78. Mussorgsky, Boris Godunov (piano reduction by K. Chernov), Prologue, Scene II, mm. 1-7.

Example 5.79. Mussorgsky, Khovanshchina (piano reduction by K. Chernov), Prelude, mm. 38-44.

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135 Calvocoressi, Mussorgsky, 206.
Example 5.80. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 81-89.

Structurally, the suite's finale can be associated with a rondo form with three main sections (Table 5.8). The movement's first section (mm. 1-80) is based on two themes (A and B—Examples 5.81 and 5.82) stated in alternation. The second section (mm. 81-113) consists of an entirely new material which introduces Mussorgsky’s famous bell motif (theme C—Example 5.83). The third section reinstates the A theme, first time metrically displaced and extended in length (*Meno mosso*, *sempre maestoso*, mm.114-161), and later brought back to its original form in the movement’s triumphant ending (*Grave*, *sempre allargando*, mm. 162-174).

Table 5.8. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, formal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I</th>
<th>Section II</th>
<th>Section III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme A</td>
<td>Theme B</td>
<td>Theme A'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-29</td>
<td>mm. 30-46</td>
<td>mm. 47-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
<td>A-flat minor</td>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jubilant Processional</td>
<td>Church Hymn</td>
<td>Jubilant Processional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 5.81. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 1-6.
Example 5.82. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 30-34.

It is worth noting that in the middle section, the composer incorporates the Promenade’s motif within the texture of the accompaniment (Example 5.84).

Mussorgsky’s own image seen through the joyful sonorities of the bells represents a symbol of his complete and unequivocal devotion to his beloved country and its people.

Example 5.83. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 81-89.

Example 5.84. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 97-104.
The entire musical material in “The Great Gate of Kiev” is defined by folk, church, and bell influences—a feature which directly identifies the movement with Russian nationalism and church music.\textsuperscript{136} In addition to the glorious bell effect presented in its second section, the piece involves two contrasting musical ideas (themes A and B), both laid out through vertical texture. The A theme, which opens and concludes the movement, possesses a particularly majestic quality. The massive and jubilant sonority of this theme can be associated with the sound of a Russian folk tune sung by large masses of people, in a way symbolizing the vitality of the national spirit.

In addition to its wide chordal texture and a generally high dynamic level, the theme’s grandeur is further elevated by its setting in the key of E-flat major. Mussorgsky’s choice of tonality in this case was certainly intentional, since throughout music history E-flat major has been associated with heroism and glory. Among the most noted works in this key—chronologically preceding Mussorgsky’s piano suite—carrying the “heroic” subtitle directly or indirectly, are: Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3, “Eroica” (1804), Piano Concerto No. 5, “Emperor” (1811); Liszt’s Piano Concerto No. 1 (1849), and the Transcendental Etude No. 7, “Eroica” (1851); and Tchaikovsky’s “1812 Overture” (1880).

The second theme, described by Stasov as “a particularly lovely church motif: ‘As you are baptized in Christ,’” is a sorrowful and prayerful theme based on a Russian Orthodox hymn (Example 5.85). This episode differs from the preceding material through a more introspective character, which is relayed through a minor key, a softer dynamic, and its setting in a four-part chorale style. Compared to the opening episode,

\textsuperscript{136} Russ, 55, 75.
which aims to convey the sound and enthusiasm of the masses, the B theme represents the sacred, more spiritual side of each individual.

Example 5.85. Russian Orthodox hymn “As you are baptized in Christ.”

The power of the massive chords and tremendous dynamic escalation toward its ending imbibes the movement with an especially monumental quality. It is an apotheosis of Mussorgsky’s adoration for Russian people, the country’s historical heritage, its traditions, and cultural values. The movement’s concluding episode represents the culmination of the entire cycle (Example 5.86), expressing a triumphant symbol of freedom over suppression, and the power of life over death.

137 Lee, 100.
Example 5.86. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 159-174.

**Performance aspect**

Although “The Great Gate of Kiev” involves obvious technical challenges such as extended octave passages and extremely wide chordal leaps, a performer’s primary task and interpretational goal should be the logical organization of the movement’s overall pace and structure. Due to its length, repetitive melodic material, and fairly uniform textural language, there is a potential risk of producing a performance that is monotone and musically ineffective for the audiences. This type of interpretive error may stem from more than one cause: when a performer may inadvertently overpower the dynamics and exaggerate the tempi in an attempt to add pomposity and grandiosity only to discover the effect is too short lived; and vice versa, when a pianist lacks energy and emotional intensity in the flow of the music.

When approaching the piece for the first time, it is important to carefully analyze its overall structure and clearly see the entire musical picture on a larger scale before
proceeding to practice separate sections or passages. While working on dynamics, sound production, phrasing, and articulation, a pianist should already have a clearly established structural plan of the piece. This movement can be compared to a puzzle which can come together only when all its pieces are put together exclusively in a certain combination. Therefore, the performer should choose the dynamic and tone color for each section in relation to its preceding and following material.

Planning the movement’s dynamic levels and appropriate flow is one of the most significant factors for achieving a successful structural organization and eventually relaying a comprehensive aural experience to the audience. Although the movement lacks dynamic extremes such as $fff$ and $pp$, there are still plenty of opportunities for producing variety in tone color and volume level. Generally, it is recommended to follow the score’s dynamic markings precisely, without differentiating the levels of $p$, $mf$, $f$, or $ff$ from one section to another. For instance, the $ff$ dynamic is used only three times throughout the entire movement (Example 5.87). First time it occurs in measure 64, at the second statement of the B theme; the second time at the beginning of the third section in measure 114; and lastly, in the closing statement of the A theme, in measure 162.

Example 5.87. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mm. 64-65,} & \quad \text{mm. 114-115,} & \quad \text{mm. 162-164.}
\end{align*}
\]
When interpreting the excerpts illustrated above, any pianist’s instinct would be to approach each section in a different way, amplifying the sound, using more (or less) pedal, etc. However, one might overlook the fact that the key role in creating a different acoustical effect is played by the textural changes, and not the dynamic adjustments. In a way, the writing in this movement, and specifically that of the A theme’s variants, can be treated as orchestral variations where new sonorities and effects are already integrated through addition of accompanimental material, thickening of the main melodic texture, expansion of range, and change of rhythm (augmentation or diminution).

As stated in the opening paragraph of this section, the octave scalar passages in measures 47-63 might present a potential technical challenge for some pianists. Although these passages consist of nothing more than just ascending and descending scales, they should be interpreted as a single melodic line played legatissimo, using the scale as a tool to create the effect of a wave, rather than playing it in a precisely rhythmic and percussive manner. As an aid for better connection of the line, it is recommended to use the fourth finger in alternation with the fifth as often as possible. In both descending and ascending directions, it is suitable to use the 1-4 fingers on the black key octaves moving to 1-5 on the white ones.

Another technical challenge is presented in the movement’s second section within the accompanimental texture played in the higher register of the piano against the bell sonority in the left hand (mm. 89-106). This difficulty can be ameliorated by approaching the passages with a specific hand position at each turn of the hand. The feeling of physical discomfort when executing these passages comes primarily in instances when the first finger is positioned on a black key (Example 5.88). In order to reduce the risk of
an inaccurate leap after the turn, it is suggested to move the hand horizontally rather than vertically, as if “plucking” the key with the first finger, anticipating the position for next chord as early as possible.

Example 5.88. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 98-99

The wide chordal leaps in the third section (mm. 114-119, 148-155) present the greatest technical challenge of the movement. There are a few factors that may help overcome this difficulty. First, it is important to observe the episode’s tempo indication—*Meno mosso, sempre maestoso*—which, even in cut time, is slower than most pianists tend to perform it in the heat of emotion. A slightly slower tempo would aid not only accuracy, but also the majestic character of the music, as it will allow sufficient time for both physical and emotional control. From a technical perspective, the grouping approach mentioned in “Baba-Yaga” can be applied to mentally isolate the main melodic notes from the ones of less importance (Example 5.89). The illustration below shows a schematic representation of the section’s melodic pillars and the accompanimental material. Each chord should be approached with a new, vertical, and separate gesture as if beginning a new phrase each time. On the other hand, the additional alternating intervals and octaves should be treated as textural means to maintain sonority and be thought of horizontally rather than vertically.
Example 5.89. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, X. The Great Gate of Kiev, mm. 114-119.
CONCLUSION

Becoming a truly successful, versatile, and competent musician—in the field of both performance and pedagogy—largely depends on one’s ability to approach and interpret a musical composition truthfully, intellectually, and open-mindedly. It is most often the case that pianists with higher musical intelligence and an all-encompassing knowledge in their field are able to transmit the most convincing interpretations and become widely acknowledged figures in the musical world, both as performers and teachers. This professional skill takes years of studying and experience not only in one’s main area of focus, but also in other related musical and historical spheres. In addition to being musically intelligent, an accomplished pianist must exhibit courage for creativity and experimentation with new interpretive ideas and technical approaches. An authentic and sincere interpretation that would capture the audience’s attention requires more than knowing how to play the instrument, possessing brilliant technique, and being familiar with music history. A pianist’s musical curiosity, personal ingenuity, and interpretive originality are the key elements in finding one’s individual artistic voice and creating a distinctive tone when performing such universal works as Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

This essay provides a detailed analytical and performance study for pianists who seek musical, technical, and interpretational recommendations and answers during the process of learning *Pictures at an Exhibition*. But most importantly, this study is an example of a learning approach designated to inspire and stimulate young musicians to become more persuasive and authoritative in their interpretation of any composition. Delving into pianistic texture is certainly one way of gaining insight into any
compositional language, which may bear original source of inspiration all on its own. It is
the author’s hope that this essay will serve as a useful performance guide that will
motivate pianists to work thoroughly and patiently in their artistic journey of becoming
truly convincing and professional performers-interpreters.


