

GARRICK OHLSSON, PIANO

• SERGEI RACHMANINOFF VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF CORELLI, OP. 42 (19:51)

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| 1) Theme (1:11) | 2) Variation - I (:51) |
| 3) Variation - II (:42) | 4) Variation - III (:42) |
| 5) Variation - IV (1:05) | 6) Variation - V (:24) |
| 7) Variation - VI (:23) | 8) Variation - VII (:26) |
| 9) Variation - VIII (1:11) | 10) Variation - IX (1:16) |
| 11) Variation - X (:36) | 12) Variation - XI (:23) |
| 13) Variation - XII (:42) | 14) Variation - XIII (:32) |
| 15) Intermezzo (1:10) | 16) Variation - XIV (1:09) |
| 17) Variation - XV (1:50) | 18) Variation - XVI (:32) |
| 19) Variation - XVII (1:06) | 20) Variation - XVIII (:35) |
| 21) Variation - XIX (:28) | 22) Variation - XX (2:24) |

• SERGEI PROKOFIEV PIANO SONATA NO. 2 IN D MINOR, OP. 14 (20:08)

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| 23) I. Allegro (6:39) |
| 24) II. Scherzo - Allegro marcato (2:18) |
| 25) III. Andante (5:53) |
| 26) IV. Vivace (5:16) |

• MODEST MUSSORGSKY PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION (29:09) (recorded in concert, 1974)

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| 27) Promenade (1:14) |
| 28) I. The Gnome (2:25) |
| 29) Promenade (:41) |
| 30) II. The Old Castle (3:51) |
| 31) Promenade (:25) |
| 32) III. Tuileries (0:57) |
| 33) Promenade (:37) |
| 34) IV. Bydlo (2:27) |

- 35) V. Unhatched Chickens (1:00)
- 36) VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle (2:15)
- 37) Promenade (1:14)
- 38) VII. Market Place at Limoges (1:21)
- 39) VIII. Catacombae (Sepulchrum Romanum) (1:28)
- 40) Con mortuis in lingua mortua (1:35)
- 41) IX. Baba-Yaga (2:55)
- 42) X. Great Gate of Kiev (4:39)

In 1873 Modest Mussorgsky was deeply affected by the sudden death at the age of 39 of his great friend Victor Alexandrovitch Hartmann (1834-73), a visionary painter and architect of Volga German ancestry whom he had probably met first in 1870 through the agency of the critical standard-bearer of Russian nationalism in art, Vladimir Stasov. In February of the following year an exhibition of over 400 works by Hartmann, arranged by Stasov at the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts, inspired Mussorgsky (who had lent some of his own Hartmann material for display) to write *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which he subtitled 'a Remembrance of Victor Hartmann'. Hartmann was a dedicated Slavophile artist: he had been associated with the Abramtsevo Colony, an estate near Moscow where Russian artists met to discuss ways of ridding Russian art and architecture of Western influences, and with the Russian Revival movement in architecture. Hartmann's concerns in art and architecture therefore paralleled those of Mussorgsky and his friends Balakirev, Borodin, Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov – collectively the 'Mighty Five' – in music. Composed in a mere six weeks, but unpublished until after his death in 1881, it is by far his most important composition for piano solo. Eleven pictures, illustrated in ten separate movements, are connected by the *Promenade*, a theme which leads us through the gallery from one picture to the next. Some of Hartmann's original

pictures are now lost, but six have been identified with the movements of Mussorgsky's suite. It should be noted that No. 6, a double portrait, seems to be based on two separate pictures, and that it was Mussorgsky's idea to combine them in a single movement as contrasted characterpieces.

Though the idea of pieces of music inspired by particular paintings was not new, the concept of, as it were, an entire gallery as the basis of a suite had few predecessors. Mussorgsky may, however, have taken note of the set of 24 'musical portraits' for piano by Anton Rubinstein, composed in 1853-4 under the title *Kamenniy-Ostrov* (Rocky Island) at the palace of the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlova, intended as a gallery of character-studies of the members of her court.

The piece begins with the *Promenade*, a formal and somewhat ponderous theme with a pronounced Russian folksong character. It recurs after movements 1, 2 and 4 and 6, and is incorporated in No. 8 in transfigured form. Its uneven metre, alternating between 5/4 and 6/4 (Mussorgsky actually wrote it first in 11/4), and its full-bodied B flat major, seemingly depict the portly composer himself as he moves from picture to picture. But the *Promenade* is also the ultimate source of the suite's other themes, providing various 2-note or 3-note figures from which those themes spring. In a very specialized sense, therefore, the entire work could be

viewed as a theme and variations. The sequence of the 'pictures' is as follows:

1. *Gnomus*, E flat minor. The music depicts a gnome running on crooked legs (Hartmann's picture was a design for a gnome-shaped nutcracker). After a reprise of the *Promenade* in A flat we come to
2. *II Vecchio Castello* ('The Old Castle'), G sharp minor. A troubadour sings before a medieval castle. A brief recall of the *Promenade* in B major prefaces
3. *Tuileries. Disput d'enfants après jeux*, B major This depicts the Paris gardens, bustling with nursemaids and squabbling children.
4. *Bydlo*, G sharp minor. A Polish ox-cart rolls along on enormous wheels. A grave D minor version of the *Promenade* prepares for
5. *Ballet des Poussins dans leur Coques* ('Ballet of Chicks in their Shells'), F major. Hartmann's picture shows sketches of some costume designs for a ballet. To be precise, the chicks were baby canaries, and the design

was for *Trilby*, *The Demon of the Heath*, a ballet composed by Julius Gerber with choreography by Petipa and décor by Hartmann, based on Charles Nodiet's play *Trilby, or the Elf of Argyle*, which was staged at the Bolshoi Theatre in St Petersburg in 1871. The movement is a tiny scherzo, with a central trio and coda.

6. *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle* sometimes called (by Stasov and others) *Two Jews, Rich and Poor*, though the former title is in Mussorgsky's manuscript. (Later editors sometimes call them 'Polish Jews'). B flat minor. As mentioned above, this is a double portrait probably based on two separate pictures by Hartmann. Musically, one character is arrogant and austere with an oriental Hassidic flavour, the other is pathetic with its importunate whining repeated notes. (The Yiddish name Schmuyle is the origin of the American-Jewish term 'a shlemiel', a hapless victim of a heartless society: it was Mussorgsky who gave the character this name, for Hartmann's picture of the poor Jew calls him Sandomir.) After both themes have been stated they are combined in counterpoint. Mussorgsky then provides an almost exact reprise of the *Promenade*, in its original B flat major.

7. *Limoges – Le Marché* ('Limoges – The Market Place'). E flat: another

scherzo. The French market-women in this clatteringly rhythmic piece are said (in a lively description, complete with French dialogue, which Mussorgsky wrote into his autograph manuscript and then crossed out) to be gossiping about a lost cow, a drunken neighbour and some false teeth.

8. *Catacombae* (*Sepulchrum Romanum* in the manuscript), B minor. This is the mystic heart of Mussorgsky's design. In the picture referred to, Hartmann depicted himself probing the mysteries of the tombs (not Roman tombs, in fact: his picture is set in the catacombs of Paris) by the light of a lantern, echoed by sepulchral sonorities in the piano. The movement is in two parts: in the section that follows, headed *Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua* ('With the Dead, in a Dead Language'), the key changes to B major as Mussorgsky figuratively picks up the lantern and continues the quest with a spectral, quasi-religious transformation of the *Promenade* tune. He wrote in the manuscript 'A latin text would be suitable: the creative soul of the dead Hartmann leads me to the skulls, invokes them, the skulls shine softly'. At this point it could be said that the distinction between the observer and the picture observed is entirely dissolved.

9. *La Cabane sur des Pattes de Poule (Baba-Yaga)* ('The Hut on Fowls Legs'), C minor. This the third scherzo, in the form of a brilliant grotesque march. Hartmann designed a clock in the form of the hut in which dwelt the mythical witch of Russian folklore, Baba-Yaga. To this idea Mussorgsky added a hint of the tale of the witch's flight in an iron mortar, which she propels with a pestle. The music is a brilliant transformation of the materials of *Gnomus*.

10. *La Grande Porte de Kiev* ('The Great Gate of Kiev'). This design, for the Bogatyr or Heroes' Gate in the city of Kiev, was commissioned in 1866 but was never built. Hartmann's gate, planned as a monument to Tsar Alexander II's narrow escape from assassination that year, was in ancient Russian style, with a cupola shaped like a Slavic war helmet. Mussorgsky's finale, based on a triumphant variant of the *Promenade* theme and bringing it to an apotheosis, is also 'in ancient Russian style' and brings the suite to a climactic conclusion with pealing bell-effects that recall the coronation pageantry of the composer's opera *Boris Godunov*.



In these pieces, Mussorgsky had produced a new style of piano writing which deeply influenced later composers. (Debussy, for one: his famous prelude *La Cathédrale Engloutie* would be unthinkable without 'The Great Gate of Kiev'. And Ravel, for another: who can imagine *Le Gibet* without 'Gnomus', or *Scarbo* without 'Schmuyle'?) The original edition, published in 1886, was heavily edited by his friend Rimsky-Korsakov, and was eventually superseded in a revised critical edition in 1931. But it long laboured under the reputation of being 'unpianistic', and though often performed in Russia was comparatively seldom heard in Western Europe until the 1960s.

Mussorgsky's expansive tableaux and free, sporadic use of variation techniques contrasts radically with a much later masterpiece of Russian pianism, Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*. Composed in 1931, this was his last major solo piano work; but its leaner, crisper harmonic and contrapuntal idiom ushered in his final compositional phase, whose most famous representative is the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* for piano and orchestra. Indeed the 'Corelli' Variations seems in some respects a study for that later variation masterwork, foreshadowing many of its textures and cadential formulae. The theme comes from Corelli's Violin Sonata Op. 5 No. 1 – but the tune (on which Corelli himself provides variations) is in fact not his: it is the slow dance

'La Folia', ultimately of 16th-century Portuguese origin but traditionally associated with Spain and thus sometimes called *Les Folies d'Espagne*. (Liszt uses it in his *Rhapsodic Espagnole*, though he too perhaps derived it via Corelli).

Rachmaninoff's work consists of 20 variations, with an Intermezzo placed between Nos. XIII and XIV, plus a coda. Individually quite short, the variations tend to group themselves into larger compositional units, extending and developing moods and features and building up a coherent and concentrated structure (with plenty of distinctively Russian echoes, not least the chattering repeated notes of Variation X and the striding Mussorgskian bass of XII). Broadly speaking most of the slow variations are grouped in the first half of the work and the faster ones in the second, though exceptions to these rules form highly effective contrasts, such as the incisive Variation V and the romantically melodious Variation XV – which creates much the same gorgeous effect, without aiming at the same kind of emotional climax, as the perennially popular 18th Variation of the *Paganini Rhapsody*. Tonally the work is anchored to Corelli's key of D minor, but with a sumptuous effect of expansion after the Intermezzo, when the key shifts to D flat for two variations. The Intermezzo itself creates a kind of ruminative cadenza. After the dramatic and exciting build-up of the last few variations, the coda has

the character of a regretful epilogue, dissolving the theme back into the mists of time from whence it had emerged.

If Rachmaninoff aims at timelessness in his *Corelli Variations*, the 20-year-old Serge Prokofiev was aiming at up-to-the-minute modernity in his **Piano Sonata No. 2 in D minor, op. 14**. Composed in St Petersburg in 1912, this work is exactly contemporary with Prokofiev's notorious *Toccata*, op. 11, the acme of a percussive, machine-like modernist style. But while the Sonata shares features with the *Toccata*, especially in its second movement, it displays an altogether wider expressive range and does so with complete confidence, showing that the young Prokofiev, who had recently completed his studies at St Petersburg Conservatoire, had found his own, fully characteristic voice. According to his diaries it started life as a project for a Sonatina for his fellow-student Maximilian Schmidthof, into which he decided to insert a scherzo written at the Conservatoire, but it grew into a full-scale Sonata which remained one of Prokofiev's personal favourites among his works. He dedicated it to Schmidthof, who committed suicide in 1913. Prokofiev gave the premiere in Moscow on 5 February 1914.

The first movement is a classically laid-out sonata form with contrasting subjects, the first descending in quite angular style, the second having

a quality of fantasy and sense of narrative about it. The extreme clarity of the keyboard textures is notable. The very short scherzo is a brilliant example of Prokofiev in percussive mode. The core of the work is however the deeply-felt slow movement, an elegy which rises to a dissonant and anguished central climax only to subside. The brilliant, sparkling finale is again an essay in toccata-style, full of harmonic clashes but driven forward by a raffish sense of humour allied with a genius for flinty, obstinate rhythms, which are as evident in the slightly slower middle section (where the second theme of the first movement is recalled) as they are in the capering outer sections.

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Since his triumph as winner of the 1970 Chopin International Piano Competition, pianist **Garrick Ohlsson** has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Although he has long been regarded as one of the world's leading Chopin exponents, Mr. Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire, which ranges over the entire piano literature. A student of the late Claudio Arrau, Mr.

Ohlsson has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. His concerto repertoire alone is unusually wide and eclectic – ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st century – and to date he has at his command some 80 concertos, which he regularly performs with the world's leading orchestras. A musician of commanding versatility, Mr. Ohlsson is also a consummate chamber pianist. He has collaborated with many of the leading chamber groups of our time, including the Cleveland, Emerson, Takács and Tokyo String Quartets, and with violinist Jorja Fleezanis and cellist Michael Grebanier, he is a founding member of the San Francisco - based FOG Trio.

A prolific recording artist, Mr. Ohlsson can be heard on the RCA Victor Red Seal, Angel, Bridge, BMG, Delos, Hänssler, Nonesuch, Telarc, and Virgin Classics labels. For Bridge Records, he has recorded the following: Bach *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988; Handel: Suite No. 2, HWV 427; (BRIDGE 9193); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 1: Op. 7, Op. 78, Op. 101; (BRIDGE 9198); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 2: Op. 2, No. 2, Op. 81, Op. 111; (BRIDGE 9201); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 3: Op. 2, No. 3, Op. 14, No. 1, Op. 14, No. 2, Op. 79; (BRIDGE 9207); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol.

4: Op. 26, Op. 28, Op. 90; (BRIDGE 9249); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 5: Op. 13, Op. 27, No. 2, Op. 53; (BRIDGE 9250); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 6: Op. 106, Op. 31, No. 1, (BRIDGE 9262); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 7: Op. 22, Op. 37, No. 1, Op. 110; (BRIDGE 9265); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 8: Op. 2, No. 1; Op. 57; No.1; Op. 109; (BRIDGE 9266) Charles Wuorinen: Music for Violin and Piano (with Benjamin Hudson) (BRIDGE 9008); Justin Dello Joio: Two Concert Etudes, Sonata (BRIDGE 9220).

A native of White Plains, N.Y., Mr. Ohlsson began his piano studies at the age of 8. He attended the Westchester Conservatory of Music and at age 13 entered the Juilliard School. His musical development has been influenced by a succession of distinguished teachers, most notably Claudio Arrau, Olga Barabini, Tom Lishman, Sascha Gorodnitzki, Rosina Lhévinne, and Irma Wolpe. Although he won First Prizes at the 1966 Busoni Competition in Italy and the 1968 Montréal Piano Competition, it was his 1970 triumph in the Chopin Competition in Warsaw, where he won the Gold Medal, that brought him worldwide recognition. Mr. Ohlsson was awarded Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Prize in 1994 and received the 1998 University Musical Society Distinguished Artist

Award in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Most recently, Mr. Ohlsson won in the "Best Solo Performance" category of the 2008 Grammy Awards for his "Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 3" (BRIDGE 9207).



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