

The Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet, came from a musical family; he successively studied the clarinet, violin and brass instruments, which he used in fanfares; later he wrote military marches for the Swiss army which he did not consider important. Besides Music, he studied Mathematics in Lausanne and graduated with a Diploma in 1903; until 1906 he taught at the Lausanne Grammar School, then he decided to continue his studies at the Sorbonne and, at the same time, to attend courses at the Paris Conservatory. After his return to Lausanne, he taught Mathematics for one more year before devoting himself entirely to music.



Ansermet was a particular advocate of the Swiss composers Arthur Honegger and Frank Martin. He conducted the first performances of the following works of A. Honegger: *Horace victorieux* (1921), *Chant de joie* (1923), *Rugby* (1928) and *Pacific 231* (1923), which was dedicated to him, and of the following works of Frank Martin: *Symphonie* (1938), *In terra pax* (1945), *Der Sturm* (1956), *Le mystère de la Nativité* (1959), *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1963) and *Les Quatre Éléments*, which were dedicated to him. Also important were the first performances of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946) and *Cantata misericordium* (1963).

Mussorgsky-Ravel PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

Mussorgsky NIGHT ON THE BARE MOUNTAIN

ANSERMET L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande



Pictures at an Exhibition, musical work in 10 movements by Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky that was inspired by a visit to an art exhibition. Each of the movements represents one of the drawings or artworks on display. Although originally composed in 1874 for solo piano, Pictures became better known in orchestral form, particularly as arranged by French composer Maurice Ravel in 1922. The work was also orchestrated by other composers, such as Sir Henry J. Wood (1918), Leopold Stokowski (1939), and Vladimir Ashkenazy (1982). In 1971 the British popular music group Emerson, Lake and Palmer devoted an entire album to their own art-rock interpretation of the piece.

Mussorgsky composed Pictures as a memorial to his friend, the Russian artist Viktor Hartmann, who had died in 1873 at age 39. Shortly after the artist's death, Mussorgsky visited a retrospective exhibit of Hartmann's sketches, stage designs, and architectural studies and felt the need to capture the experience in music. By early summer 1874, he had completed the work, a lengthy and fiendishly difficult suite for solo piano. At the time of Mussorgsky's death in 1881 from alcoholism, the piece had been neither performed nor published. It fell to his friend and colleague Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov to tidy up the manuscript and bring it to print in 1886.

The suite consists of musical depictions of 10 paintings by Hartmann, interspersed with a recurring "Promenade" theme, or intermezzo, that represents a visitor—in this case, the composer himself—strolling through the exhibition. The powerful nature of the intermezzis, Mussorgsky acknowledged in one of his letters, reflects his own large physique.

Following the opening "Promenade," the first four movements, or "pictures," in order of appearance, are: "The Gnome," a depiction of an awkward dwarf conveyed through irregular rhythms and forceful outbursts; "The Old Castle," a solemn and lyrical portrayal of a medieval troubadour singing on the grounds of a grand castle; "Tuileries," a sprightly sketch of children at play in the well-known Tuileries Gardens in Paris; and "Cattle," a ponderous characterization of the lumbering of a large Polish ox cart.

The scampering fifth movement, "The Ballet of Unhatched Chicks in Their Shells," represents a costume design by Hartmann for a children's ballet. The sixth scene evokes an image of "Two Jews: One Rich, One Poor" through the interplay of a strident melody in the lower register and a twittering chantlike theme in the upper. The folksy and cheerful quality of the seventh movement, "The Market at Limoges," is neutralized by the eighth, "The Catacombs," which casts an eerie shadow with ominous chords and variations on the recurring intermezzo.

The last two scenes of Pictures at an Exhibition are the most renowned. "The Hut on Fowl's

Legs" is a nightmarish portrayal of the cackling witch Baba-Yaga on the prowl for her prey. She charges—bounding in a virtuosic passage in octaves—right into the tenth and final picture, "The Great Gate of Kiev." With a depiction of Hartmann's sketch of a proposed city gate topped by cupolas in which carillons ring, Mussorgsky brings the piece to a majestic close. Upon reading Gogol's classic Russian short story "St. John's Eve" in 1858, the young

Modest Mussorgsky found the perfect narrative vehicle for the dark, dense musical language he was beginning to develop. The shortest night of the year, June 23, St. John's Eve is known in Russian folklore as the night in which witches and demons gather on Bald Mountain (now known as Mount Triglav, near Kiev), for a yearly "Black Mass" and devilish revelry lasting until dawn. Despite the vividness of the scenario and Mussorgsky's original realization of it in 1867, the composer struggled to cast the music in its ideal voice, off and on, for the rest of his career. It appeared unfinished in various forms, including a version with chorus meant for a ballet, as well as an operatic intermezzo. And although a few conductors in recent years, including Claudio Abbado and Esa-Pekka Salonen, have given successful performances of the original 1867 version, the one most familiar to modern audiences is the version completed in 1886 by Mussorgsky's friend, Rimsky-Korsakov, known as Night on Bald Mountain. The famous conductor Leopold Stokowski, however, was so unsatisfied with the 1886 orchestration that he traveled to Russia, studied Mussorgsky's manuscripts himself, and in 1938, prepared his own orchestration. Writing in the notes accompanying his 1954 recording of the work, Stokowski explained that Rimsky-Korsakov "had more technical skill than Mussorgsky, and so generously, and with good intentions, gave of his precious time to assist his friend." The problem, however, was that Rimsky-Korsakov "sometimes misunderstood Mussorgsky's uncompromising originality in harmony and rhythm." In other words, Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral skill rendered the diabolical scene altogether too tidily. Stokowski's version sought to mediate between Mussorgsky's visceral, weighty sonority and Rimsky-Korsakov's skill at instrumental balance and contrast. There is, perhaps, a natural affinity between Stokowski's orchestral sound -- which is often characterized as bombastic, vivid, with a low center of gravity, and a broadness of gesture -- and Mussorgsky's compositional style, which for Stokowski betrays an obsession with "the dark, fantastic, grotesque, mysterious, and terrifying side of life." Ultimately, however, Stokowski's more exaggerated orchestral realization of Mussorgsky's demonic fascinations serve to contrast all the more starkly the visions of dawn that end the work: the early morning church bells, the bird call of an oboe solo, and the peasant song of a lone flute.

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Mussorgsky NIGHT ON THE BARE MOUNTAIN

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Pictures At An Exhibition - Orchestrated By Ravel

1 Promenade - Gnomus 4:04

2 Promenade - Il Vecchio Castello 5:20

3 Promenade - Tuileries - Bydlo 4:02

4 Promenade - Ballet Des Poussins Dans Leurs Coques

Samuel Goldenberg Und Schmuyle 4:06

5 Limoges-Le Marché - Catacombae-Sepulchrum Romanum 5:11

6 La Cabane Sur Des Pattes De Poule - La Grande Porte De Kiev 8:40

7 Night On The Bare Mountain 11:04

Total Time: 42:27

Pictures At An Exhibition

Producer James Walker Engineer Roy Wallace

Recorded 1959 by Decca at Victoria Hall, Geneva

Night On The Bare Mountain

Producer Michael Bremner Engineer James Lock

Recorded 1964 by Decca Victoria Hall, Geneva



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