

Российская Музыка Фортепьяно

Russian Piano Music Series



vol. 8 Modest Mussorgsky
Anthony Goldstone

Russian Piano Music Series, vol. 8: Modest Mussorgsky

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

¶ = first recording § = possible first recording

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|-----|---|------|
| [1] | Hopak [or Gopak] (earlier version) § | 1.41 |
| [2] | On the Southern Shore of the Crimea (Gurzuf) | 4.32 |
| [3] | Ein Kinderscherz (later version) | 2.42 |

From Memories of Childhood

[2.56]

- | | | |
|-----|---|------|
| [4] | Nurse and I | 1.23 |
| [5] | First Punishment: Nurse Shuts Me in a Dark Room (completed by A. Goldstone) ¶ | 1.33 |
| [6] | In the Village | 4.06 |

Pictures from an Exhibition, performed from the composer's manuscript

[35.06]

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|------|--|------|
| [7] | Promenade | 1.28 |
| [8] | No. 1 Gnomus | 2.30 |
| [9] | [Promenade] | 0.55 |
| [10] | No. 2 Il vecchio castello | 4.22 |
| [11] | [Promenade] | 0.29 |
| [12] | No. 3 Tuileries (Dispute d'enfants après jeux) | 1.08 |
| [13] | No. 4 Bydło | 3.30 |
| [14] | [Promenade] | 0.39 |
| [15] | No. 5 Ballet of Unhatched Chicks | 1.14 |
| [16] | No. 6 Samuel Goldenberg und Schmuyle | 2.26 |
| [17] | Promenade | 1.28 |
| [18] | No. 7 Limoges, le marché (La grande nouvelle) | 1.24 |
| [19] | No. 8 Catacombæ (Sepulcrum Romanum) | 2.32 |
| [20] | Cum mortuis in lingua mortua | 2.16 |
| [21] | No. 9 The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Yagá) | 3.25 |
| [22] | No. 10 The Bogatyr Gates (in the Capital in Kiev) | 5.20 |
| [23] | The Seamstress (Scherzino) | 2.53 |
| [24] | Impromptu passionné (later version) | 3.06 |
| [25] | Intermezzo in modo classico (later version) | 9.35 |

from Pictures from an Exhibition, with earlier variants from the composer's manuscript

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|------|---|------|
| [26] | No. 1 Gnomus § | 2.55 |
| [27] | No. 9 The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Yagá) § | 3.24 |
| [28] | No. 10 The Bogatyr Gates (in the Capital in Kiev) § | 5.17 |

Anthony Goldstone, piano

Total CD duration 78.15

Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky was the most original of the group of Russian composers known as the “Mighty Handful”, the other members being Balakirev, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin; the sobriquet was coined by the important arts critic Vladimir Stasov but only later attached specifically to these five. They shared the aim of incorporating traditional Russian culture into their work in reaction to the Western and Southern European influences that had prevailed, and remarkably all five were virtually self-taught amateurs. Born in a small town a few hundred miles south of St. Petersburg, Mussorgsky showed early musical promise, both as a pianist and as a composer, to the extent of having a Polka published (financed by his father) at the age of twelve. The following year he entered the Imperial Guard Cadet School in St. Petersburg, where he inculcated a lifelong addiction to alcohol that, combined with epilepsy, would hasten his death. After a time in the Guards he joined the civil service and was never able to make sufficient money from music to relinquish other work. The peak of his career was the production of his operatic masterpiece *Boris Godunov* in Moscow in 1872; a slow decline began soon afterwards and he died a week after his forty-second birthday.

Mussorgsky's work is distinguished by a raw, even crude, realism, iconoclastic at times, favouring the primitive peasant culture over the gentrified; his harmonic language pointed forward to the twentieth century. At times his innovations surpassed his colleagues' understanding and Rimsky-Korsakov took it upon himself to edit – sometimes recompose – some works in order to make them more “acceptable”. Not published in Mussorgsky's lifetime, *Pictures from an Exhibition* was his magnum opus for piano, but he wrote several shorter works that are worthy of a hearing: some are recorded here.

The Hopak (or Gopak) is a lively Ukrainian dance, Cossack in origin and characterised by acrobatic leaps. The name is derived from the Ukrainian for “to jump” and in performance the exclamation “Hop!” may be heard, but this could be a happy coincidence, as the English word “hop” is Germanic in origin. The dance is often performed at festivals and celebrations, and Mussorgsky incorporated one into the wedding scene of his opera *The Fair at Sorochinsk*, written (though never completed) between 1874 and 1880 to his own libretto, after Gogol. In arranging this **Hopak [1]** for piano Mussorgsky modified it and made it more quirky and concise; also it fades out rather than ending with a bang. Two piano

versions exist, differing mainly in the final page – I find the earlier one, which is one bar longer, preferable.

In 1879 Mussorgsky was granted three months' leave by his music-loving superior in the civil service to give recitals in various southern regions as accompanist to the singer Darya Leonova and as piano soloist. He was enchanted with the Crimea, which inspired two piano pieces based on the music he heard there. The titles of the pair are easily confused and the middle sections of both pieces comprise a dance section with a similar rhythm, but the one recorded here, ***On the Southern Shore of the Crimea (Gurzuf)*** [2], is the more interesting. Gurzuf is a resort on the Black Sea, originally a Tatar village. The brooding outer sections are based on E flat, although no key signature is attached, as the shifting exotic modes (neither major nor minor) would render one unhelpful. The effect is dark and mysterious in contrast to the central dance, which has energy but also a certain stately grace.

Ein Kinderscherz [3] (sometimes known as *Children's Games: Puss in the Corner*) is less characteristic than much of Mussorgsky's music, and indeed if one were told that it originated from another hand one could believe it. An early work, written in 1859 when the composer was just twenty and revised the following year, it is a conventional well-crafted scherzo and trio in 3/8. It vividly evokes the rough and tumble of children, particularly in the hectically scampering middle section, fragments of which are quoted in the coda, one providing the abrupt ending. It attests to Mussorgsky's fascination with early childhood, which over a decade later produced the masterly song cycle *The Nursery*.

This preoccupation continues through the following two pieces constituting ***From Memories of Childhood***, which Mussorgsky wrote in 1865 soon after his mother died and which were dedicated to her memory. *Nurse and I* [4] is a tender reminiscence, though – it appears – rather overshadowed by moments of sobbing and pleading from the anxious child. It ends with a timid question, brutally answered by *First Punishment: Nurse Shuts Me in a Dark Room* [5]. This is a furious toccata – a virtual moto perpetuo in which both hands play the same notes in alternation. The child's panic is palpable as he crashes around in the darkness. The piece was left unfinished and, although it has been published with a completion, I have chosen to write my own.

Au village (*In the Village*) [6], like the Crimean pieces, is a musical postcard. The village is unnamed (there may have been more than one location), but the idea could well have been ignited during Mussorgsky's concert tour along the Don and Volga rivers and in the Ukraine in 1879, as it was published in the following year. The scene opens with a touching melody in B minor (*quasi fantasia*), at first unaccompanied, then gently supported. It seems Russian in idiom (rather than Gypsy), asymmetric at the start, though not to the extent of the *Promenade* in *Pictures at an Exhibition* (the following track). Mussorgsky repeats this theme twice, first cleverly harmonising it as a chorale in G major without transposing its actual notes, then ceremoniously in B major. A short transition leads to the main event, a dance marked *alla zingara* (in Gypsy style), distinguished by syncopated "kicks" and fluctuating tempo. It builds in impetus, only to be halted by a pause and a final staccato chord.

The background to the creation of ***Pictures from an Exhibition*** [7-22], described by Sviatoslav Richter as "the most profound masterpiece of Russian piano music", is well known. Mussorgsky had met the artist and architect Viktor Hartmann probably through Stasov in 1870. Hartmann, then in his mid-thirties, was a pioneering force in making use of Russian folk elements in his work, which accorded with Mussorgsky's aims, and they struck up a close friendship, cruelly ended when Hartmann died in August 1873 as the result of an aneurysm at the age of thirty-nine. In February-March 1874 an extensive exhibition of his work was mounted in the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts, where he had been a student. Mussorgsky's visit to this inspired him to compose his masterpiece, originally to be entitled simply *Hartmann*, which he completed in June 1874. "Woe to you, orphaned Russian art!" he mourned. (Not all the pictures immortalized in this work survive, and some later described by the dedicatee, Stasov, did not appear in the exhibition's catalogue.)

The artistic by-product of its composer's intense grief has not always been understood, however. "Nothing could characterize Mussorgsky's own art more sharply than the complete absence of subjective emotion from a composition directly inspired by a deeply felt personal loss," declared the renowned writer on music M.D. Calvocoressi in the 1940s, and this was a commonly held opinion, though one that to me seemed patently wrong. On coming into possession of the facsimile autograph manuscript I was impelled to look afresh

at this great work. I noticed much detail, carefully annotated, that had not appeared in the first published score, edited by Rimsky-Korsakov – for example phrasing, dynamics, articulation and note lengths – occasionally even different notes, as well as things that were obviously carelessly misplaced, perhaps under the influence of drink, and some crossings-out and afterthoughts.

Somehow the turmoil that the composer must have been experiencing on his visit to the posthumous exhibition of his friend's work came through very powerfully, and I began to recognise, guided by the authentic text, a whole range of personal feelings that were rising up in him in response to his memories of his friend and the immediacy of the pictures, producing psychological conflict and sudden changes of mood. The result was to appreciate at a heightened level this unique and complex fusion of three elements: document of a particular event, monument to a lamented close friendship and tribute to a gifted fellow artist.

The composer's ambiguity of emotion is immediately demonstrated in the opening *Promenade* [7], in which he enters the exhibition. In the Russian manner with bucolic irregular phrase lengths (not corresponding to normal walking), it is marked *allegro*, i.e. in a lively tempo, usually denoting cheerfulness, but *senza allegrezza* – without cheerfulness; also *giusto* (strictly), but *poco sostenuto* (a little sustained). All this implies resolution tempered by hesitancy as Mussorgsky, remembering his friend, contemplates how he will be affected by the experience to come, and one can sense these mental states colliding in the course of the ambling melodic phrases.

He takes courage as he confronts – *attacca*, i.e. with no gap in the music, an indication omitted from the printed score here and later – the first picture, *Gnomus* [8], a nutcracker in the shape of a grotesque gnome. The creature comes to life with skulking menace, the jagged intervals mirroring his crooked and fitful movements. Finally he scampers off, and Mussorgsky, subdued, walks [9] (the *Promenade* theme assumes new emotional significance with each passage between pictures) towards a drawing of a mediaeval castle, apparently French according to the catalogue but given the Italian title *Il vecchio castello* [10] by Mussorgsky. There was probably no one in the foreground of the picture, but Mussorgsky introduces a minstrel singing a doleful lay to a lute accompaniment. The phrasing and articulation are not uniform, perhaps to correspond with the vagaries of the putative lyrics and to give the feel of improvisation.

The visitor, more confident now, resumes his progress [11] until he notices a scene depicting children and their nursemaids in the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris [12]. Mussorgsky imagined an infantile dispute breaking out at play, and the children's descending two-note call, which seems to be international, soon becomes more heated. In the less active middle section I can visualise an aggrieved youngster seeking comfort from his or her nanny while the tormentor looks on giggling. The following tableau, *Bydło* (the Polish for *Cattle*) [13], brings to life a drawing of a cart with heavy wheels, pulled by a pair of oxen. Although it was marked *pesante* (heavily), in the first edition no dynamic was given to the opening, and later editions added *p*, which would be appropriate if the wagon were approaching from a distance. However a glance at the manuscript reveals *ff*, clearly written, creating a stark contrast with the lightness of touch in the Tuileries. We feel almost physically the weary, labouring tramp of the beasts and the lumbering of the huge wheels on unyielding ground, eventually vanishing into the distance.

Mussorgsky, perhaps pondering the tribulations of the peasant classes, continues in thoughtful vein [14], but before long out of the corner of his eye he catches sight of an extraordinary watercolour of children encased in egg-shaped costumes, with little wings attached to their arms and birdlike headgear. These canary chicks formed one of Hartmann's costume designs for a ballet, *Trilby*, composed by Yuli Gerber and choreographed by Petipa, that was produced in Moscow in 1870. *Ballet of Unhatched Chicks* [15] is a tiny scherzo that animates the chicks as they find their feet, chirping and tottering about the stage. The trills in the trio section are written explicitly to begin on the main note, but the first edition, followed by later ones, put the auxiliary upper note first on each trill.

Another textual surprise (to which I shall refer later) occurs in the next picture, a composite of two marvellous portraits of Jews in the ghetto of Sandomierz in Poland [16]. Mussorgsky gives the rich man in a fur hat the name Samuel Goldenberg and the poor old man with a stick Schmuyle. (Samuel and Schmuyle are both variants of the name of the biblical prophet.) We witness a drama in which the haughty Goldenberg paces along and is presently accosted by the whining Schmuyle, begging for alms. In the final scene we hear the two characters simultaneously, then a last desperate appeal from the beggar before he is peremptorily dismissed. Three seconds into this piece the rhythm has always been

“corrected” by adding a triplet sign to the three semiquavers; the result was that in the first edition the fourth crotchet was equivalent to just three (normal) semiquavers instead of four. This solecism was in turn “corrected” in future editions: note values were altered while the triplet sign was retained. The manuscript contains no triplet sign and is grammatically accurate, making any modification unnecessary, so I have naturally followed the composer’s intention.

There follows [17] an adaptation of the *Promenade* that opened the work. Ravel thought it too similar and omitted it from his famous orchestration of *Pictures*, but a crucial distinction in the manuscript is the lack of the *f* dynamic that had been at the start of the opening *Promenade*, thus leaving the performer free to explore different emotional states, for instance, as here, beginning ruminatively and growing in assurance towards the final long note.

The “big news” that Mussorgsky imagined being exchanged by the raucously gossiping women at Limoges market [18] was written in the manuscript in French in two versions, but later crossed out by the composer. This is the text of his second attempt:

Monsieur de Puissanceout has just got his cow La Fugitive back again. But the good ladies of Limoges are not completely as one on this issue, because Madame de Remboursac has got herself a lovely set of porcelain false teeth, while Monsieur de Panta-Pantaléon still watches over his ungainly peony-red nose.

Unexpected accents and sudden modulations simulate the constant interruptions of the women shouting against each other at top speed. After a sudden silence there is total mayhem, which is cut short by the start of the most original sound-picture of the set.

Hartmann’s atmospheric watercolour depicted himself with a friend exploring the ancient catacombs under Paris, while a guide holds a lantern whose glimmer reveals a large number of neatly stacked human skulls. Mussorgsky’s *Catacombs* [19], by means of a series of slow echoing octaves and strangely erupting chords with one fragment of baleful melody, conveys the eerie bleakness of the extensive caverns. This coldly objective account is followed by its profoundly personal counterpart [20], explained by the composer: “Latin text: With the dead in a dead language. Well may it be in Latin! The creative spirit of the dead Hartmann leads me towards the skulls, invokes them; the skulls begin to glow

softly from within." Ghostly octave tremolos in the right hand represent the shimmering of the lantern, now symbolically transfigured into the creative spirit of Hartmann illuminating and inspiring the composer, whose *Promenade* theme, in B minor, proceeds with calm dignity. The moving elegy, in which Mussorgsky identifies with and bids farewell to his friend, ends with a benediction in B major.

Peace is shattered [21] by the violent antics of the witch that all Russian children fear (as she would gladly eat them), Baba-Yagá. This old hag with iron teeth flies through the air in a mortar, propelling herself along with a pestle, and lives in a hut on hen's legs that is able to move of its own accord. Hartman sketched an ornate design for a clock in Russian folk style based on Baba-Yagá's hut, but it was the malevolence and terrifying flight of the witch that Mussorgsky captured with virtuosic brilliance in his penultimate picture. The reprise that follows the more contained central episode leads, with mounting intensity, directly into the culmination of the work, which the composer entitled *The Bogatyr Gates of Kiev* [22]. (Bogatyr were the mediaeval warrior heroes of Russian epic poems.)

When a competition was announced for a gate for Kiev to commemorate Tsar Nicholas II's escape from an assassination attempt in the city in 1866, Hartmann submitted a design (reproduced on the cover of this booklet). Although the project was cancelled, his conception was celebrated as outstanding and he himself was particularly proud of it. The massive arch is surmounted by carving that suggests a *kokoshnik*, the traditional head-dress of Russian women, and the tower is in the shape of a mediaeval Slavonic helmet.

Mussorgsky's imposing finale opens with a celebratory hymn-like melody, which is followed by a hushed chorale. The hymn returns, accompanied by the pealing of bells; then comes a sonorous reiteration of the chorale, which, although *ff*, Mussorgsky desired to be played *senza espressione* – without expression, by which he probably intended to preclude any hint of sentimentality. The first edition, followed by others, altered this to the unlikely *sempre espressione* – always expression. Deep-throated tolling introduces the *Promenade* theme, rung out in triumph; after a colossal descending scale in octaves traversing the entire keyboard, the hymn is finally transformed into a majestic paeon to the invincibility of the human spirit. The huge demands of *Pictures from an Exhibition* on the performer bear out Cui's remark that Mussorgsky could have equalled Anton Rubinstein as a pianist had he been so motivated.

The composer's intriguing first thoughts on three of the pictures are presented in the last three tracks of this recording. *Gnomus* [26] contains extra material, later crossed out, in three places. In *Baba-Yagá* [27] the original lead-in to the reprise was covered by a strip of paper on which the composer wrote the definitive version. There were two bars, later crossed out, in the opening hymn of *The Gate* [28], and at 1'26" the original carillon accompanying the hymn's reappearance, later papered over, was more convoluted.

Mussorgsky composed the charming *La Couturière* (*The Seamstress*) [23] in 1871. This charming piece, described by the composer as a little scherzo, doubles as a rather taxing piano étude. It opens with an imitation of the chattering sound of a sewing machine, generating a succession of semiquavers that continues almost uninterrupted throughout the piece, until the machine winds down towards the end and the lady makes a hasty exit.

Dating from 1859 like *Ein Kinderscherz*, *Impromptu passionné* [24] shows Mussorgsky the malleable composer in embryo who, having made the acquaintance of several older colleagues, had already decided that music was the most important thing in his life. He chose to write this piece in the obscure key of F sharp major with its six-sharp key signature (Russian composers were attracted to keys with many sharps or flats), but his scanty knowledge of musical grammar, or perhaps his desire to create an impression by complicating matters, led him to make incorrect and unnecessary use of double sharps. There is a flavour of salon music about the *Impromptu*, which Mussorgsky marks *amoroso*, but, despite its meanderings it shows an undeniable gift for melody and even at one point makes a half-hearted attempt at counterpoint. The second of two versions incorporated some modest improvements.

The two versions of *Intermezzo in modo classico* [25], however, differ widely. The piece originally (in 1861) consisted of only the rather severe music, marked *grave pesante*, that became the outer sections of the later version. In 1867 when orchestrating the work Mussorgsky added a contrasting *vivo* middle section and reworked it for piano. According to the composer the main theme of the *Intermezzo*, which he described as "à la Bach" but which has most un-Bachlike eccentric accents and dynamics, came into his mind when, on holiday in winter with his mother, he saw peasants striding through snowdrifts, falling and picking themselves up again. The middle section represents the sudden appearance of "a crowd of young women, coming with songs and laughter along a level pathway" and therefore must have been conceived at the same time, though it was incorporated only later.

The Performer

Described by *The New York Times* as “a man whose nature was designed with pianos in mind”, **Anthony Goldstone** is one of Britain’s most respected pianists. A sixth-generation pupil of Beethoven through his great teacher Maria Curcio, Anthony Goldstone was born in Liverpool. He studied with Derrick Wyndham at the Royal Manchester College of Music (which later honoured him with a Fellowship), later with Curcio in London.

He has enjoyed a career encompassing six continents, the Last Night of the Proms (after which Benjamin Britten wrote to him, “Thank you most sincerely for that brilliant performance of my Diversions. I wish I could have been at the Royal Albert Hall to join in the cheers”), very many broadcasts and seventy CDs (including the BBC issue of his London Promenade Concert performance of Beethoven’s fourth Piano Concerto). He has an adventurous approach to repertoire and has been praised by Vienna’s *Die Presse* for “his astonishingly profound spiritual penetration”.

In the last few years Goldstone has become known for his acclaimed completions and realisations of works for solo piano and piano duet by Schubert, and for two pianos and solo piano by Mozart, all of which he has recorded on Divine Art CDs.

He is also one half of the acclaimed and brilliant piano duo Goldstone and Clemmow with his wife Caroline. The duo has made many CDs for Divine Art as well as Toccata Classics and other labels, including one (Divine Art 25020) containing première recordings of two Russian masterpieces, Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4 and Romeo and Juliet, in spectacular transcriptions for four hands by friends of the composer – Sergei Taneyev and Nadezhda Purgold (Mme. Rimsky-Korsakov) respectively. The present disc by Goldstone is part of his substantial contribution to Divine Art’s new Russian Piano Music series, issued by its American branch.



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A Maxim digital recording

Piano technician: Benjamin E. Nolan

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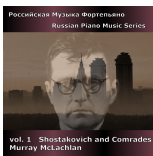
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