Saturday, September 24, 6pm  |  opening night at symphony
andris nelsons conducting

Shostakovich “festive overture,” opus 96

Please note that this performance of Shostakovich’s “Festive Overture” is being recorded for future release as part of the ongoing BSO/Deutsche Grammophon collaboration “Shostakovich Under Stalin’s Shadow.” Your cooperation in keeping noise in Symphony Hall at a minimum is sincerely appreciated.

Prokofiev piano concerto no. 3 in c, opus 26
Andante—Allegro
Theme (Andantino) and Variations
Allegro ma non troppo
lang lang

{intermission}

Mussorgsky “pictures at an exhibition,” orchestrated by maurice ravel
Promenade
Gnomus
Promenade
Il vecchio castello
Promenade—Tuileries
Bydlo
Promenade—Ballet of Chicks in their Shells
Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
The Market at Limoges
Catacombae. Sepulcrum Romanum
Con mortuis in lingua mortua
The Hut on Chicken Legs (Baba-Yaga)
The Great Gate of Kiev

Bank of America and Dell EMC are proud to sponsor the BSO’s 2016-17 season.
Tonight’s concert will end about 7:45.

Concertmaster Malcolm Lowe performs on a Stradivarius violin, known as the “Lafont,” generously donated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra by the O’Block Family.

Steinway & Sons Pianos, selected exclusively for Symphony Hall.
The BSO’s Steinway & Sons pianos were purchased through a generous gift from Gabriella and Leo Beranek.

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In consideration of the performers and those around you, please turn off all electronic equipment during the concert, including tablets, cellular phones, pagers, watch alarms, messaging devices of any kind, anything that emits an audible signal, and anything that glows. Thank you for your cooperation.

Please note that the use of audio or video recording devices, or taking pictures of the orchestra—whether photographs or videos—is prohibited during concerts.

Guest Artist

Lang Lang

Lang Lang’s playing has inspired millions, whether in intimate recitals or on the grandest of stages—such as the 2014 World Cup concert in Rio with Plácido Domingo; recent Grammy Award shows, performing with Metallica and Pharrell Williams; the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, while more than four billion people worldwide watched; the Last Night of the Proms at London’s Royal Albert Hall, or the Liszt 200th birthday concert...
broadcast live to more than 500 cinemas around the United States and Europe. He has formed enduring musical partnerships with the world’s greatest artists, from conductors Daniel Barenboim, Gustavo Dudamel, and Sir Simon Rattle to artists outside the classical music sphere—among them dubstep dancer Marquese “Nonstop” Scott, singer Julio Iglesias, and jazz titan Herbie Hancock. Lang Lang also builds cultural bridges between East and West, frequently introducing Chinese music to Western audiences, and vice versa. Yet he never forgets what first inspired and continues to inspire him: great artists, and above all the great composers—Liszt, Chopin, and others—whose music he now delights in bringing to others. Even that famous old Tom and Jerry cartoon, “The Cat Concerto,” which introduced him, as a child, to the music of Liszt, propels him to what he calls “his second career,” bringing music into the lives of children, both through his work for the United Nations and through his own Lang Lang International Music Foundation. His autobiography, Journey of a Thousand Miles, has been published by Random House in eleven languages. He has played sold-out concerts in all the world’s major cities and is the first Chinese pianist to be engaged by the Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, and New York Philharmonic. Time Magazine included Lang Lang in the “Time 100,” citing him as a symbol of China’s youth and its future; he is cultural ambassador for Shenzhen and Shenyang. His influence on the Chinese passion for piano has created a phenomenon The Today Show called “the Lang Lang effect.” For the first time, Steinway Pianos named a model after a single artist when they introduced “The Lang Lang Piano” to China, specially designed for education and now on its fifth iteration. Lang Lang mentors prodigies, convenes 100 piano students at a time in concert, and dedicated his foundation to cultivating tomorrow’s pianists, providing music education at the forefront of technology, and building a young audience. He has performed for numerous international dignitaries, including former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, William J. Clinton, President Xi Jin-Ping and former President Hu Jin-Tao of China, President Horst Köhler of Germany, H.R.H. Prince Charles, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, President François Hollande, Queen Beatrix and King Majesty King Willem-Alexander, and Polish President Lech Kaczyński. Of many landmark events, he was honored to perform for President Barack Obama and former President Hu Jin-Tao at a White House State Dinner, as well as at Queen Elizabeth II’s Diamond Jubilee celebratory concert at Buckingham Palace. For UN Day in 2015 he played in a concert marking the 70th anniversary of the United Nations. Also in 2015 he performed a festive outdoor concert for the 500th anniversary of the City of Havana’s founding, donating his service as a gift to the people of Havana, and became the first-ever Ambassador of the Château de Versailles in Paris. One of the world’s most prolific recording artists, he has played on several movie soundtracks and joined Sony Music Entertainment as an exclusive recording artist in 2010. His most recent releases include “New York Rhapsody,” “Lang Lang in Paris,” and “The Romance of Rachmaninov.” Lang Lang made his Boston Symphony Orchestra debut with Mendelssohn’s G minor piano concerto in August 2003 at Tanglewood, more recently appearing with the orchestra in Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 3 for his subscription series debut in February/March 2013, and in Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 1 at Tanglewood in August 2013.

The Program in Brief...

To begin their 2016-17 Symphony Hall season, BSO Music Director Andris Nelsons leads the Boston Symphony Orchestra in an all-Russian program featuring superstar Chinese pianist Lang Lang. Opening the concert is the ebullient Festive Overture of Dmitri Shostakovich, the most enduring specimen of a once-flourishing 20th-century genre, the Soviet ceremonial piece. Composed in 1954 for the Bolshoi Theatre—allegedly on a twenty-four-hour turnaround—to mark the thirty-seventh anniversary of the City of Havana’s founding, donating his service as a gift to the people of Havana, and became the first-ever Ambassador of the Château de Versailles in Paris. One of the world’s most prolific recording artists, he has played on several movie soundtracks and joined Sony Music Entertainment as an exclusive recording artist in 2010. His most recent releases include “New York Rhapsody,” “Lang Lang in Paris,” and “The Romance of Rachmaninov.” Lang Lang made his Boston Symphony Orchestra debut with Mendelssohn’s G minor piano concerto in August 2003 at Tanglewood, more recently appearing with the orchestra in Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 3 for his subscription series debut in February/March 2013, and in Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 1 at Tanglewood in August 2013.

To continue the program, Lang Lang is soloist in Sergei Prokofiev’s most popular piano concerto, his brilliant and witty Piano Concerto No. 3. Prokofiev wrote this most scintillating of his five piano concertos over several years straddling his departure from Russia at the end of the 1910s. Prokofiev himself was soloist in the world premiere, given by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1921. The piece features Prokofiev’s astonishingly virtuosic writing for the keyboard, along with dramatically lyrical passages.

The concert concludes with a repertoire staple—the French composer Maurice Ravel’s spectacular instrumentation of Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky’s solo piano Pictures at an Exhibition. Ravel created his instrumentation of Pictures at the request of Serge Koussevitzky, who led the premiere in Paris in 1922 and the American premiere
with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1924, during his first season as the BSO’s conductor. That Koussevitzky chose Ravel for this task made infinite sense: the Frenchman’s brilliance at orchestration was thoroughly apparent in his own music, including orchestral versions of such piano works as the *Pavane for a Dead Princess, Mother Goose*, and *Alborada del gracioso*. Whether in the haunting alto saxophone of “The Old Castle,” the scurrying evocation of children at play in the Tuileries gardens, the lumbering, tuba-weighted oxcart of “Bydlo,” the balletic pecking of “chicks in their shells,” or the varying guises of the opening Promenade, climaxing amidst tolling bells at the end of the piece—to cite just a few examples—the Mussorgsky/Ravel *Pictures* have never failed to hold audiences rapt.

Matthew Mendez/Robert Kirzinger/Marc Mandel

Dmitri Shostakovich

“*Festive Overture,*” Opus 96

DMITRI DMITRIEVICH SHOSTAKOVICH was born in St. Petersburg on September 25, 1906, and died in Moscow on August 9, 1975. He composed his “Festive Overture” (“Prazdnichnaya uvertyura”) in November 1954, and the premiere took place at the Bolshoi Theatre on November 6, 1954, by the State Academic Orchestra of the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra, Alexander Melik-Pashayev conducting, in a gala concert celebrating the 37th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.

THE SCORE OF THE “FESTIVE OVERTURE” calls for piccolo, two flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, extra brass ensemble (three trumpets, four horns, three trombones), and strings.

Extroverted, flashy, and cheerful, the *Festive Overture* has over the years become one of Shostakovich’s most popular “crossover” symphonic works. Frequently found on the programs of pops ensembles, and recorded by countless orchestras, it displays the lighter side of the composer’s complex personality, which is more often associated in the popular imagination with tragedy, gloom, suffering—and with lengthy compositions. Aficionados of brass instruments feel a special fondness for this splashy curtain-raiser, rippling with stirring fanfares, fortified at the rousing climax by a double brass ensemble featuring a grand (and it really is grand) total of six trumpets, six trombones, and eight horns.

Shostakovich first announced that he was working on the overture in the newspaper *Evening Leningrad* in late August, 1947. His statement there resounds with the ideological platitudes that dominated Soviet culture during this final—and in many ways, most frightening—stage of Stalin’s rule. At the time, a new campaign was raging against the “formalism” and “errors” of prominent Soviet creative artists, initially focused on the writers Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko. Shostakovich was already far too familiar with such attacks, having himself been the target in 1936 for his daring opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, a turning point in his career. So his caution is more than understandable.

“In this work,” Shostakovich wrote (though it is likely someone else authored this statement, since the composer disliked such clichéd pronouncements),

I want to convey the mood of those who survived the difficult trials of the war years, those who defeated the enemies of the Motherland and who are now rebuilding their country. I want to embody in musical images the pathos of the peaceful work going on at the construction site of our new Five Year Plan. The overture does not have sharp dramatic conflicts. Its themes are song-like, and the orchestration is varied. Full of anticipation, I will offer this new work to the judgment of the sophisticated Leningrad listener during the upcoming great celebration [of the 30th anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution].

But Shostakovich never completed the overture in 1947. If he began work and then abandoned it, he left no traces. One can speculate that in the ominous—and rapidly worsening—cultural/ideological climate, Shostakovich feared that the work would incur the disapproval of Stalin and his primary henchman in the field of the arts, Andrei Zhdanov. In January 1948, the Central Committee of the Communist Party convened an extraordinary conference of Soviet composers at which Shostakovich’s music (along with Sergei Prokofiev’s) was singled out for scathing criticism in his presence. One of his friends later wrote that Shostakovich was “very traumatized by the course of events and was walking around with a bloodied soul.”

For the next five years, until Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953, Shostakovich feared for his very life. Hoping to stay
out of trouble, he tried to keep a low profile and turned his attention to “applied” music with broad appeal, producing scores for seven films, including the infamous *Fall of Berlin* (1949), a one-dimensional paean to Stalin’s leadership during the war. During this period he wrote no symphonies, and, fearing an adverse reception, withheld from performance a new violin concerto completed in 1948 but first heard only in 1955.

Almost immediately after Stalin’s death, Shostakovich’s situation improved dramatically. (Sadly, Prokofiev did not see this new era, since he died the very same day as Stalin.) Within months, Shostakovich produced a brilliant new symphony, his Tenth, a personal statement of liberation. In autumn 1954, the composer received a lucrative last-minute commission from the Bolshoi Theatre to produce an occasional piece to be performed there as part of the celebration of the 37th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution (which fell on November 7). So Shostakovich now returned to the *Festive Overture* project abandoned in 1947. He completed the piece within a matter of hours. Couriers carried pages of the score, the ink still wet, to the Bolshoi to be copied for the orchestral parts.

Shostakovich’s friend, the musicologist Lev Lebedinsky, later described the scene:

> The speed with which he wrote was truly astounding. Moreover, when he wrote light music he was able to talk, make jokes, and compose simultaneously, like the legendary Mozart. He laughed and chuckled, and in the meantime work was under way and the music was being written down… . Two days later the dress rehearsal took place. I hurried down to the Theatre and I heard this brilliant effervescent work, with its vivacious energy spilling over like uncorked champagne.

Set in the bright key of A major, the *Festive Overture* opens with an extended introductory section, a brass fanfare; its theme strongly resembles the opening theme of the piano piece “Birthday,” composed in 1945 for the cycle *Children’s Notebook*, Opus 69. With a change of meter from 3/4 to 2/2, the main theme enters in the clarinets, later joined by flutes and piccolos, a sprightly and playfully propulsive scampering of scales set against ingenious syncopated accompaniment in the strings. A central section offers another theme, announced by the horn, a serene and confident song-like motif then taken up by the strings. Now morsels of the main theme begin to reappear, gradually engulfing the entire orchestra. The second theme then intertwines with the main theme, until the dramatic entrance of the extra brass ensemble. The fanfare motif now returns, fortified and amplified, and the overture marches to a cathartic, exuberant, and optimistic conclusion—no trace here of the irony or sarcasm found in so many of the composer’s other works.

The *Festive Overture* also enjoys the distinction of having been included in the only symphonic concert that Shostakovich—who never much enjoyed making public appearances—ever conducted. This event took place as part of a festival devoted to his music in the city of Gorky (known now by its original name of Nizhny Novgorod) on November 12, 1962. Besides the overture, the program included the First Cello Concerto, with Mstislav Rostropovich as soloist. As he told his colleague and later biographer Krzysztof Meyer, “It was no big deal to conduct the overture, but with the concerto it was much worse.” Because he was having pain in his right hand, he had to conduct mostly with his left. At one point in the performance he got lost completely. After the concert someone asked him if he got pleasure from conducting his own music, and Shostakovich replied, “Not in the slightest.”

Harlow Robinson

Harlow Robinson is an author, lecturer, and Matthews Distinguished University Professor at Northeastern University. The author of “Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography” and “Russians In Hollywood, Hollywood’s Russians,” he is a frequent lecturer and annotator for the Boston Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera, Aspen Music Festival, and Rotterdam Philharmonic, among others.

THE FIRST AMERICAN PERFORMANCE of Shostakovich’s “Festive Overture” was given by the Utah Symphony Orchestra, Maurice Abravanel conducting, on November 16, 1955.

THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA has performed the “Festive Overture” on just two previous occasions prior to this season, both times at Tanglewood: on July 13, 2002, with Mstislav Rostropovich conducting it as part of the gala concert entitled “Celebrating Seiji”; and on August 5, 2014, with Andris Poga conducting as part of that summer’s gala Tanglewood on Parade concert. It has had numerous performances by the Boston Pops, and has been recorded by the Boston Pops Orchestra with John Williams conducting.
Sergei Prokofiev

*Piano Concerto No. 3 in C, Opus 26*

SERGEI SERGIEVICH PROKOFIEV was born in Sontsovka, Ekaterinoslav district, in the Ukraine, on April 23, 1891, and died at Nikolina Gora near Moscow on March 5, 1953. The first part of this concerto to be composed was the theme of the second movement, in 1913. Prokofiev did some work on the score in the winter of 1916-17 but completed it only in the summer of 1921. He himself was soloist in the first performance, on December 16, 1921, with Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

IN ADDITION TO THE SOLO PIANIST, the score of the concerto calls for an orchestra of two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, bass drum, castanets, tambourine, cymbals, and strings.

Prokofiev was the only child in a cultural and affluent household; his early development was directed first by his doting pianist mother, who gave him his first lessons on the instrument, and then—when his talent proved to be unmistakable—by the young composer Reinhold Glière, who was hired to come to Sontsovka as a private music tutor. By the time Prokofiev entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1904 he had already completed a remarkable number of youthful works, mostly for the piano, but also including a violin sonata and an opera. During his first four years in St. Petersburg he pursued the course in composition. It was a difficult time: 1905 brought the first rumblings of the coming revolution, disturbing the tranquility of academic life (Rimsky-Korsakov was fired for anti-government activities, and other leading teachers resigned in protest). But Prokofiev himself was responsible for most of his own difficulties. Rather arrogant by nature, he was also younger than the other students and found it difficult to make friends with them. Most of his teachers were conservative pedagogues whose tutelage Prokofiev found dull; eventually he found himself in open clashes with his harmony teacher Liadov. Within a few years, the headstrong young colt had appeared in a recital of his own music that marked him as an *enfant terrible*, an image he assiduously cultivated for some time.

Prokofiev’s experience in the composition program so disillusioned him to the prospects of teaching that he decided to pursue a career as a performer. Thus, though he had maintained at best a love-hate relationship with the St. Petersburg Conservatory—somewhat skewed to the latter—he decided to stay on for the study of piano and conducting. Here, too, his willful self-assurance made difficulties, but his piano teacher, Anna Esipova, proved as strong-willed as he. Prokofiev disdained to play the music of the Classical era without adding his own “improvements,” and he found the discipline of technical drills a waste of time. Only when Esipova threatened him with expulsion did he see the light. His four years of study proved essential to his career as a soloist. He already played brilliant pieces brilliantly, but Esipova nourished a strain of lyricism that was to become as important to his composition as it was to his playing.

Needless to say, he did not give up composing during this time. Before completing the piano program, Prokofiev had already finished his first two piano concertos (obviously designed as showpieces for himself) and had even boldly chosen to play the First Concerto as his piece for the final keyboard competition, although it was expected that the participants would choose a work from the established repertory.

The years following Prokofiev’s graduation in 1914 were marked by war and revolution in the world at large and in Russia in particular. Yet in spite of this, Prokofiev began to achieve renown, composing some of his best-known works, including the *Classical* Symphony and the First Violin Concerto. Eventually, though, the unsettled condition of musical life and almost everything else persuaded him to go abroad, at least for a time. He set out with high hopes for New York, going the long way, through Vladivostok, Tokyo, and San Francisco. While on this long journey he began sketching a new opera, *The Love for Three Oranges*, as well as two movements of a string quartet. Though the opera was eventually to become his most successful stage work, its first production was fraught with difficulties. After signing a contract for a 1919 production in Chicago, Prokofiev finished the score in time for rehearsals. But the sudden death of the intended conductor postponed the premiere for one year, then a second. Increasingly disillusioned with the United States,
Prokofiev left for Paris in the spring of 1920. Paris was a good place for a Russian composer of advanced tendencies. Diaghilev’s brilliant Ballets Russes was open to the newest ideas, especially from Russian composers, and Serge Koussevitzky had founded his own concert series emphasizing new works. After the exciting premiere of his ballet *The Tale of the Buffoon* by the Ballets Russes (Paris loved it, London hated it), Prokofiev adjourned to the coast of Brittany for a summer of composition. There he achieved his long-held plan to write a Third Piano Concerto. Much of the material was already in hand, since he had been thinking about such a work since completing the Second Concerto in 1914, and some of the musical ideas go back even before that. He was still committed to the premiere of his opera in Chicago that fall, so he took the opportunity of introducing the new piano concerto there during the same trip. *The Love for Three Oranges* was premiered (in French, rather than the Russian in which it had been composed) at the Auditorium Theater in Chicago on December 30, 1921—two weeks after Prokofiev himself had introduced his new concerto with conductor Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony. Here, too, Prokofiev received diverse reactions: Chicago loved both works, New York hated them. Following this experience, Prokofiev returned to Paris, where he lived until his permanent return to the Soviet Union in 1936. Only concert tours brought him back to the United States during that period. By now, though, his two major “American” pieces are well established as favorites among Prokofiev’s output.

The Third Concerto, in fact, is the most frequently performed of Prokofiev’s five contributions to that genre. Though it is not a whit less demanding technically than the first two concertos, it opens up a new and appealing vein of lyricism that Prokofiev was to mine successfully in the years to come. At the same time his biting, acerbic humor is never absent for long, especially in the writing for woodwinds and sometimes for percussion.

The concerto opens with a yearning lyrical theme in the clarinet, immediately echoed in flute and violins; its simplicity makes it memorable, and it will mark several stages of the form later on. Almost at once a bustling of sixteenth-note runs in the strings ushers in the soloist, whose nervous theme grows out of the first three notes of the opening lyrical theme (a major second down and a perfect fifth up) turned backwards (a perfect fifth down and a major second up), then sweeps farther afield harmonically in its headstrong energy. An austere march of pounding chords leads to a faster passage of whirling triplets to conclude the exposition. The basic material is developed and recapitulated in a free sonata form.

The main theme of the second movement is one of those patented Prokofiev tunes, dry and sardonic. But it doesn’t stay that way long. The first variation is a Chopin nocturne with a twist; each ensuing variation has its own special color and character, by turns brilliant, meditative, and vigorously energetic. A climactic restatement of the theme with further pianistic display dies away mysteriously into nothing.

The finale begins with a crisp theme in bassoons and pizzicato lower strings in A minor; the piano argues with thundering chords, clouding the harmony. Despite various contrasting materials, some lyrical, some sarcastic, the opening figure provides the main basis for the musical discussion, ending in a brilliant pounding coda.

Steven Ledbetter

*Steven Ledbetter was program annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1979 to 1998.*

**THE FIRST AMERICAN PERFORMANCE** of Prokofiev’s *Piano Concerto No. 3* was the world premiere performance noted above, on December 16, 1921, with the composer as soloist and Frederick Stock conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

**THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCES** of Prokofiev’s *Piano Concerto No. 3* were on January 29 and 30, 1926, with the composer as soloist under Serge Koussevitzky’s direction, followed that February by
performances in New York, Brooklyn, Cambridge, and Providence. Prokofiev and Koussevitzky performed the work again here in February 1937, subsequent BSO performances featuring Alexander Borovsky with Koussevitzky, William Kapell and Gary Graffman with Richard Burgin, Alexander Urinsky with Charles Munch and Burgin, Jorge Bolet and John Browning with Erich Leinsdorf, Graffman with Michael Tilson Thomas, Maurizio Pollini with Seiji Ozawa and Tilson Thomas, Jeffrey Siegel with William Steinberg, Browning with Aldo Ceccato, Israela Margalit with Lorin Maazel and Joseph Silverstein, Martha Argerich and Alexander Toradze with Ozawa, John Lill with Yuri Temirkanov, Yefim Bronfman with Charles Dutoit, Browning with Leonard Slatkin, Garrick Ohlsson with Marek Janowski and James Conlon, Argerich with Charles Dutoit, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet with Sean Newhouse (the most recent subscription performances, in October 2011), and Ohlsson with Ludovic Morlot (the most recent Tanglewood performance, on July 28, 2013).

Modest Mussorgsky

“Pictures at an Exhibition”
(orchestrated by Maurice Ravel)

Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky was born at Karevo, District of Pskov, on March 21, 1839, and died in St. Petersburg on March 28, 1881. He composed “Pictures at an Exhibition” as a set of piano pieces in June 1874. Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) made his orchestral transcription in the summer of 1922 for Serge Koussevitzky, who two years later would begin his twenty-five-year tenure as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Koussevitzky introduced the Ravel version at one of his own concerts in Paris on October 22, 1922, and led the American premiere with the Boston Symphony Orchestra early in his first Boston season, on November 7 and 8, 1924, in Symphony Hall.

Ravel’s orchestration of “Pictures at an Exhibition” calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, alto saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, bells, triangle, tam-tam, rattle, whip, cymbals, side drum, bass drum, xylophone, celesta, two harps, and strings.

It was Ravel, the Frenchman, who told Serge Koussevitzky, the Russian, about these fascinating pieces and fired his enthusiasm. At the time, around 1922, the Pictures at an Exhibition were quite unknown, and the Russian publishing house of Bessel, which had issued them in 1886 in a version heavily edited by Rimsky-Korsakov, had so little faith in them that it had no difficulty going along with Koussevitzky’s stipulation that Ravel’s transcription should be reserved for a number of years for his exclusive use, since clearly there was nothing in it for the publishers. In the event, the Mussorgsky/Ravel Pictures quickly became a Koussevitzky specialty, and his frequent and brilliant performances, especially his fantastic 1930 recording with the Boston Symphony, turned the work into an indispensable repertory item. What would particularly have pleased Ravel is the way the popularity of “his” Pictures led pianists to rediscover Mussorgsky’s.

At that, Ravel was not the first musician to orchestrate Pictures at an Exhibition, having been anticipated by Mikhail Tushmalov in 1891 (his version also being tampered with by Rimsky-Korsakov, who conducted the first performance) and by Sir Henry J. Wood in 1920. During the time that Ravel’s score was available only to Koussevitzky, an orchestration appeared by Leonidas Leonardi (“whose idea of the art,” remarked a contemporary critic, “is very remote”), and later there were scorings by Leopold Stokowski, Lucien Cailliet (the uncredited ghostwriter of many orchestrations attributed to Stokowski, though thePictures do seem to be Stokowski’s own), and Walter Goehr—not to forget the electronic version by Tomita, Elgar Howarth’s transcription for the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble, the Yamashita reduction for solo guitar, Keith Emerson’s rock presentation, and Vladimir Horowitz’s own rethinking for piano.

In this whole scene, Ravel’s edition is the time-tested survivor, and for good reason: he is Mussorgsky’s peer, and his transcription stands as a model of what we would ask for in such an enterprise by way of technical brilliance, imaginative insight, and concern for Mussorgsky’s own name.

The Pictures are “really” Victor Hartmann’s. He was a close and important friend to Mussorgsky, and his death at only thirty-nine in the summer of 1873 was an occasion of profound and tearing grief for the composer. The critic Stasov organized a posthumous exhibition of Hartmann’s drawings, paintings, and architectural sketches in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1874, and by June 22,
Mussorgsky, having worked at high intensity and speed, completed his tribute to his friend. He imagined himself “roving through the exhibition, now leisurely, now briskly in order to come close to a picture that had attracted his attention, and at times sadly, thinking of his departed friend.” The roving music, which opens the suite, he calls “Promenade,” and his designation of it as being “nel modo russico” is a redundancy.

Gnomus: According to Stasov, “a child’s plaything, fashioned, after Hartmann’s design in wood, for the Christmas tree at the Artists’ Club...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.”

Il vecchio castello (The Old Castle): There was no item by that title in the exhibition, but it presumably refers to one of several architectural watercolors done on a trip of Hartmann’s to Italy. Stasov tells us that the piece represents a medieval castle with a troubadour standing before it. Ravel decided basically to make his orchestra the size of the one Rimsky-Korsakov used in his edition of his opera Boris Godunov, the most famous of earlier orchestrations of Mussorgsky, but not, alas, as honorable as Ravel’s. He went beyond those bounds in adding percussion and, most remarkably, in his inspired use of the alto saxophone here. In this movement, Ravel makes one of his rare compositional changes, adding an extra measure of accompaniment between the first two phrases of the melody.

Tuileries: The park in Paris, swarming with children and their nurses. Mussorgsky reaches this picture by way of a Promenade.

Bydlo: The word is Polish for cattle. Mussorgsky explained to Stasov that the picture represents an ox-drawn wagon with enormous wheels, but adding that “the wagon is not inscribed on the music; that is purely between us.”

Ballet of Chicks in their Shells: A costume design for a ballet, Trilby, with choreography by Petipa and music by Gerber, and given in St. Petersburg in 1871 (no connection with George du Maurier’s famous novel, which was not published until 1893). A scene with child dancers was de rigueur in a Petipa spectacular. Here we have canaries “enclosed in eggs as in suits of armor, with canary heads put on like helmets.” (See picture on page 41.) The ballet is preceded by a short Promenade.

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle: Mussorgsky owned two drawings by Hartmann entitled “A rich Jew wearing a fur hat” and “A poor Jew: Sandomierz.” Hartmann had spent a month of 1868 at Sandomierz in Poland. Mussorgsky’s manuscript has no title, and Stasov provided one, “Two Polish Jews, one rich, one poor,” and he seems later to have added the names of Goldenberg and Schmuyle. Another small alteration here: Mussorgsky ends with a long note, but Ravel has his Goldenberg dismiss the whining Schmuyle more abruptly.

The Market at Limoges: Mussorgsky jots some imagined conversation in the margin of the manuscript: “Great news! M. de Puissangeout has just recovered his cow...Mme. de Remboursac has just acquired a beautiful new set of teeth, while M. de Pantaleon’s nose, which is in his way, is as much as ever the color of a peony.” With a great rush of wind, Mussorgsky plunges us directly into the

Catacombae. Sepulcrum Romanum: The picture shows the interior of catacombs in Paris with Hartmann, a friend, and a guide with a lamp. Mussorgsky adds this marginal note: “The creative spirit of the dead Hartmann leads me towards skulls, apostrophizes them—the skulls are illuminated gently from within.”

Con mortuis in lingua mortua (Among the dead in the language of the dead): A ghostly transformation of the Promenade, to be played “con lamento.”

The Hut on Chicken Legs: A clock in 14th-century style, in the shape of a hut with cock’s heads and on chicken legs, done in metal. Mussorgsky associated this with the witch Baba-Yaga, who
Michael Steinberg was program annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1976 to 1979, and after that of the San Francisco Symphony and New York Philharmonic. Oxford University Press has published three compilations of his program notes, devoted to symphonies, concertos, and the great works for chorus and orchestra.

The important modern study of Prokofiev is Harlow Robinson’s Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography, originally published in 1987, reprinted in 2002 with a new foreword and afterword by the author (Northeastern University paperback). Robinson’s book avoids the biased attitudes of earlier writers.
whose viewpoints were colored by the “Russian”-vs.-“Western” perspectives typical of their time, as reflected in such older volumes as Israel Nestyev’s Prokofiev (Stanford University Press, translated from the Russian by Florence Jonas) and Victor Seroff’s Sergei Prokofiev: A Soviet Tragedy (Taplinger). Robinson has also produced Selected Letters of Sergei Prokofiev, newly translating and editing a volume of previously unpublished Prokofiev correspondence (Northeastern University). Sergei Prokofiev by Daniel Jaffé is in the well-illustrated series “20th-Century Composers” (Phaidon paperback). Michael Steinberg’s The Concerto—A Listener’s Guide includes Prokofiev’s Second and Third piano concertos and his two violin concertos (Oxford University paperback). Robert Layton discusses Prokofiev’s concertos in his chapter on “Russia after 1917” in A Guide to the Concerto, which Layton also edited (Oxford paperback). Other useful books include the aforementioned Boris Schwarz’s Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, Enlarged Edition, 1917-1981 (Indiana University Press) and Prokofiev by Prokofiev: A Composer’s Memoir, an autobiographical account covering the first seventeen years of Prokofiev’s life, through his days at the St. Petersburg Conservatory (Doubleday).

Lang Lang has recorded Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 3 with Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic (Sony, paired with Bartók’s Piano Concerto No. 2, on CD, DVD, and Blu-ray). Erich Leinsdorf and the Boston Symphony Orchestra recorded Prokofiev’s five piano concertos in the mid-1960s with soloist John Browning for RCA (reissued on CD by Testament). Recordings of Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 3 also include Martha Argerich’s with Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon), Behzod Abduraimov’s with Juraj Val’cuha and the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI (Decca), Vladimir Ashkenazy’s with André Previn and the London Symphony Orchestra (Decca), Jean-Efflam Bavouzet’s with Gianandrea Noseda and the BBC Philharmonic (Chandos), Yefim Bronfman’s with Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic (Sony), and Evgeny Kissin’s with Vladimir Ashkenazy conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra (EMI).


For a recording of Mussorgsky’s Pictures in the original piano version, choices include Yefim Bronfman’s (Sony Classical), Leif Ove Andsnes’s (EMI), Evgeny Kissin’s (RCA), Paul Lewis’s (Harmonia Mundi), Sviatoslav Richter’s from a 1958 Sofia recital (Urania), and Vladimir Horowitz’s own rethinking of what Mussorgsky actually wrote (RCA). Serge Koussevitzky’s historic BSO account, recorded by RCA Victor in 1930, has resurfaced on compact disc (RCA, Pearl). More recent contenders among recordings of the familiar Ravel orchestration include (among many others) Fritz Reiner’s with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (RCA), Valery Gergiev’s with the Vienna Philharmonic (Philips), Leonard Bernstein’s with the New York Philharmonic (Sony Classical), James Levine’s with the MET Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Eugene Ormandy’s with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Sony), Seiji Ozawa’s with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Sony), and George Szell’s with the Cleveland Orchestra (Sony Classical).

Marc Mandel