

Pictures at an Exhibition

October 13, 2023

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Darko Butorac, conductor
Roman Rabinovich, piano

Valentyn Sylvestrov
(1937-)

"Evening Serenade" from *Silent Music* for string orchestra

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891-1953)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Major, Op. 26
Andante - Allegro
Tema con variazioni
Allegro, ma non troppo

INTERMISSION

Modest Mussorgsky
(1833-1897)

Pictures at an Exhibition (arr. Ravel)
Promenade
Gnomus
Promenade
The Old Castle
Promenade
Tuileries
Bydlo
Promenade
Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
Limoges, the Market Place
Catacombs
The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba Yaga)
The Great Gate of Kiev

*Roman Rabinovich is represented exclusively by Arts Management Group, Inc
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Ukrainian composer and pianist **Valentin Silvestrov (1937-)** was born in Kyiv. His early modernist leanings did not fit the Soviet government's restrictions on/expectations for art, and his involvement in a protest resulted in his expulsion from the Ukrainian Union of Composers in 1970. By the time he was reinstated three years later, he had begun writing softer, gentler works with a more conventional approach to melody and tonality. Of his *Silent Songs* (1977), former Tallahassee and world-renowned pianist H el ene Grimaud has said, "He's a magician in the sense that he's able to create this inner space within the sound and really captivate the soul of his audience." [check out her recent recording with baritone Konstantin Krimmel] After Ukraine became independent in 1991, Silvestrov's music became more political. Following the 2014 protests, he composed a series of songs for a cappella chorus that later became known as *Maidan-2014*. This collection includes "Prayer for Ukraine" and five new arrangements of the Ukrainian national anthem. After the Russian invasion of his homeland last year, Silvestrov fled Kyiv with his daughter and granddaughter, spending one night in a nursery school when Russian bombing delayed their journey to Lviv. They eventually crossed Poland and settled in Berlin. His music is now being performed around the globe, making him into a spokesperson for the Ukrainian people. "**Evening Serenade**" is the central movement of three called *Silent Music* (2002). Violins and violas play a simple unison melody with pizzicato accompaniment by the lower strings. This cantabile lullaby is calm and contemplative, with traditional melodic phrases and chord progressions. Grimaud's description of *Silent Songs* is also appropriate for *Silent Music*: "It is utterly poetic, never pretending to be something else."

DID YOU KNOW?

Most of us spell the Ukrainian capital "Kiev," but that is the transliteration from the Russian language. The Ukrainian spelling translates to "Kyiv" in English, and there is an online movement fighting for this spelling exclusively, *KyivnotKiev*.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) received his earliest piano instruction from his mother in rural Sontsovka in Ukraine. As a young child, he fell asleep hearing her play Beethoven and Chopin. He wrote his first opera at age nine, and at age thirteen he and his mother moved to St. Petersburg so that he could attend the Conservatory, where one of his teachers was Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Prokofiev received three diplomas as well as the Anton Rubenstein Prize for best pianist when he graduated in 1914. During that time, many criticized his innovative compositions and considered him arrogant. Uninterested in the political chaos and revolution following the deposing of Czar Nicholas II in March 1917, the 26-year-old composer spent that summer writing his first symphony in the countryside, working simultaneously on ideas for a string quartet and several piano concertos. **Piano Concerto No. 3**, which incorporated some of that material, was composed primarily on the coast of Brittany in the spring and summer of 1921. The Chicago Symphony premiered the concerto in December 1921 with Prokofiev as soloist. Two elements that distinguish Prokofiev's "voice" are soaring lyricism and perpetual motion (or *perpetuum mobile*). These contrasting features are much in evidence in this the most popular of Prokofiev's five piano concertos. A clarinet solo (that becomes a clarinet duet) presents a lyrical theme. Scurrying strings gather momentum, moving the tempo from **Andante to Allegro** and introducing the soloist,

who alternates percussive chords and octaves with rapid and often whimsical phrases. The conversation between piano and orchestra is at times intimate and other times exhilarating, with many dazzling virtuosic passages for the soloist. The first movement ends with a flurry of energy.

After the orchestra presents the courtly theme that is the basis of the **Tema con variazioni**, a long trill on the piano signifies the beginning of the first variation. When the pianist abruptly begins a rapid finger chase up and down the keyboard, the second variation has arrived; it has a strangely reflective ending. Variation 3 is characterized by a syncopated rhythm. Its drive quickly fades into the contemplative fourth variation with its octave leaps in the horns and rather haunting descending passages played by the soloist. Variation 5 returns with a burst of vitality. A repetition of the theme and an unexpected coda conclude the movement. Bassoons introduce the final **Allegro** and are featured several times in this study of contrasts in tempo and mood. A beautiful slow theme dominates the middle of the movement before the perpetual motion kicks in, leading inexorably to a whirling dervish of an ending.

A group of nineteenth-century composers known as *Moguchaya Kuchka* (The Mighty Five) desired to promote Russian nationalism. The most original of The Five, **Modest Mussorgsky (1839-81)**, was a civil servant who composed when he had time. In 1873 his friend, Russian artist and architect Viktor Hartmann, died at age thirty-nine. The following year the composer helped organize an exhibit of 400 of Hartmann's works. This event inspired Mussorgsky to write a piano composition illustrating his friend's artwork. He completed **Pictures at an Exhibition** in just six weeks, a truly amazing feat when one considers a statement from one of his *Moguchaya Kuchka* colleagues:

"Modest has a constitutional reluctance to finish things." Although completed, *Pictures at an Exhibition* was not published until five years after Mussorgsky's death, when Rimsky-Korsakov presented his edition of the work. (Rimsky-Korsakov spent much of his life revising and promoting his friend's music, along with composing his own masterpieces.) In 1922 Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1924-49), personally published the orchestral transcription of *Pictures* that he commissioned from Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). Ravel was a master orchestrator who created a rich palette of timbres that maintained clarity despite the large orchestra. The popularity of *Pictures* prompted many others to make arrangements because Koussevitzky had exclusive performance rights to Ravel's version for many years. More recently, the British pop group Emerson, Lake and Palmer arranged *Pictures* in a progressive rock/jazz format for two albums (1971, 2008), and Isao Tomita recorded an electronic version in 1975.

The opening "**Promenade**" recurs several times, representing the composer strolling between pictures in the exhibit. It was originally written in 11/4, but it is generally printed in alternating measures of 5/4 and 6/4. The tempo and mood of this passage change according to the spectator's ambling through the artwork. Ravel heralds the opening of the exhibit with the trumpet. Two- and three-note cells from this melody inform much of the larger composition. In "**Gnomus**," rapid rhythmic changes and wide melodic intervals suggest the uneven limping of a dwarf. A foreboding brass progression, long descending scale passages, extended trills in winds and brass, and eerie string glissandos all add to the novel effect. A constant, rhythmic pulse (ostinato) provides a drone for the bassoon's medieval-sounding, modal tune in "**The Old Castle**." "**Dispute Between Children at Play**"

(**Tuileries**) has a repetitive, taunting gesture in the winds that symbolizes the children playing, not always nicely, in the gardens near the Louvre. Following that brief ternary movement, Mussorgsky places another ostinato figure in the bass of "**Cattle**" (Bydlo). Often translated "Polish oxcart," this movement's opening is dark and labored. A climactic moment occurs in the middle as the dynamics change and percussion instruments reinforce the measured gait. The Promenade that follows continues the dark, minor mode until piccolo and high strings scratch through the "**Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells**." "**Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle**" (**Two Polish Jews, One Rich, the Other Poor**) follows immediately with unison strings introducing the first, noble character. A rapidly-tongued trumpet introduces the second, poorer individual, after which the two themes occur simultaneously. Mussorgsky emulates Jewish music by his use of an ancient mode (scale pattern). Rapidly scurrying figures race through busy "**Limoges, the Market Place**." Sharply contrasted with the brief preceding scene, "**Catacombs**" begins with ponderous brass instruments that echo in the underground vaults. This first section of nearly static block chords moves into a slightly faster part that incorporates the Promenade theme. Descending string tremolos in the background provide a foreshadowing of a ghostly effect that Mussorgsky reuses in the following movement. The peaceful ending of shimmering strings and winds makes the tumultuous beginning of "**The Hut on Fowl's Legs**" even more startling. This music represents Hartmann's sketch of a clock designed to resemble the hut of Baba Yaga, the legendary Russian witch who flies through the air on a mortar and pestle. A repeated note in the trumpet ushers in the middle section with its eerie theme accompanied by oscillations in the winds. String tremolos characterize the witch's supernatural flight. For his finale, the

composer turned to Hartmann's design for a grand entry gate for the ancient city of Kyiv. Although the architectural wonder was never realized, Hartmann's vision is immortalized in Mussorgsky's work, which proceeds without pause to "**The Great Gate of Kyiv**." Slow and majestic brass chords alternate abruptly with a quiet wind chorale. The Promenade theme returns amidst celebrating brass, percussion, and joyous bells, an integral part of all Russian festivities (and a common element in the ending of much Russian music). Prolonged chords produce a magnificent, spine-tingling conclusion to the *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

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Guest Artist



Praised by *The New York Times* for his 'uncommon sensitivity and feeling,' the eloquent pianist **Roman Rabinovich** is renowned for his multifaceted musical artistry, earning acclaim as a soloist, curator, and collaborator.

Winner of the 12th Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition in 2008, Rabinovich made his Carnegie Hall Concerto Debut, on a 24-hour notice with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and has collaborated with esteemed orchestras like the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Meininger Hofkapelle, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, KBS Symphony, Prague Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Buffalo Philharmonic, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and Seattle Symphony, under the batons of conductors including Sir Roger Norrington, Zubin Mehta, JoAnn Falletta, Kristjan Järvi, and Gerard Schwarz. As a recitalist, he has performed at Washington Performing Arts Society, Vancouver Recital Society, Piano Series at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and Liszt Academy in Budapest and participated in festivals including Marlboro, Lucerne and Prague Spring.

Dubbed "a true polymath, in the Renaissance sense of the word" (Seen & Heard International, 2016), Rabinovich's artistic reach extends beyond the piano. He is a composer and visual artist with a diverse

repertoire spanning six centuries. He has won critical acclaim for interpretations of the music of Joseph Haydn, encompassing Haydn's complete keyboard sonatas at the Lammermuir and Bath Festivals in UK, and curated a three-concert Haydn Day at Wigmore Hall. The first two volumes of his complete Haydn Cycle on First Hand Records have been released to critical acclaim.

Having made his Israel Philharmonic debut under Zubin Mehta at the age of 10, Rabinovich was among the first pianists championed by Sir Andrés Schiff in his series 'Building Bridges'.

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