

Pictures at an Exhibition – program notes

Modest Mussorgsky

Mussorgsky was a Russian composer born in 1839. He was a close friend to Victor Hartmann, an artist, who died at the early age of thirty-nine. In the spring of 1874 a posthumous exhibition of Hartmann's drawings, paintings and architectural sketches was organized. As a tribute to his friend, Mussorgsky wrote a musical movement for piano for each picture. Mussorgsky died before he ever heard the music performed.

Promenade – The composer 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 artist.

Movement #1 – Gnomus (The Gnome) – Represents a gnome-shaped nutcracker designed in wood. The gnome accompanies his droll movements with savage shrieks.

Movement #2 – Il Vecchio Castello (The Old Castle)- This refers to one of several architectural watercolors done by the artist of an Italian medieval castle with a troubadour standing before it.

Movement #3 –Tuileries – The music refers to a park in Paris, swarming with children and their nurses.

Movement #4 – Bydlo – The word is Polish for cattle and the music represents a picture of an ox-drawn wagon with enormous wheels.

Movement #5 – Ballet of Chicks in Their Shells – This movement is based on a costume design for a ballet where child dancers portray canaries “enclosed in eggs as in suits of armor.”

Movement #6 – Samuel Goldenberg and Shmuel – This movement is based on two drawings entitled *A Rich Jew Wearing a Fur Hat* and *a Poor Jew: Sandomierz*.

Movement #7 – The Market place at Limoges – The music represents a bustling marketplace with news and gossip being passed from one person to another.

Movement #8 – Catacombae- the original picture shows the interior of a catacomb in Paris with the artist, a friend and a guide with a lamp walking through the catacombs.

Movement #9 – The Hut on Fowls' Legs – This movement is based on a picture of a clock in the shape of a hut with chicken legs that Mussorgsky associated with the witch Baba Yaga who flew about the forest in a “mortar” chasing her victims. The folk tale relates that she lived in a hut on fowls' legs.

Movement # 10 – The Great Gate of Kiev – The artist had designed a series of stone gates that were to have replaced the wooden city gates. These gates were never built, but certainly Mussorgsky's Great Gate shall live on in perpetuity.