

POEMS AND PICTURES:
A PERSPECTIVE OF MUSICAL JOURNEY IN PIANO RECITAL

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ABSTRACT

Piano recitals are often associated with listening to beautiful and virtuosic performances. While most of the piano repertoire are absolute music, there are a few programmatic piano pieces that have stories, poems, or other literary aspects. I am presenting a recital titled “Poems and Pictures,” to offer a perspective in a musical journey through listening to a piano recital. The program selections in this recital allow the audience to listen to a piano recital and get a similar experience as going to the movies. Like a movie, this recital program includes stories (poems), pictures, and sounds (music).

In this contemporary era, when everything tends to be fast-paced, and technology-oriented, many people do not enjoy going to a long classical piano recital without knowing the music. The goal of this program is to lure in more audience and to guide them on how to enjoy a piano recital. People love stories and this program will bring it to the audience.

The first half of this program, there are poems related to each of the piece. I commissioned the first piece, *Andando* (Walking) by American composer, Dylan Findley. This piece was inspired by a Spanish poem by Juan Ramón Jiménez. The second piece is a transcription of Schubert’s song “Der Müller und der Bach” from his song cycle *Die Schöne Müllerin* by Franz Liszt. The third piece is Johannes Brahms’ Ballades, op. 10. The first

Ballade from this set is the only one that has a poem associated with the music. All three pieces in the first half are associated with story and words. Each of them has a plot, which invites the audience to join in the journey of the music.

The second half of this program, I am presenting Mussorgsky's *Picture at an Exhibition*, which has pictures associated with each of the pieces in the set. Like the first half of the recital, this second half will open with a journey of walking. *Pictures at an Exhibition* opens with a Promenade, which depicts the action of walking or entering the art exhibition. Listeners then will hear numerous different pieces associated with specific paintings in the exhibition.

By having supplementary elements attached to the music, I hope that listeners can enter the musical journey through words, poems, and pictures. These visual and literary accompaniment to the music in this program will hopefully promote imaginations from the listeners, hence creating a more relatable and enjoyable experience this program.

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PART I

The first piece, *Andando* (2018), was written by an American composer, Dylan Findley (b. 1991). It was written for me, Regina Tanujaya (b. 1993), and this recital was the world-premiere of this piece. I requested the composer to write something based on a poem. He selected a Spanish poem by Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), titled *Andando*.

This poem talks about walking. A person that wants to walk away from everything he had, but still leaving marks behind. Findley expressed this poem through in his music by creating three different movements with titles from the poem. Although the music is in three movements, they are all to be performed *attaca*, therefore the movements are to be considered as sections instead of separate musical ideas.

The first movement titled “Que yo quiero llegar tardando” (“For I want to arrive late”) starts quick and it decelerates through metric modulations. The composer stated that “this movement retreats from the busyness of everyday life into the solitude of nature at sundown.” The busyness mentioned in the poem is also depicted by the constant syncopations that happen in the music. The music also frequently changes time signatures. The right hand and the left hand do not really correspond with each other melodically and it creates the metric instability. Eventually the busyness dies down as the tempo slows down through the metric modulation and it arrived at the solitude of the nature of the peaceful second movement.

Solo Piano

Written for Regina Tanujaya
Andando
Inspired by Juan Ramón Jiménez's poem

Dylan Findley

I.
Que yo quiero llegar tardando

The image shows the first ten measures of a piano piece. The first system (measures 1-4) is marked 'Frantic, Busy' with a tempo of quarter note = 160 and a dynamic of *ff*. It features a 4/4 time signature and a 15^{ma} fingering. The second system (measures 5-8) is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 120 and a dynamic of *p*. It features a 5/4 time signature and a 15^{ma} fingering. The third system (measures 9-10) is marked with a dynamic of *mf* and includes the instruction 'resolutely'. It features a 5/4 time signature and a 15^{ma} fingering. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Figure 1: Findley, *Andando*, mm. 1-10

The second movement is titled “Mi corazón ya es remanso” (“My heart is already at peace”). The tempo marking for this movement, “Reverent, Meditative,” suggests that this movement should be signifying the end of the “busy life”. There are a lot of uses of the damper pedal and the sostenuto pedal in this movement. The pedal use is supporting the meditative element of this movement. The composer stated that this movement “traces a

modal melody, then it swells passionately to a strong, yearning climax, depicting the faithful tears the poet leaves behind.”

The third movement, “Dar mi alma a cada grano” (“To give my soul to each grain”), is depicting the freedom of walking away. The melodies are ornamented, with extended runs, and could be played freely.

III.
Dar mi alma a cada grano de la tierra que voy rozando

76 Liberated, in tranquility
(15^{ma})

Pg. 7
Andando

Figure 2: Findley, *Andando*, mm. 76-83

It ends very quietly after presenting a recollection from the second movement. Findley conveys the ending of the poem perfectly in the music because the ending sounds quite uncertain and empty, just like how the person in the poem might feel at the end. In the poem, it is also mentioned “I want to see the faithful tears of the path I leave behind” at the end of the poem. In the music, the fragment recollection from the second movement indicates that there are traces of his path that he left behind. Another interpretation of the ending of the poem is that the person might suggest that he wants to walk away from life to his death. The music ends very quietly and serene, which could be representing the end of his life, free from all his worldly duty.

The sentiment presented both in the poem and in the music is about giving up something in order to gain freedom to experience different things. This recital program starts with this piece to invite all listeners to allow themselves to let go of their preconceived idea of attending a piano recital as passive participants. Therefore, they could be free to enter the stories and use their imagination to actively participate in the journey through sounds. This entire program is designed to help the audience enhance their senses.

PART II

The second piece is Franz Liszt's (1811-1886) transcription of the song "Der müller und der Bach" from Franz Schubert's (1797-1828) song cycle *Die Schöne Müllerin* (1824). Schubert exhibited tight connections between words sung and the piano part writing in his *lieder*. The piano part is not only giving harmonic support, but it sets the mood and expression from the text.

Die Schöne Müllerin was one of Schubert's late compositions. This cycle consists of twenty songs, with one continuous plot. The text of this cycle, *Die Schöne Müllerin*, was originally written by poet William Müller (1794-1827) in 1818. In this song cycle, the plot goes from having an optimistic narrative to a tragic ending. It is about a young man, who is a miller, that goes around the countryside then works for a miller. Then this young miller falls in love with a miller's daughter. However, the daughter is in love with another man, a hunter. This young man expressed his sorrow and anguish to the brook or the stream of water. This brook is present throughout the cycle. At the end, the text and the music of the cycle is implying that the young man probably committed suicide by drowning himself in the brook out of despair of his unrequited love.

"Der müller und der Bach" is the second to last song in the cycle. At this point of the story line, the young man knew that he could not get the love from the miller's daughter despite trying everything he could to get her. In the song, he had a conversation with the brook about dying because he no longer had hope to get the girl's love. The text is a conversation between the young miller and the brook.

Schubert's *lieder* "Der müller und der Bach" is in three parts. It is divided by the thematic materials and the key of the sections. The poem is also in three parts, divided by

the speaker's point of view. The first and third stanza are spoken by the miller (the young man) and the second stanza is spoken by the brook. However, Liszt's transcription has some added sections after these three sections were completed. Liszt added an extra repetition with a slight variation on the accompaniment at the end in his solo piano transcription. Although the solo piano transcription is technically not in three sections, the score is marked by the text, and it indicates which text is for which section.

This song opens with pensive, slow, and simple G minor chords. The minor key portrayed the sadness of the young miller. When the melody enters, this is when the young miller starts to speak his concerns to the brook. The melody is very solemn, and it fits the mood of the young miller expressing his heartache.

In the middle part, when the text is spoken by the brook, is in its relative major key, G major. The texture on the piano part has more rhythmic subdivision, hence making the music sound more fluid and continuous. This could be a way that Schubert is depicting the brook and its flowing water. The brook is consoling the young man, giving him some hope and encouragement. The brook is expressing that the most important thing is that he has true love.

When Schubert was writing this song cycle, he was suffering from severe symptoms of syphilis. He knew he was dying, and he also knew that there was no more hope of healing. Schubert perhaps expressed this feeling of hopelessness and despair through this song cycle. He conveyed his own agony through the young miller's heartbreak in the poem, then composed music that would depict the torment of both the young miller and himself.

After the major section, the music goes back to the minor key, and the text is also from the young miller's perspective again. The first thematic materials also returned to this last section. However, at the very end, the music moves to G major, and it also cadences in G major.

Although the major section in this song is spoken by the brook, Schubert might be using this as an indication of his inner thoughts. Using the major key, he could mean that he was thinking of hope of healing or betterment. However, I believe that he also thought of the feeling of relief. The last section of this song is in G minor, clearly expressing his devastation. However, the piece ended in G major. Like the young man portrayed in the song cycle, Schubert was living in pain from his condition. The thought of ending the pain through the inevitable death gave him hope that at some point all the pain and suffering would end, which probably gave him hope and will to live while he can. The G major ending in this song portrays the young miller's surrendering to the brook, perhaps drowning himself. It also could be interpreted as Schubert's surrendering to his death.

The last words in the song could be translated as "sing on." This also offers some perspective into Liszt's transcription for solo piano. Liszt added some repetitions after the three sections Schubert's song are presented. In these repetitions, there are also some variations on the "piano accompaniment" part. This addition by Liszt is not only offering more opportunity for listeners to be engaged in the music, but it is a realization of the last text in Schubert's song "sing on."

PART III

The third piece is Johannes Brahms's (1833-1897) four Ballades, op. 10 to close the first half of the recital. Out of this set of 4 Ballades, only the first Ballade is programmatic. Brahms wrote the first Ballade based on an old Scottish poem "Edward." This poem first appeared in the collection of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, published in 1765.¹

This poem contains a conversation between a son and his mother. In the beginning, the mother asked her son why his sword was dripping blood, and he gave excuses and answered that he killed different animals. The mother keeps asking the question and her persistence leads him to finally confessed that he murdered his father. He also said that he will leave his family and all he had forever as penance. At the end, the poem suggested that the mother actually put him up to killing his father.

'Why does your sword so drip with blood,
Edward, Edward?
Why does your sword so drip with blood?
And why so sad are ye, O?'
'O, I have killed my hawk so good,
Mother, mother:
O I have killed my hawk so good:
And I had no more but he, O.'

'Your hawk's blood was never so red,
Edward, Edward:
Your hawk's blood was never so red,
My dear son I tell thee, O.'
'O, I have killed my red-roan steed,
Mother, mother:
O, I have killed my red-roan steed,
That once was so fair and free, O.'

'Your steed was old, and we have got more,
Edward, Edward:
Your steed was old, and we have got more,
Some other evil ye fear, O.'
'O, I have killed my father dear,
Mother, mother:

¹ Charise Hastings, "From Poem to Performance: Brahms's "Edward" Ballade, Op. 10, No. 1," (*College Music Symposium* 48 (2008): 83-97. Accessed February 18, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25664809>), 83.

O, I have killed my father dear,
Alas! and woe is me, O!

'And what penance will ye suffer for that,
Edward, Edward?
And what penance will ye suffer for that?
My dear son, now tell me, O.'
'I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
Mother, mother:
I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
And I'll fare over the sea, O.'

'And what will ye do with your towers and your halls,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye do with your towers and your halls,
That were sae fair to see, O?'
'I'll let them stand till they down fall,
Mother, mother:
I'll let them stand till they down fall,
For here never more may I be, O.'

'And what will ye leave to your children and your wife,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your children and your wife
When ye go over the sea, O?'
'The world is large, let them beg through life,
Mother, mother:
The world is large, let them beg throw life,
For them never more will I see, O.'

'And what will ye leave to your own mother dear,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your own mother dear?
My dear son, now tell me, O.'
'The curse of hell from me shall you bear,
Mother, mother:
The curse of hell from me shall you bear,
Such counsels you gave to me, O.'

Although it is clear that this Ballade was inspired by the poem, as Brahms indicated, the connection between the poem and the music is a little bit ambiguous. According to Charise Hasting, an author of an extensive analysis on the relationship between Brahms's Ballade, op. 10 no, 1 to the "Edward" poem, there needs to be a distinction between perceiving story and discourse.² She mentioned that there are three

² Hastings, 84.

main points to the story. The story of the poem goes from Edward having a conversation with his mother, then he confessed that he killed his father, and finally it is revealed that his mother gave him the counsel to do the crime. However, this story does not follow the chronological order. She proposed that we look at this poem by its discourse, the order should be his mother told Edward to kill his father, then he killed his father, and finally they had a conversation. Hasting believes that it is important to distinguish between the story and the discourse of the poem.

Brahms's Ballade, op. 10 no. 1 is in three sections. These sections are determined by the thematic materials and also the tempo markings. The first section is marked *Andante*, the middle section is *Allegro*, the last section is returning to the first tempo marked "Tempo I." The thematic material between the first and the last sections are also similar. The last section is resembling a variation/embellished version of the first section.

The corresponding structure between the three main points of the story in the poem and Ballade, op. 10 no. 1 starts with the first section. The first section has two different thematic materials. The first theme could be associated with the mother, and the second theme could be associated with Edward. The alternating theme presented in the first section is depicting the conversation between Edward and his mother. The mother's theme sounds like a question and Edward's theme sounds more choral-like, that ends with *fermatas*. Moreover, the resemblance between the opening stanza of the poem to the opening phrase in Brahms's music is undeniable. The piece opens with a repeated phrase, as if it is imitating the poem repeating the mother's question, and the repetition of the word "Edward, Edward."

The middle section is in D major, which is the relative major of the first section. It also has a faster tempo. This section is portraying the second point of the poem, the act of the crime. Edward is presumably passionately killing his father in this section. The triplets on the right hand give a sense of direction and movement. At the end of the middle section, Edward's theme came back in thicker texture and in higher register. The occurrence of Edward's theme could indicate that Edward is the culprit that killed his father. Edward's theme here is also marked with *pesante*, indicating that it might be showing his regret and that he is heavy from the burden.

The last section is back in D minor and is marked *sotto voce*. This section which starts with the first theme/mother's theme of the first section, is the reveal that the murder was actually the mother's counsel. Unlike in the first section, the left hand in this section does not give strong harmonic support to the melody. The left hand has a new triplet rhythm with frequent rests and *staccato* giving an ambiguous feeling to the overall mood. The *sotto voce* could symbolize a whisper, which could be interpreted as the mother's "whisper" that led Edward to commit the murder.

While many pieces have programmatic stories or poems attach to them, this Brahms's Ballade is not only expressing the overall character or mood, but it also has a tightly structured correlation between the story of the poem to the music itself. This organization will be a tremendous aid to both performers and listeners in navigating this seemingly bizarre Ballade by Brahms. The music is lacking development and exploration, and it seems is more "reviewing existing material than of exploring new ideas."³

³ Hastings, 94.

Up to this point, there are a lot of death and darkness in this program. For most people, death could be seen as something terrifying and devastating. However, when one thinks about death, one could also think about the afterlife. Many people believe that death is not the end of everything, it could be a start of a better and more peaceful life in heaven (or suffering eternally in hell). This program shares the idea of the better one. Brahms's fourth ballade is in B major. The key of this piece and the music depicts the feeling of transcendence. The music invokes a somewhat desolate feeling, but profound and ethereal. I am reminded of the story of the crucifixion of Jesus from the Bible. He died out of love to give redemption to humans. While this last Ballade does not have any programmatic supplement, one can still create a story that could appropriately fit the feeling conveyed by the music. The first half of this recital carries the audience to a journey of walking away from their home to romance, suffering, death, and ends with a heavenly afterlife.

PART IV

Like the first half of the recital, the second half starts with walking. The next piece will bring the audience the experience of walking into an art gallery. Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) wrote *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) after the death of his friend, Viktor Hartmann (1834-1873), an architect and painter. After Hartmann's death, his friends did an exhibition of his works to remember him. Mussorgsky wrote this masterpiece shortly after attending this memorial.

Pictures at an Exhibition is a set of ten pieces with a few Promenades between the pieces. Mussorgsky used the narratives out of Hartmann's sketches and designs.⁴ All ten pieces are based on Hartmann's artwork, and they are all varied in characters and mood. This piece is not structured in a form that people are used to, but it is loved by many people for generations because of its originality and it brings these pictures to life. Looking closely, Mussorgsky was never very successful with writing in traditional form.⁵ His creativity in captivating the sounds of the objects and the way he wrapped it into a journey of walking through the gallery is very innovative.

The novelty that Mussorgsky brought to the piano repertoire comes from the free form of the piece and the inspirations that come from pictures. Although other composers such as Robert Schumann (1810-1856) had written a set of miniature pieces or character pieces before, *Pictures at an Exhibition* offers a completely different aesthetic. This piece could be comparable to one of Schumann's masterpieces, *Carnaval*, op. 9 (1834-1835). They are both a collection of miniature pieces, however *Carnaval* lacks the recurring Promenades, and *Pictures at an Exhibition* does not have a tight knit motivic material as Schumann's ASCH.⁶

Although it is not unusual to have a piano composition inspired by pictures in this contemporary era, it was a different approach in 19th century piano music. Mussorgsky heard Franz Liszt's *Totentanz* (1849) in 1866, which might have contributed to his idea.

⁴ Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 31.

⁵ Russ, *Musorgsky*, 2.

⁶ Russ, *Musorgsky*, 4.

However, other than this piece, pictures are generally away from other 19th century composer's sources of inspiration.⁷

PROMENADE

Pictures at an Exhibition opens with a Promenade. The music depicts the experience of walking through the front door of a gallery and seeing a collection of art presented. This idea came from Vladimir Stasov (1824-1909), a Russian critic, who organized Hartmann's artwork exhibition after his death.⁸ He offered a few comments and opinions about Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Stasov was acquainted with Mussorgsky as he was also an advisor to "The Mighty Handful," a group of composers that Mussorgsky belonged to. Other members of this group include Mily Balakirev (1837-1910), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Alexander Borodin (1833-1887), and César Cui (1835-1918).

The opening of the piece sounds grand and majestic. Stasov mentioned that the Promenade depicts Mussorgsky himself as he walks through the exhibition, "joyfully or sadly recalling the talented deceased artist."⁹ The walking sound is depicted by his simple rhythm, alternating meter changes, and repetition of the same ideas. The simple melody is also derived from a Russian folk song. Mussorgsky later interpolated promenades in between the pieces to portray walking between pictures.

Aside from depicting the act of walking, the Promenades also function as a conjoining prelude to the piece after them. First, all of the Promenades are marked *attaca* to the next piece. They are also harmonically related to the piece following them.

⁷ Russ, *Musorgsky*, 4-5.

⁸ Russ, 35.

⁹ Russ, 16.

Compared to the first Promenade, the other recurring Promenades are different in lengths, keys, and characters.

The first Promenade is in B-flat major, connected harmonically to the piece after, “Gnomus,” which is in E-flat minor (making B-flat major the dominant). The second Promenade is one whole step lower than the first one. The key change to A-flat major allows it to prepare for the next piece, “Il Vecchio Castello,” which is in G-sharp minor. By lowering the Promenade by one whole step, the melody will have both A-flats and E-flats, which are the enharmonic pitches of G-sharp and D-sharp (tonic and dominant of the G-sharp minor key for the next piece). The third Promenade is one half-step higher than the first, to the key of B major. The piece following this Promenade is “Tuileries,” which is also in B major.

The fourth Promenade is in D minor, which is the relative minor key to the next piece, “Ballet der nicht ausgeschlüpften Küchlein,” which is in F major. This Promenade is not only connecting the harmony, but it also has some melodic relationship to the next piece. At the end of this fourth Promenade, it has a theme fragment of the next piece in diminution. The change to a minor key could also relay Mussorgsky’s sadness as he recalls the deceased artist.

The fifth Promenade is almost identical with the first, with a few omitted beats in the rhythm and some added measures. Like the first Promenade, this last Promenade is also in B-flat major. The following piece, “Limoges,” is in E-flat major (making the Promenade in the dominant key of this piece). At the end of this Promenade, the last note on the right hand, B-flat, is held out for one additional measure and it is marked with a

fermata. This is to create the suspense and anticipation to the next piece, that starts with the exact same B-flat note on the right hand.

The craft Mussorgsky put into the planning of the Promenades are outstanding. However, the real success of this masterpiece comes from the music he wrote to bring Hartmann's artwork into live. Each of the pieces that he wrote are full of characters and charms. Instead of centering on the artwork itself, Mussorgsky focused on depicting the item or person within the pictures.¹⁰

STRUCTURE AND THEMES

The pieces in *Pictures at an Exhibition* are addressing different aspects in life. Some pieces have social aspects from different countries, portraying fantasy, death, tragedy, and comedy. The original titles of the pieces are also in six different languages, Russian, French, Italian, Polish, Yiddish/German, Latin. Mussorgsky chose the languages carefully, depending on the character depicted in the piece.¹¹ Many of the original paintings were lost, however, Stasov, who organized Hartmann's exhibition after his death, offered a few commentaries on the artworks that inspired Mussorgsky's pieces.

According to Vladimir Bobrovsky, a Soviet musicologist, the subject matter of the pieces in *Pictures at an Exhibition* are symmetrically mirrored with the fifth piece, "Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks," as the center.¹² The first Promenade and the last piece, "The Great Gate of Kiev," are Russian pieces. The first piece, "Gnomus," and the ninth piece, "Baba-Yaga," are fantasy characters. The second piece, "The Old Castle," and the eighth

¹⁰ Russ, 31.

¹¹ Russ, 28.

¹² Vladimir Bobrovsky, "Structural Analysis of Musorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition*," *From Lulli to our Days*, (Moscow: Muzyka Press, 1967), 151.

piece, “Catacombae,” are historical pieces. The third piece, “Tuileries,” and the seventh piece, “Limoges,” are French pieces. The fourth piece, “Bydlo,” and the sixth piece, “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle,” are tragedy pieces and also Polish pieces.

The Russian pieces are the Promenade and “The Great Gate of Kiev.” Russian folk songs typically do not have a regular meter.¹³ The Promenade in this piece also has that characteristic, the meter is constantly changing as evident in the first two measures. “The Great Gate of Kiev” sounds like a ceremonial procession.¹⁴ It has grand and big chords, octave passages, and towards the end, it has a section that imitates the tower bell constantly ringing. The theme itself suggests the Russian/Soviet connection as the original painting was supposed to be Hartmann’s plan for a new great gate in Kiev.

The fantasy pieces, which involve fantasy characters, are the gnomes and the Russian monster, Baba-Yaga. In the first piece, “Gnomus,” Mussorgsky is focusing on the gnomes/dwarfs instead of the nutcracker. Gnomes are mythological creatures that are often associated with fantasy. There are numerous uses of the augmented fourth interval (tritone) in this piece, that create the creepy and unsettling character. Tritones are often associated with negative/bad connotation, or devilish character. The frequent change of tempo and fermata depicts the “unpredictable movement of a dwarf.”¹⁵

In “Baba-Yaga,” Mussorgsky did not focus on the clock, which was the focal point of Hartmann’s painting.¹⁶ He focused on the character of Baba-Yaga. Similar to the gnomes, Baba-Yaga is a supernatural being from Slavic folklores. This character is

¹³ Chen-Tien Lee, “Mussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition”: An analytical and performance study,” (D.M.A. diss., Ohio State University, 1993), 25

¹⁴ Lee, 81.

¹⁵ Lee, 34.

¹⁶ Russ, 31.

supposed to invoke scary, mysterious, and intimidating feelings. The music starts octave leaps alternating with one measure of rests. It progressed into an intense constant repetition of the same motive with accented upbeats, building a feeling of being chased. Throughout the piece, the rhythm keeps going with almost no place of rest. There are many extreme registral leaps on the left hand to create the scariness and mysteriousness of the character.

The first historical piece is “The Old Castle.” There is no surviving painting for this piece. However, Stasov mentioned that it has a medieval castle and a troubadour singing in the front.¹⁷ The music sounds like a combination of siciliana, medieval rondeau, and ballade.¹⁸ A siciliana is a 17th-18th century dance, usually in 6/8 meter, and it frequently has the dotted rhythm with lyrical melodies. This characteristic fits the music in this piece. The left hand is perhaps imitating the lute that accompanied the troubadour singing lyrically on the right hand. Moreover, the constant repetition makes this piece have an element of a rondeau.

The second historical piece, “Catacombae,” is representing the catacombs in Paris. The painting of this piece survived. In the picture, there are people going down the catacomb with a lantern to light the room and there are stacked rows of skulls on the right side. As the title suggested, this piece also has an element of death. The opening has an echo of *Dies Irae* and it is followed by a second part, “Con mortuis in lingua morta,” which actually has a misspelling and should be “Cum mortuis in lingua morta.”¹⁹ At the end of

¹⁷ Russ, 37.

¹⁸ Svetlana Nagachevskaya, “Pictures at an Exhibition: A Reconciliation of Divergent Perceptions about Mussorgsky's Renowned Cycle,” (D.M.A. diss., University of Arizona, 2009. Accessed February 27, 2021. <http://hdl.handle.net/10150/194168>), 85.

¹⁹ Russ, 46.

the first part, the notes are gradually getting lower in register, which could be directing the feeling of going down into the catacomb.²⁰ “Con mortuis in lingua morta” has constant tremolos in the right hand, and the left hand is playing a variation of the Promenade theme. It starts in B minor, which is a key that is often associated with death and sadness, but it ends with a B major chord, which could be interpreted as heavenly and peaceful.

The first French piece, “Tuileries,” also has no surviving painting. According to Stasov, the painting depicts children playing in the Tuileries Garden in Paris.²¹ Mussorgsky was well-known to have liked children and was popular among them, as recalled by Stasov’s daughter. He also composed a set of songs *The Nursery*. One of the songs from this set has a similar element as “Tuileries.” The opening of the fifth song in *The Nursery*, “Evening Prayer,” has similar piano figurations as the opening of “Tuileries.”²²



Figure 3: Mussorgsky’s “Tuileries” from *Pictures at an Exhibition*, mm. 1-3

This figuration of a group of two descending figuration is mimicking children arguing and joking with each other. In French, children often yell “Nyanya, nyanya” to

²⁰ Nagachevskaya, 146.

²¹ Russ, 38.

²² Matthew Quick, “Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition: Identifying the Expressive Narrative through Comparisons with Vocal Literature,” (D.M.A. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2014), 9-10.

tease or mock each other and Mussorgsky is “imitating speech shapes in music.”²³ This musical gesture could be seen in m. 1 and m. 3 in “Tuileries,” as shown in Figure 1. In general, the character of the piece is full of actions that children would do. For example, they would laugh and immediately cry. The middle section of this piece sounds like a child pleading for something in the middle of playing.

The second French piece, “Limoges,” is full of energy and excitement. There are many *staccatos*, *sforzandos*, jumps, and leaps. Hartmann’s painting for this piece is lost. However, according to Stasov, the painting is about “old women quarreling at the fair in Limoges.”²⁴ The percussive and constant rhythm is portraying the women quarreling and yelling. In the middle section there is a section when the left hand and the right hand create a back-and-forth conversation, which could be imitating the women arguing with each other. The relentless sixteenth note rhythm not only shows the ladies quarrel, but it also captures the bustling and crowds in the market.

“Bydlo” is the first tragedy piece that depicts motion and also the hardships of the peasants.²⁵ This piece is about portraying the Polish cart and the oxen that pulls it. The left-hand figurations of repeated motive are portraying the heavy rotation of the wheels on the wooden cart. However, this depiction of hardship is not only about the act of labor and the heaviness of the cart, but also about the suffering of the peasants and low-class people. Mussorgsky wanted to express the social injustice and horrible life that the servants, peasants, and other low-class people had to endure. Moreover, the word “Bydlo” could be

²³ Russ, 39.

²⁴ Russ, 44.

²⁵ Russ, 11.

translated in Russian as one of the most distasteful words for peasantry.²⁶ This supported Mussorgsky's use of symbolism and metaphor to express his thoughts.²⁷

“Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle” is based on two paintings. Stasov mentioned that it is about two Polish Jews, one is rich, and one is poor.²⁸ The names in the title are most likely made up by Mussorgsky. There is no evidence in the relationship between the names and the actual painting given by Hartmann. In this piece, Samuel Goldenberg is the rich Jew and Schmuyle is the poor Jew. The piece introduces two different thematic materials. The first, is a speech-like unison melody, representing Samuel Goldenberg's assertive and confident speech. Then the second thematic material has a repeated triplet figuration, that sounds a little bit like a “shaking effect,” representing Schmuyle's trembling voice or nervousness.²⁹ After presenting both materials, the next section combines and layers both of them. This could be interpreted as presenting each of the Jew characters, and then both have a conversation or an argument with each other.

The center piece, which is “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks,” is a piece with the lightest theme. It is a comedy piece, filled with humor and funny gestures. The painting for this piece is Hartmann's sketch of a chick costume. The costume is of an egg, that had holes for a person's limbs and head. The music has a lot of sounds that imitates the act of chicken pecking. There is also an interpretation of this sound imitating the chicks tapping to break the shells.³⁰ There are a lot of ornaments that function as effects, *staccatos*, and percussive rhythm. The tempo marking of the piece is *Scherzino* indicating that it should be

²⁶ Nagachevskaya, 104.

²⁷ Nagachevskaya, 104.

²⁸ Quick, 32.

²⁹ Russ, 44.

³⁰ Russ, 42.

a small light-hearted piece. This movement is perhaps an important center piece as it is between the two tragedy pieces, which has deep and sad connotations associated with them.

The ten pieces in *Pictures at an Exhibition* represents “a trip through life without an overall story or plot.”³¹ Mussorgsky wants to be connected and represent a regular life. The topics in the pieces are mostly common people, the children in “Tuileries,” the peasants in “Bydlo,” women in the market in “Limoges,” and two Jews having a conversation in “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle.”³² He also showed the “descriptive qualities that are linked to real life and social justice.”³³ The depiction of the hardship of the peasants and also the assumption and social commentary on how people perceive the rich and the poor.

PERFORMANCE ASPECTS

Pictures at an Exhibition is well-known for its challenging attributes. However, some of its demanding quality comes from the awkwardness for pianists to play rather than its virtuosity. He wrote many passages that are not very pianistic. This piece is also “imitating vocal music rather than exploiting the qualities of the piano.”³⁴ In “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle,” Mussorgsky displayed his mastery in imitating the natural human speech and intonation in piano writing.³⁵ The combination of rhythmic design, rests, and articulations in the opening of “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle” emulates the sound of

³¹ Russ, 31.

³² Nagachevskaya, 20-21.

³³ Russ, 11.

³⁴ Russ, 10.

³⁵ Nagachevskaya, 126.

spoken words in a conversation. The music lacks accompaniment, and it is played in unison recitative style.³⁶

In “Catacombae,” the dynamic markings are not very pianistic. Mussorgsky marked some chords *crescendo*, and this is just something that is not scientifically possible to do on a piano. Hence, his writing shows unpianistic markings, perhaps this could be evidence that he was thinking towards writing like vocal music.

In “The Great Gate of Kiev,” the series of loud and sustained thick chords in the opening section are also not very pianistic, as a piano cannot sustain sounds for very long. Pianists will have to play at a faster tempo to avoid having the sounds decay too much before striking the next chord. This effect would be much better conveyed in the orchestral version or with any other instruments that can sustain long notes.

Although these challenges were because of Mussorgsky unpianistic writing, there are also some technical difficulties in the piece. At the end of “Gnomus,” there is a passage that needs to be played very fast and loud, with both hands in contrary motion. The notes on both hands are not exactly following any type of pattern or interval sequence. The note placement on both hands also do not fit well on the fingers.

Another major technical issue in this piece can be found in the repeated double notes in “Limoges.” This piece is arguably the most technically demanding out of the set. Not only because it has fast repeated double-notes, but they are also to be played loudly, with *staccato*, and with the left hand, which is usually considered the “weaker” hand for pianists.

³⁶ Nagachevskaya, 127.

Additionally, the constant tremolo on the right hand in “Con mortuis in lingua morta” could be challenging to some pianists. As the continuous tremolo needs to always be played really soft and smoothly, while the left hand plays the dark and mysterious variant of the Promenade theme.

This composition also received harsh criticism from his fellow composer friends. Some members of “The Mighty Handful” considered that this work is uneducated, as Mussorgsky did not have extensive composition training compared to the others. Rimsky-Korsakov was given a job to make an editorial version of this piece, and he revised many “mistakes” that Mussorgsky did. This simple job quickly became one of the major controversies in musical history.³⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov made a lot of changes that includes dynamics, harmonies, articulations, and some omission of the *attaca*. While a few of them could have been Mussorgsky’s error, most of them are believed to be intended by the composer. However, because Rimsky-Korsakov saw Mussorgsky as an incompetent composer, who wrote flawed compositions with incoherent harmonies, he assumed many of his “mistakes” were truly errors.

Despite the criticism from his fellow composers, this composition is still loved by the public to this day. There are a few composers that orchestrated his piece, but the most well-known version is by a French composer, Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). He orchestrated the piece in 1922, which became a great success until today. His orchestration is mostly faithful to the original, with great details to the dynamics, articulation, and phrasing.³⁸

Although each individual piece is very special and different from each other, the whole piece works very effectively as a journey. The Promenades that keep returning in

³⁷ Russ, 22.

³⁸ Russ, 79-80.

various styles represent “different psychological situations.”³⁹ The last promenade, which is the most similar to the first one, could be considered as one the pictures, immersing Mussorgsky into the work, instead of viewing it from outside.⁴⁰

Like *Pictures at an Exhibition*, where Mussorgsky begins as the person walking into the exhibition and ends as part of the exhibition, this recital program also invites the audience to be immersed in the whole journey. He allowed the audience to experience walking in the gallery and looking at the pictures through sounds.

CONCLUSION

Through this recital program, I hope that listeners could experience all aspects of life; story, words, social issues, and all the feelings invoked by the music presented in the program. Through the exploration of poems, pictures, and stories behind the compositions in this recital program, music themselves might remain unchanged, however our emotional perception and psychological reception towards the music will hopefully transformed.

³⁹ Russ, 34.

⁴⁰ Russ, 34.

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