



**Suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* –
arrangements and transcriptions for orchestra
and chamber groups**

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Abstract: Outstanding representative of Russian musical culture, Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky (1839-1881) was imposed at the same time as one of the leading figures of the universal composers of the nineteenth century. Prominent member of *The Group of Five*, Mussorgsky was not only a pioneer but also an innovator of Russian music in the Romantic period, as he strove to achieve a unique identity, its language influences infiltrating deep in the creation of subsequent generations. Modest Mussorgsky conceived in 1874 the Suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*, in a great piano accomplishment, with a melodic and rhythmic manner of great suggestive force, in an original harmonic and colorful vesting, rich in modal elements, with a unique architectonic construction.

Enrolling in the nineteenth century masterpieces gallery dedicated to the piano, the Suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* is one of the most important achievements of the programmatic instrumental music from the Romantic period. The extremely colorful palette and complex harmonic sonorities, the multitude of voices, timbre and register contrasts that exceed the limits of a single instrument, the piano, all explain that the Suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* has been subjected for over a century immediately after its publication, to numerous arrangements, transcriptions, adaptations for orchestra, solo instruments or with piano accompaniment, for assemblies of homogeneous or mixed instruments. Inside the informative material on this subject there are about 50 arrangements and transcriptions of the whole piece or fragmentation of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which certifies this suite to be included among the works that permanently cause either interpretative imagination or arouse the imagination and creative force in order to achieve unprecedented and inspired instrumentation / orchestration.

Keywords: Modest Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, arrangements and transcriptions.

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Outstanding representative of the Russian musical culture, Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky (1839-1881) also imposed himself as one of the leading figures of the manifold personalities of universal composers of the nineteenth century. Prominent member of the *Group of Five*¹, Mussorgsky was not only a pioneer, but also an innovator of Russian music in the Romantic period, as he endeavored to achieve a unique identity, its language influences deeply infiltrating into the creations of subsequent generations.

Visionary creator, obsessed with his project which aimed to achieve a perfect aesthetic connection between word and music, outlining stylized human characters, inspired either from the world of innocence and moral purity, captured in various actions, or sometimes, from the area of hallucinatory realism or the abysses of the human psyche, Mussorgsky transposed into sounds also “subjects” of the fantastic or grotesque, his music revealing a fascinating plasticity of contoured images, a unique courage in translating their sound into a bold musical language, which often highlights deliberate defiance of the established conventions in Western music by sometimes ignoring the stereotypes of the classical melodic-harmonic rigors.

In this sense, we can say that the Russian musician paved the way for composers such as Debussy and Ravel, or Stravinsky (especially from the "Russian phase"), envisaging also modalism of the twentieth century exponents of national schools such as Janáček, De Falla, Enescu, Bartók, Kodaly, Messiaen, Jolivet, Prokofiev and Shostakovich.

In the universal musical culture, Moussorgsky's name is associated with several important Opus-es, like Boris Godunov and Hovanscina works, lieder for voice and piano and, in particular, suite for solo piano *Pictures at an exhibition*

Experienced pianist, Mussorgsky² conceived in the Suite *Pictures at an exhibition*, a score of great originality, in an embodiment of pianistic realisation, with a melodic and rhythmic of great suggestive power, in an original, colorful harmonic vesting, rich in modal elements, a striking work, with the help of the novelty of musical language with an innovative blast rarely seen, due to the means of descriptive sound of great plasticity, but also a unique architectural construction. Suite *Pictures at an exhibition* is thus one of the most impressive and original Mussorgskian instrumental works, being also in the gallery of piano dedicated masterpieces of the nineteenth century as one of the greatest achievements of programmatic instrumental music of the Romantic period.

¹ *Group of Five*, composed of Modest Mussorgsky, Mily Balakirev, Cesar Kui, Nikolai Rimski-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin are known as innovators of Russian music.

² As noted by his contemporary composers, Mussorgsky was a brilliant pianist. He studied piano with the remarkable teacher of his time in St. Petersburg, A. Gerke.

The Suite *Pictures at an exhibition* arose from Mussorgsky's viewing of the posthumous exhibition devoted to the work of the Russian architect and painter Viktor Hartmann (1834-1873), who entered into art history as the creator of the nineteenth century Russian architecture and style which owes Petersburg some special buildings. Completed in June 1874, after a very quick creative process, which lasted only 20 days, Suite saw, however, daylight in 1886, five years after the composer's death.

Mussorgsky succeeded, however, in making his *Pictures at an exhibition* exceed illustrative aspect, even if its source of inspiration were works of visual art, the Russian composer remaining loyal to his aesthetic conception of sounding the human soul, to his inner feelings, expressing lyrical-psychological dimensions, so that his descriptive side complements organically with his expressive, characterological³ side. Also, through Mussorgskian music, the plastic works of Viktor Hartmann have become, in turn, a new artistic dimension, being launched into the orbit of universal values. It can be appreciated that the conjectural biographic moment – posthumous exhibition dedicated to his friend Viktor Hartmann – becoming the inspiration source, prompted a composition grafted onto the sequence of images inspired by the paintings of nature, portraits, genre scenes, objects, the structure of the piece belonging in the type and form of romantic suite of contrasting pieces, work which drew, over time, the attention of many performers or composers, wanting to highlight it in different ways.

The composer's contemporaries immediately noticed the extremely colorful palette of harmonic sonorities, the complex multiplicity of voices, timbre and register contrasts that exceed the limits of a single instrument. This explains the fact that the Suite *Pictures at an exhibition*, designed and built by the author as concerto piece for piano solo, was subjected for over a century, immediately after its publication, to many arrangements, transcriptions, adaptations for orchestra instruments solo or with piano accompaniment for homogeneous or mixed ensembles of instruments.

In the following lines, we will try a systematization of transcripts and arrangements of Suite *Pictures at an exhibition*, composed either for orchestra or for various instruments and instrument groups/ensembles.

There are over twenty orchestral transcriptions of Suite *Pictures at an exhibition*, that occurred since the late nineteenth century and continues to be recreated till this day. Already in 1891 an orchestral version was published, with seven of the cycle tracks, by composer Michael Tushmalov – student of Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov, version interpreted in Sankt Petersburg. A few

³ For M. Mussorgsky, his purpose of art was: "Life, wherever it occurs, however acid the truth should be, it must be told honestly and sincerely to people – be hold the true art quintessence, this is what I want to administer and not want to fail. That's my only goal and thus is the way I'll remain" (Vasile Cristian, 1956, p. 40).

years later, English conductor Sir Henry Joseph Wood also made his orchestral variant, omitting *Promenade* interventions.

An increased interest for the *Suite Pictures of an Exhibition* is observed in the third decade of the twentieth century. Finnish violinist and conductor, of Slovenian origin, Leo Funtek provides a full version of the paper in 1922, just months before the famous Ravel orchestration.

Suite Pictures at an exhibition became, however, increasingly known in the world with the full orchestral version (just omitting the last *Promenade*) conducted in 1922 by French composer Maurice Ravel; the popularity enjoyed in this release causes us to make some references on how the work was imposed. Ravel was fascinated by Mussorgsky's piano suite, then not well known to the general public, which prompted the great French composer to make an option for orchestra, convincing also Russian conductor Sergei Kusevitski to interpret the work in one of his symphonic concerts. The premiere of the orchestral version of *Pictures at an exhibition* was held, therefore, in Paris on October 19, 1922, the work enjoying great success, which led to its immediate imposition in symphonic orchestra repertoire. First audio print of the Ravel version of *Pictures at an exhibition* was done in Boston in 1930, again under the baton of Sergei Kusevitski.

In his orchestration, Maurice Ravel used a variety of instruments, especially wind instruments. The score included: two flutes and piccolo flute, three oboes, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, a contrabassoon, a saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and a tuba. There are exploited also parties of string instruments, piano, and percussion instruments, where bells are dominant.

Also, in 1922, the Italian composer and conductor Giuseppe Becce, who had his activity in Germany, made a version for chamber orchestra.

Two years later, in 1924, Leonidas Leonardi – American composer and pianist of Russian origin, disciple of Maurice Ravel, created another orchestration of the suite, and in 1937, the American clarinetist, of French origin, Lucien Cailliet made for Orchestra Philadelphia a version in which an important role is given to the wind instruments.

Another orchestral version of *Pictures at an exhibition* belongs to American conductor, of English origin, Leopold Stokowski, made in 1938. Omitting two parts – *Tuilleries* and *Fair Limoges*, Stokowski realised in 1939, 1941 and 1965 audio recordings, and in 1971 he makes it public, editing it.

German conductor and composer, with successful operations in the UK, Walter Goehr achieved, in turn, in 1942 an orchestral version that omits, however, *Gnome* and *Fair Limoges* pieces. Twelve years later, in 1954, Russian composer Sergei Gorcheakov, in his orchestral version of the Suite *Pictures at an exhibition*, presents especially the wind instruments parties. It

is a version liked by many conductors, including Kurt Mazur, senior conductor Orchestra of Leipzig, who printed a disc in 1991.

Another orchestral version of *Pictures at an exhibition*, that of German composer Helmut Brandenburg appeared in 1970, and in 1974 the Bulgarian composer and pianist Emil Naoumoff created a concert version for piano and orchestra. Also for piano and orchestra is created in the 1977 version of the American composer Leonard Lawrence. In the same year it appears the orchestral version of the Czech conductor Zdeněk Mácal.

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In the last two decades, the number of orchestration variants for Suite of *Pictures at an exhibition* is growing continuously. Known versions belong to Swiss-born composer and conductor Hanspeter Gmur, American composer and cellist Jason Wright Wingate, who performed an original version for orchestra, organ and choir (2003). The latest transcripts belong to Finnish conductor Jukka Pekka Saraste, who created an original edition, combining orchestrations of Leo Funtek and Sergei Gorcheakov; the pianist, composer and conductor Peter Breiner Slovak created in 2012 a version for large orchestra.

Returning to numerous transcriptions and arrangements for piano of the Suite *Pictures at an exhibition* we remember that one of the first attempts to interpret the work in a different instrumental formula was in Russia, where already in 1900 appeared the cycle's transcription for piano for four hands, aimed primarily at facilitating interpretative work. But the real "eruption" of the number of transcripts begins in the third decade of the twentieth century. We have already mentioned that in those years there were created numerous transcriptions for orchestra, but also for other interpretative formulas. In this list of processing we notice the assemblies of wind instruments: brass quintet, brass sextet, for piano and solo instruments (trumpet, piano, trombone with piano), for organ, accordion and accordion ensembles; we meet up also transcription for a more interesting instrument, such as glass harp.

In 1926, the English musicologist and organist Arthur Hull Eaglefield performed the first transcription for organ and played some fragments of the suite, and in 1930, Giuseppe Becca performs a string trio transcription with piano. Later in the second half of the twentieth century, there will be made

for organ transcriptions of some parts of the suite. The universal catalogues transcribe nominate Arthur Wills (1970), Yevgenia Lisitina (1981), Jean Guillou (1988), Cameron Carpentier (2006). German composer and organist Oskar Gottlieb Blarr conducted in 1976 full transcript *Pictures at an exhibition* for organ.

In 1963, the American conductor and composer Mark Hubert Hindsley made transcription of the suite for brass orchestra, and English composer and conductor Elgar Howarth made in 1977 transcript for brass band. In turn, Jon Faddis made a transcription for solo trumpet of the *Promenade*, and Christian Lindberg in 2000 for trombone and piano. Among the versions for non-academic tools, we remember transcription for accordion ensemble, conducted in 1954 by German accordionist Würthner. Another version of Rudolf Hartmann's work was also made by Sergei Gorchakov in 1955.

And some of the most distinguished representatives of modern music in various genres addressed this score, adapting it to their instruments or instrumental bands that worked. In addition to classic academic tools, used by the authors of these works, there were undertaken arrangements for new instruments, appeared along with technical progress – for jazz bands, big-band, for synthesizer, for rock bands.

A unique arrangement – for big band – made in 1963 American composer, author of music for films, Allyn Malcolm Ferguson Jr.

In 1970, when rock began to be booming, the group Emerson, Lake & Palmer was founded, and in 1971, with its vision of Mussorgsky and Ravel's works, but also on the 10 "sound" paintings of Hartmann, Keith Emerson (group leader), aims to edit the third album of the group by processing *Pictures at an exhibition*, with large "infiltration" of progressive rock, jazz and folk elements. The album was presented in their concert at Newcastle in early 1971 but was quite controversial. At the end, however, with the publication of the LP, the album *Pictures at an Exhibition* was a success among fans of Emerson, Lake & Palmer. It should be noted that Keith Emerson, to edit the album, began working with engineer Robert Moog, who in 1969 invented the synthesizer.

Moreover, the composition of Mussorgsky was an inspiration to many famous artists of different musical styles. We recall processing for jazz bands, created by the most reputed and renowned musicians such as Duke Ellington and Ray Baretto; also, in 1975 the Paintings reproduction on the synthesizer, made by Japanese composer Isao Tomita electronic music.

The great pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, in 1982 achieved a processing of *Pictures at an exhibition* for symphony orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and James Last Orchestra supported, in turn, numerous concerts worldwide with ample processing of Mussorgsky's Suite.

With the development of electronic instruments and computer music, the German author Thomas Wilbrandt created in 1992, inspired by the *Paintings of an exhibition Suite*, the composition *Exhibitionistic Echoes*. Also, fragments of *Paintings at an exhibition* are used by many non-academic music bands such as Swiss black metal group Samael, who took Baba Yaga song in their album *Ceremony of Opposites* (launched in 1994).

In 2003 guitarist Trevor Rabin published *Promenade* arrangement for electric guitar and Japanese guitarist Kazuhito Yamashita made in 1980 an arrangement for classical guitar, as the famous Andrés Segovia, who made arrangement for classical guitar for the piece *Old castle*.

International music literature provides many examples of processing and “quotes” of fragments from Suite *Pictures at an exhibition* in other genres of art, such as theater and cinema. We just remind a few: Wassily Kandinsky in 1928 performed at the theater in Dessau a musical – pictorial of *Pictures at an exhibition* with decorations and abstractionist costumes. In turn, in 1963 musical theaters of Moscow K. Stanislavski and V. Nemirovici Dancenko mounted, on the music of *Pictures at an exhibition*, a ballet. There are several cartoons with the music from *Pictures at an exhibition*.

Among the numerous transcriptions and arrangements of Suite *Pictures at an exhibition* for various interpretative formulas, there are noticed several for percussion ensembles. The first realization of this type, which appears in the universal catalogs, is carried out in 1981 by Dutch percussionist, composer and arranger, permanent member of Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Henk de Vlieger .

There followed several transcriptions for mixed formulations – percussion instruments in combination with other instruments. Organist Latvian Russian origin Yevgenia Lisitsina conducted in 1997 *Paintings* arrangement for organ and 14 percussion instruments. In turn, the tubist and German conductor Walter Hilgers conducted in 2006, the suite arrangement for brass ensemble, percussion and two harps. Brazilian composer Clarice Assad has conducted and published in 2009 *Pictures at an exhibition* arrangement for string orchestra, prepared piano and percussion. We also remember two compositions featured in international catalogs: transcription for vocal group, double bass and percussion of the piece *Limoges Fair* by American jazz singer and musician and composer Ward Swingle jazz music Poulan Key.

Naturally, the most significant variation mainly dedicated to percussion instruments, including those mentioned, is the one by Henk De Vlieger , who transcribed the work for a set of 14 percussion, harp, piano and celesta.

Overall formula, designed by Henk de Vlieger, consists of 16 musicians:

❖ *Vibraphone I, II Vibraphone, Xylophone I, Xylophone II, Marimba I, Marimba II, Marimba bass, harp, piano/celestial (1 performer), Timpani (set of 5) I, Timpani (set of 4 with an inverted cymbal) II*

❖ Percussion 1: *Glockenspiel, two bells plate (e-flat', f), snare drum, whip, thundersheet*

❖ Percussion 2: *Lithophone 7 gongs (d-flat, E-flat, e, f, f sharp, g, b-flat), 3 suspended cymbals, sizzle cymbal, guiro*

❖ Percussion 3: *Crotales (2 octaves), low tamtam, triangle, three temple blocks, windmachine*

❖ Percussion 4: *8 cowbells (c-sharp', f, f-sharp', g-sharp', a', a-sharp', c', d'), 2 plate bells (a-flat, B-flat), 3 tom-toms, tambourine, vibraslap, claves, flexatone, 2 cymbals*

❖ Percussion 5: *Chimes, castanets, bass drum, switch, sleigh bell.*

From this diagram it can be seen that seven percussionists play on the keyboard percussion instruments (including bass marimba) and the rest of the group wields an impressive array of percussion instruments on both melodic and non-melodic. Among the latter are seven gongs tuned/processed, tuned bell plates, wind machine, thundersheet, lithophone and nine timpani in two sets.

In the chronicles that refer to the interpretation of the first audition of the respective version of the *Pictures at an exhibition*, that took place on 20 September 1981 in Amsterdam, it is stated that the transcript includes many of Ravel's ideas regarding instrumentation, also retains many elements of original score for piano solo. However, this transcription for percussion ensemble is an extension of timbre colors by making unique sound effects available only to percussion instruments.

The information material on the subject contains about 50 whole or fragmented arrangements and transcriptions of *Pictures at an exhibition*, which certifies this suite among the creations that permanently cause interpretive fantasy or awaken the imagination and the creative force in order to achieve unprecedented and inspired instrumentation/orchestration.

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