

Modest Mussorgsky

(1839-1881)

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

(1874)

Arranged for two guitars

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Engraved by Dejan Ivanovich.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Pictures at an Exhibition (1874) by **Modest Mussorgsky** (1839-1881) is regarded as one of the most beloved classical music works of all time. Like Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1830), its direct conceptual predecessor, Mussorgsky's *Pictures* follow the programmatic, descriptive nature of its music material, connecting the elements of reality with the world of fantasy and illusion. Inspired by a series of paintings by **Viktor Hartmann** (1834-1873), Mussorgsky's close friend, *Pictures* narrates a story about personal transformation during the observation of the paintings — perhaps even the composer's own self-reflection. This is particularly evident when comparing Promenade I with Promenade IV or *Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua*, which is, in fact, a Promenade, though differently titled and positioned. As in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, the main character moves between reality and hallucination, ultimately undergoing his own transformation. From *Gnomus* and *Baba-Yaga* to *Ox Cart*, *Children's Quarrel after Games* or the *Market in Limoges*, the listener is constantly confronted with dualities of conscious and unconscious, real and imaginary, rich and poor, joyful and sad or funny and scary.

The popularity of *Pictures at an Exhibition* increased significantly after **Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937) colorfully adapted the work for symphony orchestra (1922). Ravel's orchestration added a new depth to Mussorgsky's music, especially through its expanded palette of orchestral tone colors. This opened possibilities for bold, new experiments, which brought the idea of creating the version of *Pictures at an Exhibition* for two guitars.

Although the idea for this project existed since 2004, the creative process began in 2018 and concluded with its recording in 2022. The overall intention was to preserve as much as possible of Mussorgsky's original piano texture while adding a new dimension through the rich timbric resources naturally available on two guitars. To achieve this, it was necessary to expand the duo's register range. Initially, the movements up to *Tuilleries*, together with *Baba-Yaga* and *Heroes' Gate*, were written with two guitars tuned in slightly altered *scordatura* (Guitar I: 6th string to D; Guitar II 6th string to C; both guitars: 5th string to G). The opening section of the work (up to *Tuilleries*) appeared to be suitable for two guitars — albeit with some effort — in keys half-tone lower than the original ones, allowing Mussorgsky's tonal relations between the movements to be preserved. *Baba-Yaga*, on the other hand, remained in its original key, and the only necessary tonal intervention was placing the *Heroes' Gate* as fifth-related to its predecessor movement instead of originally being distanced by a third, since C Major is significantly more resonant and practical than E-flat Major on two guitars with the aforementioned tuning. Regarding the movements between *Bydlo* and *Cum Mortuis*, the main challenge was preserving the depth of the lower register that is so prominent in Mussorgsky's piano score, particularly in *Bydlo*, *Promenade IV*, *Samuel Goldenberg eŝ Schmuyke* and *Catacombae*. This problem was solved at the end of 2019 by including a third guitar, equipped with a 6th bass string tuned to G₁. The solution made it possible to recreate the necessary register depth and the overall heaviness of the central section of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, ultimately expanding the instrumental range to over five octaves. The tonal relations continued to be maintained throughout these newly adapted movements up to *Catacombae*, which, together with *Cum Mortuis*, kept its original key — a change that can be difficult to perceive due to the chromatic ascent in the final bars of *The Market at Limoges*, which lead directly into *Catacombae*.

From a performance perspective, the *Ballet of the Chicks* and aforementioned *Market in Limoges* can be considered as the two most technically challenging movements which initially appeared very unlikely to be successfully adapted on two guitars. However, through the use of extended techniques and careful distribution of the musical material between the two instruments, it became possible to arrange these movements without sacrificing texture, *tempi*, or their lively and joyful character. For instance, it was necessary to enter the world of muffled sounds produced outside the fingerboard, which recreated very well the effect of *una corda* on the piano (*Chicks*), as originally indicated by Mussorgsky. Another important aspect of this transcription is the dialogue-based distribution of Mussorgsky's thematic material between the two guitars, avoiding unnecessary repetition of melodic and rhythmic motifs on the same instrument — particularly evident in *Tuilleries*, which in this adaptation vividly evokes a quarrel between two children.

The performance history of this transcription for two guitars follows the same order as the chronology of its creation. The movements up to *Tuilleries*, together with *Baba Yaga* and *Heroes' Gate*, were first performed at the Guimarães Guitar Festival (Portugal) in December 2018. The premiere of the complete work took place at the Jijona Guitar Festival (Spain) on 17th of January 2020.

GENERAL NORMS

1. Articulation

This score presents Mussorgsky's original articulation. Additional suggestions by the editors regarding the use of guitar slurs are indicated with dashed ties.

2. Phrasing

The phrasing follows the original piano score. The dashed ties represent the editors' suggestions in passages where Mussorgsky didn't make such division (*e.g.* Promenades I & V).

3. Harmonics

The standard notation of a small circle above the note — written at the sounding pitch — indicates the precise location of the harmonic in the register. However, if the overall layout of the score made this impossible, the *8va* indication is placed above the note. When a circle is placed to the left of a single note, only that note on the stem is played as a harmonic, with the remaining note(s) sounding naturally.

4. Dynamics

The dynamics are placed between the staves. However, if a particular marking appears closer to one staff than the other, it applies to that guitar part.

5. Fingerings

Fingerings for the right and left hand were intentionally omitted as they tend to be a highly personal choice and may vary considerably from one performer to another.

OBSERVATIONS (Guitar I)

1. “*Gnomus*”

Bars 66-71: The descending chromatic *tremolo* is played on the 1st and 3rd strings. As the line begins above the guitar’s register, the upper notes of the first two or three octaves should be played outside the fretboard and, therefore, will sound muffled. To avoid abrupt changes in timbre and volume, all notes in these bars should be played by placing the left-hand fingers directly over the metal frets of guitar *tastiera*.

2. Promenade II

Bars 3-4 & 7-8: It is recommended to use as many harmonics as possible in order to enhance sustain and *legato*. This edition favors the use of natural harmonics up to the 3rd position while balancing *legato*, ease of position changes and minimizing left-hand noise. Artificial harmonics on the 2nd string may be used in the highest register (*e.g.* the final three notes of Bar 4) for the upper line, while the lower line on the 1st string remains non-harmonic.

3. “*Ballet of the Chicks in their Eggshells*”

Bars 1-4: The high C# must be played outside the fretboard. Its percussive, muted sound will be barely noticeable, as the transition to the note B is very fast.

Bars 17 & 42: Using an *appoggiatura* as an octave harmonic while keeping the main note non-harmonic, creates the illusion that both notes belong to the higher register.

4. “*The Market in Limoges*”

Bars 12 & 14: The high C# must be played outside the fingerboard. Its timbre is masked by the strong presence of the same pitch an octave lower and by the overall dynamic intensity of the chord.

5. *Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua* (Promenade VI)

Bars 12-21: Although playable with a half-*barré* at the 14th fret while performing *tremolo* on the 1st and 4th strings, maintaining this *barré* for such a long passage in a high position may cause discomfort. As an alternative for Bars 16 and 18, the *tremolo* may be played on the 2nd & 4th strings with fingers 4 and 3, while the note D# on the 1st string with the left-hand thumb. In this case, it is recommended to prepare the new fingering on the final beat of Bars 15 and 17.

6. “*The Hut on Fowl’s Legs*” (*Baba-Yaga*)

Bars 117-118: Optionally, these four notes may be played in the lower octave (A-E-A₁-G₁) to correspond with Mussorgsky’s original writing. This can be achieved by using the third guitar, placed on a stand beside the performer. For *legato* continuity, only the right hand should pluck these notes.

OBSERVATIONS (Guitar II)

1. “*Ballet of the Chickens in their Eggshells*”

Bar 19: The artificial octave-harmonic *appoggiatura* creates the impression that the subsequent natural note—played with a left-hand ascending slur—remains in the same high register. This illusion results from the rapid succession of both notes, leaving insufficient time for the perception of the register difference.

Bars 31-38: The high note E *appoggiatura* is played as a muffled sound on the 1st string. It’s highly important to preserve the precision of its relative tuning as much as possible. This effect reinforces Mussorgsky’s *una corda* indication.

2. “*Samuel Goldenberg e³ Schmuyle*”

Bar 30: The two E notes have been added to the final chord to enhance resonance at the *ff* dynamics. However, Mussorgsky’s piano score indicates a double octave — one for each hand — without additional notes.

3. Promenade V

Bars 1-25: Probably the most technically demanding movement for Guitar II, largely due to constant left-hand position shifts and the tuning of the 5th & 6th string (G & G₁). It’s important to maintain as much *legato* as possible between the octave intervals of the lower line.

4. “*The Market in Limoges*”

Bar 40: The partial *glissando* effect is produced with an irregular *tremolo* using a right-hand *rasgueado* technique. Furthermore, to preserve the dramatic ascending climax of this movement and the *attacca* transition into *Catacombs*, the final three semiquavers are played as muted outside the guitar *tastiera* range. Again, maintaining relative tuning of these notes is essential.

5. *Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua* (Promenade VI)

Bars 13, 15 & 20: To sustain the first chord of each one of these Bars, one option is to play the second note of Bars 13 and 15 using right-hand tapping, followed by a left-hand *hammer-on* effect for the third note. In Bar 20, this applies to the third and fourth notes. These techniques extend the chord's resonance and preserve *legato*. Nevertheless, excessive percussive effect should be avoided due to the calm character of this movement's ending.

SPECIAL THANKS

Duo Kontaxakis–Ivanovich would like to thank all our colleagues, friends, aficionados and family members around the world who have supported us over the past 21 years of our existence. This arrangement represents one of the highlights of our Duo's work and we sincerely hope it will inspire future generations of guitar duos to further expand the repertoire for this chamber music ensemble.

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