



SCHUBERT MUSSORGSKY

*Piano Sonata
in A major, D.959*

*Pictures at
an Exhibition*

DANIEL HILL
PIANO



These two masterpieces are very different in style - the Schubert (1828) being a four movement sonata in the Viennese classical tradition and the Mussorgsky (1874) a sequence of fifteen short sections in a deliberately Russian idiom that rejects western European influence.

There are, however, definite parallels between them. Neither was published until after their composer's deaths - the Sonata in 1838 and Pictures in 1931 - though an edited version by Rimsky-Korsakov had appeared in 1886. Neither work received real appreciation and understanding until the 20th century. The Mussorgsky depicts a stroll through an art gallery, whilst the Schubert employs his characteristic rhythmic tread to evoke the image of a wanderer.

The piano writing of both composers is highly original and each can transmute the instrument into both singer and orchestra but in a way perfectly suited to the instrument. Both composers led bohemian lives and died early deaths - Schubert from syphilis and Mussorgsky from alcoholism.

Schubert composed his last three piano sonatas in the last year of his life, between the Spring and Autumn of 1828: he was to die on 19th November aged 31. The sonatas with their numerous thematic and harmonic cross references form a trilogy and the A major is the second of the three. A major is a key which for Schubert often conjures up an idyllic or Arcadian world and the first and last movements can be read as a journey, for the most part, through such an interior landscape.

The composer's treatment of the piano is highly original; the piano

becoming both transposed orchestra and singer. The commanding six-bar phrase which opens the first movement is distinctly orchestral in character, but the two contrasting phrases that follow have a delicate and magical quality that is essentially pianistic. There is a long and harmonically fluid transition in which some of the music becomes more unstable, but when the new singing theme of the second subject appears serenity is restored. However, this is dramatically contradicted by a very troubled harmonically unstable section which seems to end in mid-air. Staccato quavers lead away from this point of crisis to the closing group, (which is based on the second subject) and the exposition ends gently emphasising the rhythmic tread which dominates much of the movement. The development begins with a striking change of key to C major and a return to the delicate pianistic sound world. The music seems to have entered a transfigured and magical landscape harmonically alternating C and B majors so that neither key is really established and the passage of time seems suspended. There is a very fine lead back to the recapitulation, which is an almost literal reprise of the exposition. At its conclusion there is a pause during which one seems to open a door into the magical coda. One hears a mysterious transformation of the magisterial opening of the movement, with quite remarkable sonority in which the pizzicato bass below sustained chords exploits the piano's overtones.

Schubert would have been profoundly affected by the F sharp minor slow movements of works including Mozart's 23rd Piano Concerto and Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, and in this *Andantino* he exploits the emotive qualities of this key. Here we have entered the world of the *Winterreise*. The sighing falling semitone that dominates the desolate outer sections of the movement is subtly related to the opening six bars of the sonata which sustain A in the top part for five-and-a-half bars before falling to G sharp at the end of the phrase. The central section of the movement begins quietly in narrative style which builds

to a nightmarish and destructive climax. This is answered by perhaps the most moving passage in the sonata, in which the music cadences into C sharp major and introduces a numinous eight bar passage that almost quotes the composer's G flat major impromptu. After this moment of illumination, F sharp minor returns with the reprise and finally the coda which is a veritable descent into the grave.

The opening spread chord of the scherzo that follows relates to those that end the previous movement, but the character of the music is diametrically opposite. Delicacy, delight and exuberance dominate, though a sudden fortissimo descending scale in C sharp minor (derived from the central crisis of the slow movement) creates a moment of alarm. The not entirely light-hearted trio contains subtle motivic allusions to first and final movements: its opening phrase has an affinity with the hymn-like A major section of the B flat sonata.

The finale is a rondo, the wonderful opening melody of which reworks the slow movement of the composer's 1817 ***Sonata in A minor***. Schumann's epithet - "Schubert's heavenly lengths" - certainly applies to this largely idyllic movement. There is, however, a stormy central section which modulates to C sharp minor (the key Schubert associates with that romantic archetype "the wanderer, that world-weary perennial seeker after higher truths.") This is followed by a magical passage in which the rondo theme returns in F sharp major, which resolves the tension created by the F sharp minor of the ***Andantino***. At the end of the movement the rondo theme takes a rather sorrowful leave before the ***Presto*** coda brings the work to a very positive conclusion.

MODEST MUSSORGSKY

(1839-1881)

Mussorgsky in his youth was a brilliant pianist, but, having been pressured by his aristocratic family, he initially pursued an army career. However, in 1856 he met the influential composer Dargomyzhsky who invited him to play at his soirées. He was introduced to the critic Stasov and Balakirev, and in 1858 their inspiration spurred him to resign from the army and become a composer. He then lived a bohemian life in a commune with like-minded artists whose aim was to create a specifically Russian art that rejected western techniques. One of their goals was realism: the desire to depict life as it is. Stasov introduced Mussorgsky to the painter Hartmann in 1870, and a close friendship developed between them. Hartmann died suddenly in 1873, leaving the composer absolutely devastated. A year later Stasov helped organise a large exhibition of the painter's work and this event spurred Mussorgsky to compose this masterpiece which he dedicated to Stasov. The work portrays ten of the pictures as well as five self-portraits, (entitled **Promenade**) which depict the different moods of the composer as he strolls from picture to picture. The opening **Promenade** (B flat major) is marked ***Allegro giusto nel modo russo; senza allegrezza, ma poco sostenuto***. Noble and celebratory, it leads to a grotesque portrait of a malevolent dwarf entitled **Gnomus**. Mussorgsky's immense gift for characterisation is obvious here in the evocation of the dwarf's awkward movements' malicious attitude. Its E flat minor tonality is poisoned with tritones.

A delicate and poetic **Promenade** (A flat major) introduces **Il Vecchio Castello**, (G sharp minor) a medieval castle where a troubadour, accompanying himself with a disconsolate and monotonous drone bass, sings a melancholy melody, its chordal refrain suggesting hopeless voluptuous longing.

Pictures at an Exhibition

The next **Promenade** (B major) is robust and leads to **Tuileries** (dispute d'enfants après jeux). Stasov described this as "an avenue in the garden of the Tuileries, with a swarm of children and nurses." This is immediately followed by **Bydlo**, which represents a Polish ox cart on enormous wheels drawn by oxen. The music (G sharp minor) is the opposite of polished and refined. As well as referring to cattle, **Bydlo** is also a derogatory term for stupid uncultured people. The following **Promenade** (D minor) is calm and meditative, but in the last two bars the composer suddenly notices Hartmann's design for a scene in the ballet **Trilby** "Ballet des poissins dans leus coques" (F major.) An unpleasantly malicious portrait, **Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle** (B flat minor) follows, which depicts two Polish Jews - one rich and the other poor. Mussorgsky's repeated note impression of a whining voice is astonishing.

The next rather grand **Promenade** (B flat major) is a slightly altered reprise of the opening movement and leads directly into **Limoges - Le marché** (E flat major.) Here Mussorgsky captures the speech patterns of garrulous women bickering and gossiping in the market place. From this clamour one is plunged into the static world of **Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum)**. Three bare octaves which imply G major are followed by a sequence of slow chords: the first six with F sharp on the top that lead to a lamenting version of the **Promenade** suspended beneath an F sharp **tremolo**. The composer describes this as "Hartmann's spirit leading me to the skulls, summoning me to them, the skulls gently glowing." The clash between F sharp and G that opens **La Cabane sur des Pattes de Poule** together with the frequent tritones contributes to this demonic piece. The hut is associated with the witch of Russian folklore **Baba-Yaga** and Hartmann's drawing depicts a clock in the form of this hut. The witches ride at the end leads straight into **La Grande Port de Kiev**. The simple E flat major of its opening resolves the tension created by the harmonic instability of the demonic passages heard before. The magnificent and triumphant main melody is punctuated by two chorale passages based on a Russian orthodox baptismal hymn, as well as a passage evoking Russian bells.



DANIEL HILL

piano

Cornish-born Daniel received his musical education at Wells Cathedral School and the Royal College of Music, where his piano teachers were John Byrne and John Barstow.

Winner of the Hopkinson Gold Medal and as soloist in Constant Lambert's *Piano Concerto* under the baton of Ian Brown, Daniel graduated with 1st Class Honours and a Postgraduate Distinction in Performance. Thereupon he became a Junior Fellow of the RCM, during which two year period he began to establish himself as an active and diverse musician, as comfortable in solo repertoire and chamber music as accompaniment and teaching.

He has performed all over the world at venues which include the Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, National Concert Hall Dublin, Hochschule der Künste Berlin and University of Iowa; and has broadcast frequently on BBC Radio 3, Classic FM, BBC 2 and Radio France. Recent performances have included Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto and appearing in the Brass Final of the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition which was shown on BBC television.

Daniel holds teaching positions at the Royal College of Music, Wycombe Abbey School and Charterhouse, and is Organist and Director of Music at St. Michael's Parish Church, Camberley.

DANIEL HILL *piano*

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

PIANO SONATA NO.20 IN A MAJOR, D.959

		44:34
1.	I. Allegro	16:49
2.	II. Andantino	8:33
3.	III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace	5:33
4.	IV. Rondo: Allegretto	12:39

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881)

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

		30:34
5.	I. Promenade	1:10
6.	II. Gnomus	2:26
7.	III. Promenade	0:47
8.	IV. Il Vecchio Castello	4:18
9.	V. Promenade	0:25
10.	VI. Tuileries	1:03
11.	VII. Bydlo	2:31
12.	VIII. Promenade	0:44
13.	IX. Ballet des poissons dans leur coques	1:16
14.	X. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuÿle	2:08
15.	XI. Promenade	1:07
16.	XII. Limoges - Le Marché	1:30
17.	XIII. Catacombæ	1:47
18.	XIV. Cum mortuis in lingua mortua	1:36
19.	XV. La Cabane sur des Pattes de Poule, 'Baba-Yaga'	3:11
20.	XVI. La Grande Porte de Kiev	4:35

TOTAL TIME: 74:10