

A portrait of pianist Jimin Oh-Havenith. She is a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a black, shiny, quilted jacket with a high collar. Her hands are crossed in front of her. The background is a dark, solid color. The text 'audite' is in the top right corner. The title 'RUSSIAN PIANO | FORTE' is in large white letters on the left, with a red vertical bar between 'PIANO' and 'FORTE'. The name 'Jimin Oh-Havenith' is in white letters on a red horizontal bar at the bottom.

audite

RUSSIAN PIANO | FORTE

Jimin Oh-Havenith

MODEST MUSSORGSKY

Pictures at an Exhibition

- Promenade 1:35
- I. The Gnome 3:09
- Promenade 1:03
- II. The Old Castle 6:44
- Promenade 0:34
- III. The Tuileries (Children Quarrelling at Play) 1:12
- IV. The Ox-Cart 3:17
- Promenade 0:53
- V. Ballet of Unhatched Chicks 1:20
- VI. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle (Rich and Poor) 3:02
- Promenade 1:38
- VII. Limoges. The Market (The Great News) 1:34
- VIII.a In the Catacombs 2:24
- VIII.b With the Dead in a Dead Language 2:34
- IX. The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Jaga) 3:35
- X. The Great Gate of Kiev 6:09

ALEXANDER SKRJABIN

- Prélude in B-Flat Major, Op. 2, No. 2 1:28
- Étude in F-Sharp Major, Op. 42, No. 4 3:23
- Étude in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 42, No. 5 3:42
- Prélude in C Major, Op. 48, No. 2 2:20

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

- Prélude in B-Flat Major, Op. 23, No. 2 4:12
- Prélude in G-Flat Major, Op. 23, No. 10 4:57
- Prélude in B Minor, Op. 32, No. 10 7:38
- Prélude in D-Flat Major, Op. 32, No. 13 6:34

(Piano) Pictures from the East.**Jimin Oh-Havenith plays works by Mussorgsky, Scriabin and Rachmaninov**

Among the great musical nations, Russia has always played a special role, whose characteristics have manifested themselves since the nineteenth century – and especially impressively in the field of piano music. The prerequisites for this lay in a fortunate combination of Russia's own as well as foreign (European) developments. The rise of Russian pianism, for example, was due to the brothers Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein who, having trained in Berlin with Theodor Kullak, co-founded the St Petersburg and Moscow Conservatoires during the 1850s, thus initiating the Russian piano school, whose demanding and comprehensive standards of training remain unsurpassed to this day. Similarly, the development of a Russian idiom took place in the field of composition, as the rich sources of Russian folk music were integrated into Western compositional models and became “exportable”, enthusing an aristocratic and a growing bourgeois audience in Western Europe. The piano profited greatly from this: rich and diverse compositions for the instrument emerged, ranging from Mikhail Glinka's character pieces, written around 1830 and inspired by folk songs, to Nikolai Kapustin's and Alfred Schnittke's post-modern piano sonatas. Between them sits an impressive series of works, several of which belong to the established repertoire of pianists all over the globe, having won the hearts of audiences worldwide from an early stage. This is especially true of the piano concertos: for a long time, Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 was a virtuoso's indispensable war horse, until it was superseded by Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 30. But the latter's Second Piano Concerto (C minor, Op. 18) and Prokofiev's Second (Op. 16) and Third (Op. 26) Piano Concertos also achieved great and, even in the case of the sombrely ecstatic Op. 16, lasting popularity.

It is characteristic of the enormous expressive range of Russian piano music that one of the most famous solo works (even if Rachmaninov's indestructible Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2, is more popular) was written by an outsider. One could even argue that *Pictures at an Exhibition*, composed within a few weeks in 1874 by the outstanding pianist (as well as Ministry of State Property official) Modest Mussorgsky, completely redefined the notion of what piano music is and what could be elicited from a grand piano. The objection that Beethoven, Liszt and Chopin (not to mention Bach) had already achieved this previously may be justified; however, the pianistic interpretation of the *Pictures* leaves all conventions far behind in terms of its demands on the technique and musical imagination of the performer. The musicologist Carl Dahlhaus therefore counted Mussorgsky among those composers who – like Alkan and the late Liszt – had already settled into a “fundamental uncertainty” during the age of the unbroken reign of tonality and classical formal idiom. By this, Dahlhaus also meant the attitude to life of a homeless modernism shaken by social and political upheavals; Mussorgsky's tragically short and unsteady life, ultimately destroyed by alcohol, demonstrates the difficulties in finding public recognition as an artist, even in the nineteenth century. He would probably have supported the slogan of “l'art pour l'art”, with which Flaubert, Baudelaire and other progressive artists in France at that time proclaimed the autonomy of art, for Mussorgsky left behind an unfinished setting of Flaubert's novel *Salammô*. And he sympathised with the revolutionary political ideas proclaimed by the writer Nikolay Chernyshevsky in his 1863 novel *What is to be Done?*, a thinly veiled call to revolt against the tsar. But Mussorgsky was unable to free himself from the social constraints imposed on him, and he did not manage to reap the glory of having initiated the independence of Russian music as the head of “The Five” – a group of composers which, alongside him, included Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Alexander Borodin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

Rimsky-Korsakov, who held one of the most influential positions in Russian musical life as a professor at the St Petersburg Conservatoire from 1871, revised or completed some of Mussorgsky's major works after his death, including the operas *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*, in order to make them accessible to a wider audience. At the same time, however, he weakened the unruliness of Mussorgsky's musical language, just as the first edition of the *Pictures* of 1886 – for which he had been responsible – was afflicted by a number of errors and mistakes. A critical edition was published forty-five years later, in 1931, and the most revealing edition to date

was published in 1940 by none other than the Italian composer Luigi Dallapiccola, who wrote in his preface that the *Pictures* had “so few connections with the past” that the interpreter had to invent the sound, “a necessity that also applies to [...] Beethoven’s last five sonatas”! Until then, the original version of the *Pictures* had been regarded as a flawed document lacking professional craftsmanship (apart from a brief period of private tuition from Balakirev, Mussorgsky had received no academic training as a composer) or, at best, as a rough diamond that could only be made to shine by way of adding appropriate instrumental polish. Whilst even to this day the date of the public premiere of the original version remains obscure, two movements in an orchestration by Rimsky-Korsakov’s student Mikhail Tushmalov were performed in a concert hall as early as 1886. Maurice Ravel’s (slightly abridged) orchestral version of 1922 brought lasting fame to the *Pictures*, though admittedly in a musical format that had not been planned as such by the composer. Since then, new transcriptions for orchestras or ensembles have been created again and again, and the competition between the original version and its arrangements has remained a constant. But pianists, at least since Sviatoslav Richter’s legendary performance (preserved as an audio document) at a piano recital in Sofia in February 1958, have demonstrated that Mussorgsky’s innovative tonal treatment of the piano cannot be replaced by any orchestration, no matter how sophisticated. The ten pictures and five promenades develop an incomparable suggestive power in the interplay of simplicity, refinement, cruelty, tenderness, grotesqueness, melancholy and monumentalism, and even seem to abolish the limits of the piano in the triumphant final picture infused with national pathos.

If one were to look for a counterpart of the *Pictures at an Exhibition* in nineteenth century piano music, intriguingly, one would come across Robert Schumann’s suite-like sequence of scenes in *Carnaval*, Op. 9, of 1834/35 (in which one scene is also called “Promenade”), as well as his six *Pictures from the East*, Op. 66 (1848), for piano duet, in whose hymn-like final image the “Great Gate of Kiev” already seems to be discernible. Thus even the solitary master Mussorgsky reveals traces and lines connecting him to (Western) European romanticism: this applies to an even greater extent to Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninov. These two, almost contemporary, personalities were also composer-pianists, representing the same musical physiognomy which had emerged with Liszt, Alkan and (to a lesser extent) Chopin in the history of pianism during the nineteenth century and which became dominant towards the end of the so-called “Golden Age” of the piano during the First World War, represented by artists such as Ferruccio Busoni and Leopold Godowsky. Scriabin and Rachmaninov had both trained at the Moscow Conservatoire, from which they graduated with the highest honours. Afterwards, their paths diverged both geographically and artistically: after a long stay in Paris, Scriabin returned to his native Moscow, while Rachmaninov left Russia permanently following the Russian Revolution, and died in exile in California. He held on to traditional tonality and his deep connection with Russian folk and liturgical music, whilst Scriabin – strongly influenced by theosophy, which was becoming popular at the time – ventured into completely different tonal spheres and his formal idiom also became increasingly abstract. These contrasts are clearly evident in the four works each by Scriabin and Rachmaninov (composed respectively in 1889, 1903 and 1905, and 1903 and 1910), which represent two central genres of nineteenth century piano music, the etude and the prelude. But it is equally clear that both composers also drew from the two towering models of Chopin and Liszt. Scriabin’s pianistic style developed in the complex process of appropriating and amalgamating these influences towards weightlessness and fragility, whilst Rachmaninov’s progressed towards sombre splendour and, in his works after the First World War, also towards surprising harshness. It was therefore with very individual stylistic and technical means that these two composers followed the path to world renown for Russian piano music which Mussorgsky had prepared with his *Pictures at an Exhibition*.



JIMIN OH-HAVENITH

An exceptional sonority and fidelity owed to the text determine Jimin Oh-Havenith's piano playing. Her warm sound, which is always embedded within the rhythmic structure, lets music come alive in all its richness. Synchronicity of sound and rhythm, not arbitrary changes in tempo and dynamics determine the clarity of her interpretation.

Jimin Oh-Havenith was born in Seoul, South Korea. After studying piano with Jin-Woo Chung (Seoul National University) and Aloys Kontarsky (Musikhochschule Köln) she performed as a soloist and recorded for radio and CD, also as a piano duo with her late husband Raymund Havenith (†1993). The pianist taught at the Hochschule für Musik Mainz and the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main. Since 2013 she has been active again as a soloist and has recorded seven solo CDs.



audite

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