

SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 5 PM

Barry Douglas, *piano*

Anthony McGill, *clarinet*

Ani Aznavoorian, *cello*

PRE-CONCERT TALK, 4 PM

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION (1874)

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

Promenade
The Gnome
Promenade
The Old Castle
Promenade
Tuileries (Children Quarrelling at Play)
Bylde
Promenade
Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
Promenade
The Market-Place at Limoges
Catacombs (Sepulchrum romanum)
Cum mortuis in lingua mortua
The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba Yaga)
The Great Gate at Kiev

FOUR MOVEMENTS FROM *THE SEASONS*, OP. 37B (1875-6)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-93)

January: By the fireside
February: Carnival
June: Barcarolle
December: Christmas

:: INTERMISSION ::

TRIO IN A MINOR FOR PIANO, CLARINET AND CELLO,
OP. 114 (1891)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Allegro
Adagio
Andantino grazioso
Allegro



PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

Modest Mussorgsky (b. Karevo, Pskov district, Russia, March 9/21, 1839; d. St. Petersburg, March 16/28, 1881)

Composed 1874; 34 minutes



Ballet of the Unhatched Chicken
For this movement, Mussorgsky selected one of 17 costume sketches that Viktor Hartmann made for the Petipa ballet *Trilby*. Based on a short story by French author Charles Nodier, the ballet featured children from the Imperial Ballet School in costumes ranging from unhatched chicks to butterflies and birds.

The cycle culminates with *The Great Gate at Kiev* or, more literally, *The Bogatyr* (Heroes') *Gate at Kiev*, based on Hartmann's prize-winning design (never built) for massive city gates for the city. Mussorgsky's transformation of his recurring *Promenade* theme throughout the earlier movements into the grandest of climaxes contrasts dramatically with the movement's reflective central section based on the church chant *As you are baptized in Christ*. Together they vividly portray Hartman's monumental cupola-crowned design.



"This is a masterpiece because it is not a piano piece! Ravel and others appreciated this when they decided to orchestrate it. Mussorgsky's music conjures up all the instruments of the orchestra, and choirs too (especially in The Great Gate). We are transported by the fact that the piano, as directed by Mussorgsky, helps us believe that we are listening to a big orchestra and not a humble piano. The titles don't really matter with Mussorgsky's Pictures, as it is simply great music." (Barry Douglas)

As a piece of Russian realism, alive with vivid colors, varied textures, vibrant scenes and telling everyday situations, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* ranks with the best. Its original piano version is craggy and asymmetric and does not fall easily under the fingers. Yet Mussorgsky himself was a fine pianist and knew exactly what he was doing when he wrote the music. *Pictures* lies many steps away from the bland salon miniatures and flashy showpieces that formed the diet of 19th century Russian pianists. In it, he uses a keen sense of dramatic realism to bring to life ten pictures by his recently deceased friend, the Russian artist and architect Viktor Hartmann. A memorial exhibition of 400 of Hartmann's drawings, watercolors and set designs, mounted in St. Petersburg, gave Mussorgsky an incentive to write his own memorial to a prematurely deceased friend.

Mussorgsky was just 35 when he wrote the piece. He was born to an aristocratic land-owning family, but dispossessed of his wealth in 1861, when the Czar freed the Russian masses from serfdom. Forced to work the tedious nine-to-five shift of a civil servant and possessing an incomplete musical education, Mussorgsky had only his raw talent to fall back on. He wrote this personal tribute to his 39-year-old friend at white heat, in less than three weeks, saying he "could hardly manage to scribble it all down on paper" because the musical ideas were coming so fast. The pictorial strength of Mussorgsky's miniature tone poems far outweighs the provincialism of Hartmann's work. In the opening *Promenade*, the composer portrays himself wandering from picture to picture. As he goes deeper into the memorial exhibition, the *Promenade* melody gradually becomes integrated into the music of the pictures themselves, increasingly coloring the spectator's mood.

Program annotator Keith Horner recounts his experience of being in the audience when Mr. Douglas took home the gold in the 8th International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition.

COMPETING FOR GOLD

Tuesday July 1, 1986. Moscow Conservatory. There has been a real buzz in the air around the Conservatory all day long. Hundreds of hopefuls are gathered outside the entrance at No. 13 Gertsena Street. I'm asked at least 20 times whether I have an extra ticket for sale. Iron fencing, decorated with notes from Tchaikovsky's compositions, keeps the large crowd out. So do the guards (or are they police?), with a loud hailer. Two of the six doors are eventually opened at 7:45 pm to admit those with tickets to the third round of the 8th International Tchaikovsky Competition... scheduled for 7:30 pm. In the elegant, legendary Great Hall, dominated by a giant hung picture of Tchaikovsky (St. Pyotr himself), all the seats quickly fill. People stand in the aisles, occupy the jump seats



at the end of each row, crowd the balcony staircase outside the hall. Elderly ushers, unsmiling (but endearingly good-natured when they begin to recognize you after the three or four weeks of the competition), try to clear a section of the aisles. One young girl close to my seat begins to push back, then bursts into tears. Later, one of the jury members tells me that emotions run high because music provides an emotional enrichment to the drabness of everyday life.

Two of the eight finalists will each play two concertos back-to-back in this very hot, unairconditioned hall. Barry Douglas, 26 years old, is the last to play, with the big crashing chords of Tchaikovsky's B-flat minor concerto immediately winning approving nods from an audience whose knowledge of the work runs deep. Having played Mussorgsky's *Pictures* a week earlier in this same hall in Round Two, the Irish pianist has already endeared himself to the Russian audience. "He is endowed with a powerful artistic will and he painted vivid 'pictures in music,'" reported a trio of Soviet music critics in the Second Round Press Bulletin. I clocked ten minutes of applause on my analogue stop watch after that Mussorgsky performance, jotting down "ecstatic crowd" in my notebook. I immediately put in an order for the audio tape from Gostelradio, for our own radio broadcasts back home to Canada and the U.S.A. Tonight, in the Tchaikovsky concerto, Barry plays magnificently and confidently, coping admirably under the intense heat of television lights for performances broadcast live across the USSR—with at least twelve conspicuous TV and video cameras and twice as many only marginally less conspicuous press photographers clicking their way through the concerto. Around me, I see no one shake their head disapprovingly, as they are apt to do when a musical interpretation displeases. You could hear a pin drop during the slow movement of Barry's Brahms D minor Concerto. It brings more knowing nods from the audience, who will clap rhythmically and cry "Gold" when the finale draws to its majestic close.

Backstage, TV director Bill Fertik, who has been here all month with three cameras and two soundmen making a documentary for PBS, is uncorking the champagne for Barry. Dozens of fans seek autographs. I arrange an interview for the following day. "Not before 1:00pm," Barry cautions!

Three days later, July 4, 1986, at 10:30pm, Barry Douglas is announced as the Gold Medal winner. Tonight, 33 years later, Barry will fly to Moscow directly after the Brahms Clarinet Trio to be a juror at the 16th International Tchaikovsky Competition, his third time on this distinguished panel. Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky and Brahms were what I heard Barry Douglas play in Moscow eight competitions ago; we are privileged to hear him play these same composers today.

—Keith Horner

FOUR MOVEMENTS FROM *THE SEASONS*, OP. 37b

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (b. Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, April 25/May 7, 1840;

d. St. Petersburg, October 25/November 6, 1893)

Composed 1875-6; 12 minutes

Always an industrious worker, in January 1875 Tchaikovsky began a monthly assignment to provide a piano piece appropriate to the month in which it was to appear in a St. Petersburg musical-theatrical periodical called *Nuvellist*. The resulting twelve short piano pieces went through several editions after their initial publication and were to become the composer's best-known piano music. Tchaikovsky's approach to the project was relaxed, with magazine editor Nikolai Bernard selecting both subtitle and appropriate accompanying verse by a Russian poet. *January*, for example, is subtitled *By the fireside* and the lines from Pushkin read: "A little corner of peaceful bliss, the night dressed in twilight; the little fire is dying in the fireplace, and the candle has burned out." *Vremena goda*, Bernard's title for the collection, translates as "The Seasons," though "The Months" might make for a better fit. The pieces are in simple ternary form, carefully crafted, often with surprisingly challenging technical demands, given their intention as music for the home. The music is often inspired. The wistful middle section of *January*, for example, appears to lead directly to Tatiana's Letter Scene from the opera *Eugene Onegin*. *February* portrays an exuberant carnival scene.

"I consider these miniature masterpieces, even though written quickly to order. When you listen to them as a cycle, it is like taking a journey through Russia, geographically and historically—moving, sumptuous, spine-chilling and, oh, so human. Several are like miniature Tchaikovsky operas, such as Barcarolle (June) which reminds us of the opera Eugene Onegin. Then, December, which reminds me of James Joyce's short story, The Dead." (Barry Douglas)

TRIO IN A MINOR FOR PIANO, CLARINET AND CELLO, OP. 114 (1891)

Johannes Brahms (b. Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833; d. Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1897)

Composed 1891; 26 minutes

"The clarinet cannot be blown more beautifully than by this Mühlfeld," Brahms said in his customary terse manner after hearing the Meiningen court orchestra. Richard Mühlfeld was well established at the Meiningen court, initially as a violinist, later as a self-taught clarinetist. For a week, Brahms asked the clarinetist to play piece after piece. Mühlfeld's refined sound and elegant phrasing would free the writer's block in what Brahms, not yet 60, now regarded as the twilight years of his life. Mühlfeld's sensitive musicianship would help him crown an already rich catalog of chamber music. The Clarinet Trio that Brahms began rehearsing with Mühlfeld and the cellist of the Joachim Quartet in November 1891 is one of the masterpieces of the chamber music repertoire. The cello's simple opening arpeggio establishes an A minor quality of nostalgia and longing that is to permeate the work. Throughout, Brahms continues to refine his extraordinary ability to weave constantly evolving, contemplative music from compressed germs of an idea. The slow movement has a calmness and serenity that is striking even among Brahms' slow movements. In it, clarinet and cello weave intricate contrapuntal threads and overlap registers and sonorities in the subtlest of ways. There's self-humor in the graceful waltz that follows, as though Brahms is offering a gentle parody of Brahms the writer of the *Liebesslieder* waltzes. His nostalgia for the innocence of times past combines with a knowing awareness of the present and the effect is delicious. The finale is a highly compressed movement with considerable rhythmic tension within its fiery arguments.

— Program notes © 2019 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BARRY DOUGLAS, piano



Barry Douglas has established a major international career since winning the Gold Medal at the 1986 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition. As Artistic Director of Camerata Ireland and the Clondeboy Festival, he continues to

celebrate his Irish heritage whilst also maintaining a busy international touring schedule. Douglas recently completed recording the full works for solo piano of Brahms, and his current recording project focuses on the solo piano works of Schubert. He has also been exploring Irish folk music through his own arrangements, including the recordings *Celtic Reflections* (2014) and *Celtic Airs* (2016). Mr. Douglas regularly plays in recitals and performs with symphonies throughout the world, with recent performances in the UK, the Netherlands, Armenia, Mexico, China and the US. He received the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2002 New Year's Honours List for services to music.

ANI AZNAVOORIAN, cello



Hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as a "cellist who shows great sensitivity and great virtuosity at all moments," Ani Aznavoorian is in demand as a soloist and chamber musician with some of the world's most recognized ensembles. She is principal cellist

of Camerata Pacifica, has been on the faculty at the University of Illinois in Champaign/Urbana, and during the summers serves on the faculty of the Great Mountains Music Festival and School in South Korea. She is a member of the renowned International Sejong Soloists, as well as a founding member of the Corinthian Trio. Aznavoorian received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Juilliard School.

ANTHONY MCGILL, clarinet



Anthony McGill serves as the principal clarinet of the New York Philharmonic and maintains a dynamic international solo and chamber music career. Hailed for his "trademark brilliance, penetrating sound and rich character" (*The New York Times*), Mr. McGill also serves as an ardent advocate for helping music education reach underserved communities. McGill was honored to take part in the inauguration of President Barack Obama, premiering a piece by John Williams. A graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, he previously served as the principal clarinet of the Metropolitan Opera and associate principal clarinet of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. In-demand as a teacher, he serves on the faculty of the Juilliard School, the Curtis Institute of Music, Bard College's Conservatory of Music, and the Manhattan School of Music.



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