Lunch Lecture Inter-Actief will start at 12:50

Modest Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition (orchestration: Maurice Ravel)  
Münchner Philharmoniker conducted by Valery Gergiev
Pictures at an Exhibition
and the Music of the Mighty Handful

Inter-Actief Lunch Lecture
15 December 2020

Klaas Sikkel
Muziekbank Enschede

For Spotify playlist and more info see my UT home page (google “Klaas Sikkel”)
Purpose of this lecture

• Tell an entertaining story about a fragment of musical history

• (hopefully) make you aware that classical music isn’t as boring as you thought,
   (possibly) raise some interest in this kind of music

• Not a goal: make you a customer of the Muziekbank
  (instead, check out the Spotify playlist)
Classical Music in Russia around 1860

Two persons have contributed greatly to professionalization and practice of Classical Music in Russia:

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  (composer, conductor, pianist)
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1859
Founding of the Russian Musical Society

1862
Founding of the St. Petersburg Conservatory (music school)
Balakirev’s circle (1860–1870)

- Classical music was West-European (“German”) music
- Five composers wanted a Russian style of classical music
  - Mili Balakirev
  - Alexander Borodin
  - César Cui
  - Modest Mussorgski
  - Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Supported by Vladimir Stasov (author, critic)
The Mighty Handful
(Могучая кучка)

In a review of a concert (for foreign guests at a scientific congress), Stasov wrote

“God grant that our Slav guests may [...] forever preserve the memory of how much poetry, feeling, talent, and intelligence are possessed by the small but already mighty handful of Russian musicians”
What makes music distinctly Russian?

• Music based on themes from traditional folk music
  – E.g. Balakirev: Overture on three Russian themes

• Musical elaboration of Russian myths and stories
  – E.g. Operas about Russian heroes from the past

• Use of some specific harmonies and scales not commonly used in West-European music

Music should not be abstract art but depict something

Balakirev: A good composer follows his intuition – you don’t learn that at a music school (conservatory)
Mili Balakirev (1837–1910)

• Leader of the Mighty Handful
• 1867–1969 director of the Russian Musical Society (!)
• 1871 Breakdown
• 1876 Back in St. Petersburg, no longer prominent
Alexander Borodin (1833–1887)

- Professionally chemist and doctor; music was a hobby
  
  *In the Steppes of Central Asia*

- Most famous work: opera *Prince Igor* (completed by Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov)
  
  *Prince Igor: March of the Polovtse*
César Cui (Кюи) (1835–1918)

- Military engineer, eventually General in the Russian army
- Least integrated in the Mighty Handful
- Also active as critic
Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

• Navy officer
• Later inspector of navy orchestras
• From 1871 to 1905: professor for composition and orchestration at the Saint-Petersburg Conservatory!
Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

- Many orchestral works and operas
  - Fragment 1, From Sheherazade: The young prince and the princess (note a, note b, note c, note d)
  - Fragment 2, From The Invisible City of Kitezh: The battle of Kerzhenets (note a, note b, note c)
- Finalized much (unfinished) work of Borodin and Mussorgsky
Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881)

• Gave up a military career in order to dedicate himself to music
• Later, financial problems forced him to take a job

Most famous works:
• Pictures at an Exhibition
• Night on a bare mountain
• Boris Godunov (opera)
Belyayev’s Circle

• In the 1880’s a new circle is formed by Mitrofan Belyayev, with Borodin, Rimski-Korsakov, Alexander Glazunov, Anatoli Lyadov, and others

• In a way a continuation of the Mighty Handful: the same vision on Russian music, but less dogmatic
Pictures at an exhibition
by Modest Mussorgsky

Impressions of an exhibition with works of Viktor Hartmann (Гартман)

• Musical impressions of some of the pictures
• “Promenade” walk through the exhibition reflecting the mood of the paintings

(Opening) Promenade (note a, note b)
Pictures at an exhibition
by Modest Mussorgsky

Impressions of an exhibition with works of Viktor Hartmann (Гартман)

• Original version (1874) for piano
• Orchestration (1922) by Maurice Ravel
  (Opening) Promenade (note a, note b)
  Bydło - Promenade
• Symphonic Rock version (1971) by Emerson Lake and Palmer
  The Hut of Baba Yaga
Pictures at an exhibition
by Modest Mussorgsky

Finale: The Great Gate of Kiev

• Design for a city gate for Kiev in honour of Tsar Alexander II

Musical elaboration:
  – Heroic theme (note a, note b)
  – Russian Orthodox chant
  – Church bells
Pictures at an Exhibition (Mussorgsky, 1874)

Finale: **The Great Gate of Kiev** (Leif Ove Andsnes, piano)
Literature


• Wikipedia pages ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)):
  – Alexander II of Russia
  – Alexander Borodin
  – Anton Rubinstein
  – César Cui
  – Mili Balakirev
  – Mitrofan Belyayev
  – Modest Mussorgsky
  – Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
  – Princess Charlotte of Württemberg
  – The Five (composers)
  – Viktor Hartmann
  – Vladimir Stasov

Klaas Sikkel

Inter-Actief lunch lecture, 15 Dec 2020