



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2021/2022 SEASON

Pictures at an Exhibition & Anthony McGill

Friday, January 14, 2022 at 7:30 p.m. | Saturday, January 15, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor

Anthony McGill, clarinet

ADAM SCHOENBERG

Picture Studies

- I. Intro
- II. Three Pierrots
- III. Repetition
- IV. Olive Orchard
- V. Kandinsky
- VI. Calder's World
- VII. Miró
- VIII. Interlude
- IX. Cliffs of Moher
- X. Pigeons in Flight

MOZART

Concerto in A Major for Clarinet & Orchestra, K. 622

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Rondo: Allegro

INTERMISSION

MUSSORGSKY/arr. RAVEL

Pictures at an Exhibition

- I. Promenade
- II. Gnomus
- III. Promenade
- IV. The Old Castle
- V. Promenade
- VI. Tuileries
- VII. Bydlo
- VIII. Promenade
- IX. Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells
- X. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
- XI. Limoges
- XII. Catacombs
- XIII. Cum mortuis in lingua mortua
- XIV. The Hut on Fowl's Legs
- XV. The Great Gate of Kiev

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program notes by Steven Lowe and Robert Markow

Picture Studies

Adam Schoenberg

Born: New Salem, Massachusetts, November 15, 1980

Composer Adam Schoenberg is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and earned both a Master's and Doctor of Musical Arts from The Juilliard School where he studied with noted American composers John Corigliano and Robert Beaser. The two composers/teachers breathed fresh life into tonality while also drawing from newer harmonic vocabularies. While at Juilliard, Schoenberg was awarded the Palmer-Dixon Prize for "Most Outstanding Composition." He currently serves as Assistant Professor of Composition at Occidental College.

In 2011, he received a commission from the Kansas City Symphony and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The resultant work, *Picture Studies*, was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition.

Schoenberg's palette is varied and strikingly attractive, drawing from traditional and more recent styles. *Picture Studies* revels in textures and colors that maintain strong connections to tonality, amply spiced up with distinctly modern spikiness and a still vital nexus with minimalism as evidenced by frequent repetition of thematic kernels that impart cohesion balanced by subtly changing timbres and thematic embellishments. Brash and barking harmonies, gossamer lyricism, angular chordal arrangements, and hints of jazz permeate the score.

In 2012, Schoenberg provided an exegesis of the work:

"In November of 2011, I received a commission from the Kansas City Symphony and the Nelson-Atkins Museum to write a 21st-century *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The idea seemed both intriguing and ambitious, and given my own interest in visual art, I welcomed the challenge. After conceptualizing the piece for six months and visiting the Nelson-Atkins on three different occasions, I decided to compose a series of studies.

"Unlike Modest Mussorgsky, who set all of his movements to the work of Viktor Hartmann, my piece brings eight seemingly disparate works of art to musical life. In honor of Mussorgsky and his original work (for solo piano), four of the ten movements were conceived in the form of piano etudes and later orchestrated. My main objective was to create an architectural structure that connected each movement to the next while creating an overall arc for the entire piece.

"I used this series as a way of pushing myself both intellectually and emotionally as a composer. I felt inspired and liberated as I gave myself permission to explore new compositional terrain. The outcome is *Picture Studies*, a 26-minute work for orchestra based on four paintings, three photographs, and one sculpture. Creating this series pushed me in a new direction and allowed me to grow as an artist in the most unexpected ways.

"The following impromptu notes were jotted down from initial impressions and repeated viewings of the artwork, after my selections had been made. These original notes helped dictate the form, style, and musical arc of each movement, and ultimately the entire piece.

"I. Intro: Ghost-like piano theme (using the piano to pay respect to Mussorgsky) that transports the listener to the inside of the Nelson-Atkins Museum.

II. *Three Pierrots* (based on Albert Bloch's painting, *Die Drei Pierrots* Nr. 2): Comedic, naive, and excited. A triad will represent the three Pierrots, and throughout the movement the triad will be turned upside down, on its side, and twisted in every possible way. The form will be through-composed. End big.

III. *Repetition* (based on Kurt Baasch's photograph, *Repetition*): Four figures walking, and each person is clearly in his or her own world. The idea of repetition can lend itself to an ostinato. This is a photograph, a slice of life, and represents only one moment in time. Take this concept of time and manipulate it. Change the scenery (lighting, shade, color), so to speak, with a shutter click before returning to its original state. ABA form with an abrupt switch to B to represent the shutter click.

"IV. *Olive Orchard* (Vincent van Gogh's painting, *Olive Orchard*): Extended impressionism. Colorful, full of love. Perhaps a meeting place for two lovers. Start thin, gradually build to an expansive texture, end colorful. ABC (C references A to show the organic growth of the piece).

"V. *Kandinsky* (Wassily Kandinsky's painting, *Rose with Gray*): Geometrically fierce, angular, sharp, jagged, violent, jumpy, and complex. A battleground. Mustard yellow, encapsulates a sustained intensity. Block structures, cut and paste.

"VI. *Calder's World* (Alexander Calder's sculpture, Untitled, 1936): As if time has stopped, dangling metal, atmospheric, yet dark. Quasi-aleatoric gestures, perhaps improvised. Gradually fade to *niente*.

"VII. *Miró* (Joan Miró's painting, *Women at Sunrise*): Child-like, yet delirious. There appears to be a sexually ambiguous tone. Try something new, a saxophone or bombastic E-flat clarinet solo. Something spontaneous, bouncy, tribal, and raw.

"VIII. *Interlude*: Return of the original Ghost-like piano theme with minimal additional orchestrations. Takes us to the final chapter to be played without pause until the end.

"IX: *Cliffs of Moher* (Hiroshi Sugimoto's photograph, *Atlantic Ocean, Cliffs of Moher*): Delicate and flowing, find a way to musically represent the ocean and cliffs in the most gentle and subtle means. A return to an ostinato.

"X: *Pigeons in Flight* (Francis Blake's photograph, *Pigeons in Flight*): I've never looked at pigeons this way. There appears to be so much joy, beauty, and depth. This will be the longest and most expansive movement. Fly away."

A worthwhile addendum to the composer's aforementioned statement comes from critic Timothy L. McDonald's review in *The Kansas City Star*: "Schoenberg's work is a gem, employing a broad palette of orchestral colors and musical forms. Even within individual movements, the music is kaleidoscopic, with ever-changing colors and textures," adding, "Whether the sensuous melody of the *Olive Orchard*, the jaunty whimsicality of *Three Pierrots* or the explosive rhythmic brutality of *Kandinsky, Picture Studies* captured a remarkable variety of moods."

Concerto in A Major for Clarinet & Orchestra, K. 622

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: Salzburg, Austria, January 27, 1756 | Died: Vienna, Austria, December 5, 1791

In common with the fantasy opera *Die Zauberflöte*, ("The Magic Flute") and a handful of other works, Mozart's sublime Clarinet Concerto has a connection with his Masonic activities. The composer was close friends with Anton Stadler, an esteemed clarinetist and fellow Mason. Despite his own distressing financial woes, Mozart lent Stadler money, ultimately to the detriment of himself and his wife, Constanza. An official document relating to Mozart's estate following his death indicates that Stadler had run up the equivalent of several thousand dollars in unpaid debt to Mozart.

In spite of this, Mozart's Clarinet Concerto was breathtaking and groundbreaking. The clarinet was still a relatively new instrument in the final decade of the 18th century. No less than Franz Joseph Haydn, in fact, opined that it was Mozart who "taught us how to compose for the clarinet." Mozart was drawn to its varied tonal colors that changed throughout its extensive range. He actually composed the Clarinet Concerto for what it known as a basset clarinet, whose lowest notes are below that of the clarinet. No original manuscript exists for the Concerto, and clarinetists who opt to perform it on their bread-and-butter instrument have to alter their parts slightly to accommodate the restrictions imposed by the lack of notes in the nether regions.

The Clarinet Concerto is cast in the standard fast-slow-fast format. The opening *Allegro* celebrates the clarinet's ability to sing sensuously and with warm, edgeless radiance. The primary theme bears a family resemblance to the equivalent tune in his Piano Concerto, K. 488 (written in the same key). Mindful of the clarinet's expressive capabilities, the second theme reverts to minor. Though a concerto, the delicacy of the writing for both the soloist and the orchestra suggests the intimacy of a chamber work.

Simplicity at the service of emotional depth is the hallmark of the *Adagio*. As with his final Piano Concerto, K. 595, this slow movement shows how a great master achieves profound beauty through understatement and economy.

The *Rondo-finale*, a typical format for a concerto, balances expected gaiety with episodes of somber introspection. Consciously or not, the dark clouds in the Concerto's emotional landscape reflects Mozart's impending farewell to life.

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Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Mussorgsky, orchestrated by Maurice Ravel

Born: Karevo, Russia, March 21, 1839 | Died: St. Petersburg, Russia, March 28, 1881

This evening's performance of Pictures at an Exhibition is accompanied by a film of images created especially for this beloved work by Ion Concert Media.

The use of one art form as a means of expression to enhance or comment upon another is a well-known phenomenon, particularly within the realms of art and music. Composers throughout history have responded to inspiration from the visual arts, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* being but one of the most famous examples. Using Mussorgsky's musical response to [Viktor] Hartmann's visual images - paintings, drawings, and designs - a team of eleven students and graduates at the USC School of Cinematic Arts in Los Angeles, under the direction of Michael Patterson and Candace Reckinger, created animated interpretations of the music, thus absorbing three different art forms into a single, creative entity of rich fantasy, whimsy, and adventure. Each art form derives impetus and inspiration from the others, generating a fruitful symbiotic relationship between them. The animator's work was first seen in January of 2011 as part of the opening ceremonies of the New World Center in Miami Beach, Florida, with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting the New World Symphony.

When Viktor Hartmann, an artist, designer and sculptor, died of a heart attack in 1873, his close friend Modest Mussorgsky was devastated. Mussorgsky was further plagued with guilty feelings, recalling that, had he run for a doctor rather than trying to comfort the stricken Hartmann, the artist might have lived. Mussorgsky slipped into depression, aggravated by his alcohol problem. Vladimir Stasov, a music critic and friend of both Mussorgsky and Hartmann, arranged an exhibit of about four hundred works of the deceased artist, hoping that this tribute might in some way relieve Mussorgsky's depression. The exhibit opened in January, 1874, at the St. Petersburg Society of Architects.

Thanks to Stasov, Mussorgsky was inspired to create a suite of ten musical portraits for piano, his only significant work for this instrument. According to the art and music critic Alfred Frankenstein, only three of the movements correspond to works actually in Stasov's exhibit; the others were items Mussorgsky had seen at Hartmann's home. The entire set was written in a single burst of creative energy during June of 1874. The music was not published until 1886, and did not achieve popularity in any form until Maurice Ravel orchestrated it in 1922. The first performance in this form was given on October 19 of that year, conducted by Serge Koussevitzky at the Paris Opéra. Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony introduced *Pictures* to North America in November of the following year.

Mussorgsky's musical portraits are based on Hartmann's paintings and illustrations, which Hartmann had created while studying art in Italy and Paris. Some depict scenes of Russian life while others have obvious links to Europe. The USC animators have remained remarkably faithful to the spirit of both Hartmann's paintings and Mussorgsky's music while letting their minds roam freely to create unique and imaginative responses. Michael Patterson's and Candace Reckinger's notes about the animated elements have been incorporated into the following descriptions:

Promenade No. 1 - The opening theme accompanies an imaginary stroll through the picture gallery. We are often told that this theme represents the composer walking about, leisurely going from painting to painting, allowing first this one, then that one, to catch his eye. This much is true. Mussorgsky even stated: "My own physiognomy peeps out through the intermezzos," as a way of explaining the changes of mood, rhythm, and orchestral coloring through which the Promenade theme passes. But after its initial statement this theme appears only three more times as an interlude between pictures, implying that the viewer may be taking in several pictures from one position. (The theme is also heard in the section "cum mortuis in lingua mortua" and embedded in the final "Great Gate at Kiev.") In the animated sequence created by Emily Eckstein, we find ourselves in a spacious modern gallery with a stylish crowd milling about. Some of those in attendance stop before the first picture.

Gnomus - Hartmann designed a nutcracker, a child's toy made of wood for the Christmas tree at the Artists Club. It was styled after a small, grotesque gnome with gnarled legs and erratic hopping movements; nuts were meant to be cracked in its jaws. Andy Lyon's animation envisions the creature instead as a grotesque circus performer, a misanthropic and malevolent creature that seeks attention and applause through his efforts to both entertain and intimidate us. The animated character is drawn in an abstract style that might well have leaped out of a Picasso painting.

Promenade No. 2 - For the second promenade, Emily Eckstein blends motion graphics with live-action photography to create a stylized mix of figurative imagery and design. The geometric shapes are inspired by Frank Gehry's designs for the aforementioned concert hall in Miami Beach. Groups of people stroll off into adjacent galleries, and the mood turns somber as several museum-goers stop to look at the next painting.

The Old Castle - Inspired by his travels in Italy, Hartmann created a watercolor of a troubadour singing in the moonlight in front of a medieval castle. His melancholic song is "sung" by the alto saxophone. The length of this section suggests this may have been one of Mussorgsky's favorite paintings. In the animation by Ryan Kravetz and Elizabeth Willy, doors open and beckon us enter. We travel through ghostly rooms, then out into a phosphorescent garden where we find the troubadour. Miami's historic landmark, the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, served as a further source of inspiration. The animation combines 3-D and 2-D techniques with live-action photography.

Promenade No. 3 - We are roused from the enchantment of the Old Castle to discover that we have traveled back in time to a majestic nineteenth-century art gallery with sunlight streaming in from overhead windows. A crowd is strolling through grand halls. This and the remaining promenade, animated by Michael Patterson, are set in the same time period, and combine hand-drawn animation with live actors and photographs.

Tuileries - Hartmann and Mussorgsky take us to Paris for a lively picture of children scampering about in the famous garden, engaged in horseplay while their nannies chatter. Cecilia Fletcher's animation perfectly captures the scene in her patterned tapestry, which culminates in a kinetic zoetropic effect. Her design is reminiscent of early-to-mid-twentieth-century book illustrations.

Bydlo - The word means "cattle" in Polish. As Mussorgsky/Ravel portrayed the scene, an oxcart on giant, lumbering wheels lumbers into view, its driver singing a folk song in the Aeolian mode ("sung" by principal tuba Craig Fuller). As the cart approaches, the music rises to a terrific climax, and as it passes on, the music gradually diminishes in volume. Melissa Bouwman, using a cut-out style, adds an important role for peasants working in the fields beneath a majestic sky. And what do you suppose her oxcart is carrying? A giant tuba!

Promenade No. 4 - The atmosphere turns melancholic as patrons wander off to contemplate various pictures. A young girl leads her uncle by the hand to the next picture, a most curious one indeed, not least of all as it comes to life before her very eyes.

Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells - Hartmann's scene portrays his costume designs for a ballet in which cheeping baby canaries dance about, still enclosed in their shells with wings and legs protruding. This ballet was actually produced in St. Petersburg in 1871 with choreography by Petipa and music by Julius Gerber. Shaun Seong-Young Kim sets his comic scene in an egg hatchery where baby chicks form a corps de ballet, diligently practicing their dance steps. When a baby rooster joins the party, matters take an amorous turn. The 3-D set designs incorporate passing references to painted Russian eggs, Degas dancers, and Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* ballet.

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle - Mussorgsky called this number "Two Polish Jews, Rich and Poor." The Jews' fictitious names were creations of Hartmann, who made individual pencil drawings of these two characters conjured up from the Warsaw ghetto he had visited. The personalities are vividly drawn: the rich man is pompous, self-important, arrogant; the poor man is sniveling, beseeching, nervous, pitiable. Mussorgsky owned these drawings, and contributed them to the exhibition. Carolyn Chrisman, using classic hand-drawn character-animation techniques, sees things somewhat differently, though in the spirit of dichotomy. At a calligrapher's desk sits an unfinished *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract), written in Aramaic. The two characters emerge from the parchment. In the course of cleaning up after his boss Goldenberg, Schmuyle cannot resist demonstrating his own artistic impulses.

Limoges - This is another bustling scene, as we can easily determine from Mussorgsky's music. Here Hartmann portrays not children but rather housewives chattering, babbling, and arguing away. Steven Day offers a more generalized and frantic vision of marketplace activity. Using scenes shot in Europe and Japan, his animated collage combines stop-motion with time-lapse and long-exposure photography. At the height of the feverish commotion the music suddenly plunges into the next scene.

Catacombs - Hartmann himself, lantern in hand, explores the subterranean passages of Paris. Animator Candace Reckinger admirably captures the grim, oppressive character and dark colors of Mussorgsky's music in her sequence, created from both still and moving imagery.

Cum mortuis in lingua mortua - Mussorgsky's title in Latin ("speaking with the dead in a dead language"). We are still in the catacombs. Eerie, ominous sounds from the orchestra accompany the grisly sight of skulls glowing faintly from within as the visitors stroll around to the promenade theme. Reckinger's and Patterson's description of this ghostly scene leaves nothing to the imagination.

The Hut on Fowl's Legs - Baba Yaga is the fabled witch of Russian folklore. Hartmann drew her abode as a fantastic bronze clock-face mounted on chicken legs. Mussorgsky's music seems more to portray the fearsome witch's ride through the air in her mortar, steering with a pestle. Alessandro Ceglia, using a bold, illustrative style and hand-drawn animation, takes us back to Hartmann's vision but expands it into a supernatural nightmare deep in the forest.

The Great Gate at Kiev - Hartmann designed a gate (never built) to commemorate Alexander II's narrow escape from an assassination attempt in Kiev. The design shows an ancient Russian gate with a cupola shaved like a Slavonic helmet. It all looks rather modest compared to what Mussorgsky created. In its original piano manifestation it is grand enough, but Ravel made it into something truly magnificent in his version for his full orchestra. Ria Ama takes matters even further. Using Hartmann's design as a point of departure, she adds a sunrise, a candlelit view of the imagined interior, icons, kaleidoscopic projections, floodlights, giant bells (vividly depicted in the orchestra), and, as the music rises to massive proportions, a spectacular fireworks display.

(c) Robert Markow



Anthony McGill, clarinet

Hailed for his "trademark brilliance, penetrating sound and rich character" (*The New York Times*), clarinetist Anthony McGill enjoys a dynamic international solo and chamber music career and is principal clarinet of the New York Philharmonic - the first African-American principal player in the organization's history. He is the recipient of the 2020 Avery Fisher Prize, one of classical music's most significant awards.

McGill appears as a soloist with top orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and Kansas City Symphony. He performed alongside Itzhak Perlman, Yo-Yo Ma, and Gabriela Montero at the inauguration of President Barack Obama, premiering a piece by John Williams. As a chamber musician, McGill is a favorite collaborator of the Brentano, Daedalus, Guarneri, JACK, Miró, Pacifica, Shanghai, Takács, and Tokyo Quartets, as well as Emanuel Ax, Inon Barnatan, Gloria Chien, Yefim Bronfman, Gil Shaham, Midori, Mitsuko Uchida, and Lang Lang.

He serves on the faculty of The Juilliard School, Curtis Institute of Music, and Bard College Conservatory of Music. He is the Artistic Director for the Music Advancement Program at The Juilliard School. In 2020, McGill's #TakeTwoKnees campaign protesting the death of George Floyd and historic racial injustice went viral.



Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

Ankush Kumar Bahl is currently the 13th Music Director in the Omaha Symphony's 100-year history. He is recognized today by orchestras and audiences alike for his impressive conducting technique, thoughtful interpretations, and engaging podium presence. In concert, he has left *The Washington Post* "wanting to hear more" and has been praised by *The New York Times* for his "clear authority and enthusiasm" and ability to "inspire." His recent guest conducting highlights include performances with the New York Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Orchestre National de France, Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México, the Richmond Symphony, Virginia Symphony Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, and the National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, D.C.). Summer festival engagements include the Copenhagen Philharmonic at Tivoli, the Sun Valley Summer Symphony, the Wintergreen Summer Music Festival, the Chautauqua Institute, and at Wolf Trap with the NSO.

Bahl is a proud recipient of four separate Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Awards between 2011 to 2016 and the 2009 Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Scholarship (Leipzig). A protégé of former New York Philharmonic Music Director Kurt Masur, Bahl served as his assistant conductor at the Orchestre National de France, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. In addition, Bahl has been fortunate to count Maestros Jaap van Zweden, Zdenek Macal, Christoph Eschenbach, David Zinman, and Gianandrea Noseda among his mentors.

From 2011-15, Bahl was the Assistant Conductor at the National Symphony Orchestra under Christoph Eschenbach. During his four-year tenure, Bahl conducted over 100 performances, including his subscription debut in 2012, his Wolf Trap debut in 2013, the inaugural concert of the Kennedy Center Concert Hall's Rubenstein Family Organ, numerous run-out concerts for the NSO's In Your Neighborhood program, and his annual Young People's Concerts which educated over 24,000 students each year. In addition, Bahl was the primary conductor for their Beyond the Score series. In February 2013, Bahl's ability to step in on short notice was once again called upon when he successfully replaced Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos at a few hours' notice in a concert with the NSO that featured soloists Kelley O'Connor and Daniil Trifonov. Other soloists Bahl has collaborated with include Lang Lang, Sara Chang, Lara St. John, Karen Gomyo, Nicholas Drauticourt, Bhezod Aburiamov, Benjamin Grosvenor, Orion Weiss, Conrad Tao, Charlie Albright, Philadelphia Orchestra Concertmaster David Kim, and Concertgebouw Concertmaster Vesko Eschkenazy.

American born and of Indian descent, Ankush Kumar Bahl is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area and received a double degree in music and rhetoric from the University of California at Berkeley. He has been a conducting fellow at the Aspen Music Festival with David Zinman and completed his master's degree in Orchestral Conducting at the Manhattan School of Music with Zdenek Macal and George Manahan. In recent years Bahl has been a frequent collaborator with jazz legend Wayne Shorter, leading his quartet in concerts of his orchestral music at both the Kennedy Center and the Detroit Free Jazz Festival.