Introduction: This assignment draws from what you have learned so far in this course and your listening and critical thinking skills in order to analyze the way in which the elements of music are used in a major symphonic masterpiece, Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, orchestrated by Maurice Ravel (and other orchestrators). You will also consider folk and popular influences on a work of music that has become part of the classical symphonic repertoire.

In 1873, following the death of Mussorgsky’s friend Victor Hartmann, who had been a famous artist, architect, and stage designer, a memorial exhibition, was staged showing hundreds of his pictures, drawings, and sketches. Mussorgsky attended the exhibition and was inspired by what he saw to compose ten solo piano pieces, each describing one of the paintings in music. It was later orchestrated in the version we commonly hear today by Maurice Ravel, which is the focus of this assignment.

Instructions: Please view the videos for the following sections on YouTube, which are linked in subunit 2.5 of this course. These sections include: “Promenade,” “Gnomus,” “The Old Castle,” “Promenade/Tuileries, Oxcart, Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, and Two Polish Jews,” “Catacombs/The Hut on Chicken Legs (Baba Yaga),” and “Great Gate of Kiev.” Remember that it may be helpful to keep the BBC program notes accessible, which are also linked in subunit 2.5.

Then, write an essay (about 2-4 pages), examining the elements of music as Mussorgsky and Ravel make use of them in *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Use the following questions to guide your reflection.

1. **On Melody:**
   - Note two or three of the most distinctive melodies in the work. In which sections do they occur? How do they evoke the visual sources for the piece? (For example, “Nomus” (Gnomes), “Great Gate of Kiev”)
   - Note two or three distinctive motives (melodic fragments) in the piece. In which sections do they occur?
   - How does the composer transform these melodies and motives throughout the piece? (Note what happens to the “Promenade” melody at the end of the work, when it reappears in “Great Gate of Kiev.”)

2. **On Harmony:**
   - In which pieces does Mussorgsky make use of pentatonic scale patterns, and why do you think he uses them?
   - In which pieces are you particularly aware of Mussorgsky’s use of minor tonalities? What effect does this have?
• In which pieces are you particularly aware of Mussorgsky’s use of major tonalities? What effect does this have?
• In “Catacombs,” Mussorgsky may have chosen certain sounds for effect. Which sounds (instruments, chords, etc., melodies) particularly stand out in this piece, and why? More advanced students may wish to comment on the harmonies and chords used in this section.

3. **On Rhythm:**
   • What kinds of rhythms does the composer seem to use frequently? How does rhythm make certain people or characters stand out and others seem less distinctive?
   • How does rhythm contribute to the emotional impact of certain pieces?

4. **On Instrumentation, Orchestration, and Texture:**
   • Some critics have stated that Ravel’s orchestration of *Pictures at an Exhibition* showcases developments in the symphony orchestra in the past 50 years since Mussorgsky had written the original score for piano. How does Ravel make use of instruments of the orchestra to create visual and emotional effects in the work? Consider, in particular, the effects of following: tuba (especially in “Oxcart”), harp, celesta, and saxophone, which was a new instrument at that time.
   • Evaluate Ravel’s choices in assigning certain melodies or motifs to certain instruments. Are there moments where you would have preferred to hear a different instrument? (Please note the demonstration of “complaining” or “kvetching” motif in “Two Jews, Rich and Poor,” featuring a solo for muted trumpet, as played by the violin.)

5. **Critical Thinking Questions:**
   • The conductor Charles Hazlewood has remarked that the music “galvanizes us through our journey through the exhibition.” How does the music add to your experience of the visual images, and shape your visual and emotional experience of the work?
   • Many years after Ravel’s orchestration, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer performed their own rock-band arrangement of *Pictures at an Exhibition* in live concerts and recordings as indicated in the YouTube video linked here; listen to the performance by clicking on the hyperlink. Which elements of music stand out in ELP’s arrangement: melody, rhythm, harmony, or texture? Do you find this arrangement effective? Why or why not? What does this tell us, if anything, about the potential appeal of *Pictures at an Exhibition* to contemporary music fans and future generations of listeners?

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