The Important Role and Benefits of Academic Research in Musical Interpretation: An Application to the Performance Study of Modest Mussorgsky's Picturess at an Exhibition

Denny Hong
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The Important Role and Benefits of Academic Research in Musical Interpretation: An Application to the Performance Study of Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate duty of a performing musician is to share a transcendental experience of aural artwork with society. Before doing so, the musician is obligated to conduct thorough research on the cultural, historical, and artistic components of the repertoire in order to create a holistic picture that can then be used to shape a convincing and thoughtful interpretation. My study explores and analyzes the creative tools and analytical methods involved in musical interpretation as applied to my own personal interpretation of Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* through public performance. My goal is to validate the multifaceted benefits that research contributes to this work of aural art as well as highlight the duty of the performing musician.
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INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Music as Aural Art

Music as an aural form of art is essentially non-existent within space; as such, it exists primarily in time.¹ This aspect is important because if music is limited to (or more accurately, contained within) time, then once it has passed, it becomes impossible to retrieve or relive that time spent. As such, each performance and recreation is completely organic, new, and original. Even if one were to record the concert onto various media, in essence, the time has been already lost.

Classical performing musicians are imbued with the privilege, duty, obligation, and blessings of sharing this allocated time with the audience members and listeners of society. In order to fully manifest one’s duty as a performing musician, one then must be cognizant and aware of the role of time as well as how to best manipulate it during the performance. These distinctions and details are incorporated into the larger structure of “musical interpretation”, wherein lies the opportunity and ultimate creative outlet for the performing pianist.

Since “musical interpretation” can potentially become a rather nebulous term, it should be defined here. If we take music to be a separated individual and isolated “language” that functions as a tool for people to communicate to one another, and the act of interpretation as being the manner in which an explanation and meaning is given to the written or spoken musical text, then musical interpretation must be an explanatory and meaningful method through which music is shared. Given that the musical text has a universal method of notation as well as of transcription and comprehension, the possibilities of interpretation are endless. Herein lies the creative and aesthetic value of music,² in its interpretive quality.

¹ Heinrich Neuhaus was accurate when quoting Hans von Bülow, who claimed: “In the beginning, there was rhythm.” Heinrich Neuhaus, The Art of Piano Playing. (London: Kahn & Averill, 1993), 30.
² Though some may argue that the subjectivity of music detracts from its inherent aesthetics, I instead would argue that the subjectivity imparts an interaction and engagement with the
Performing classical musicians, then, are interpreters of the notated text that the aural medium is shared to the rest of the world. As a classical performing musician, I believe that my solemn personal duties are not solely to society, but also to the aural art form itself. There is an intrinsic beauty and profound aesthetic in music as an art form. Musical artists must be mavericks and lead the society forward, and strive not only for personal growth, but also for the growth of our fellow man.

Music is intellectual, emotional, spiritual, educational, but most importantly, universal. Because of this universality, one must strive to connect with the audience and share with them a personal and transcendental experience that can potentially affect their lives in a profound manner and impart an unforgettable memory. Furthermore, musicians have a duty to educate the public on classical music as well as foster a greater appreciation for the arts.

In performing classical music, the pianist must possess both musicality as well as technical skill. He or she must not be afraid of exploring new ideas and experimenting with different sounds and delighting in opportunities for creativity. I believe that within this domain of exploration, however, one needs to be respectful as well as aware of the composer’s original intent in one’s interpretation. In acknowledging the composer’s intent and adhering to the original manuscript within stylistic and musical context, the performer will also experience enriching rewards in a successful performance.

It should further be noted that my research is rather isolated to the perspective of a classically trained pianist; as such, most of my primary sources will be to focus upon the musical approach and interpretive processes from a strictly classical perspective as well as from perspectives of classical concerting pianists in the world.

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artwork. Music is not merely a mindless activity, but one that is demanding and thoroughly effective.

3 Classical music must not be confused with the Classical period (approximately 1750-1830), which follows the Baroque and precedes the Romantic era. Rather, classical music encompasses the genre of Western music, where the Western development paralleled the artistic achievements in occidental civilization.
By including Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* within the recital program, I sought to incorporate a scholarly research not apart from, but in complement of the musical analysis. It is my goal to perform a recreation of the *Pictures* that will not only serve as accurate depictions of Mussorgsky’s original score, but also animate and bring the visual works of Hartmann to life.

The ability for pianists to convey an artistic expression that highlights the composer’s intent is done through the musical interpretation of a work. As interpreters of the work, we are to render it faithfully so that the audience may be presented with a clear picture of what the composer intended to express with his or her work.

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4 Due to the numerous versions of spelling the composers’ last name, some clarification is needed. The original Russian spelling is: Musorgsky; the French reads: Moussorgsky. In this research, the composer’s last name will be spelled in the traditional Western version: Mussorgsky. In quotations and reference notes however, the composer’s last name will be spelled according to the original source where it is found. Furthermore, in the original Russian title “Kartinki s vystavki” is most accurately translated as “Pictures from an Exhibition”; but since “Pictures at an Exhibition” is more commonly used in reference, the latter will be used.
MUSIC AS INTERPRETATION

Composer and Medium

I often ask myself, if the composers were still alive, how would they react to the various rearrangements that are made upon their original works? Would they be angered and indignant that someone else had the audacity and confidence to alter another's work? Or would they be amused that someone should strive to “improve” upon a finished composition?

Next, how would composers feel about the hundreds of interpretative approaches to his or her work? Would they be proud of their great achievements or conflicted and tortured with the thousands of inaccuracies found within? I suspect that Mussorgsky would have first and foremost been greatly humbled to learn that there are over 380 piano recordings of his suite.

Mussorgsky would have granted a certain degree of freedom in interpretation unto pianists who seek to lift up the art onto a pedestal. After all, Mussorgsky himself had said that the purpose of art was to depict life, no matter where it shows itself; truth, no matter how bitter. Such realism and truth in art were respected above all else. With knowledge of the composer’s intent, how should we as pianists interpret and fashion a convincing argument in light of the intention? This question of interpretation has led to the creation of many rearrangements and transformed versions of Mussorgsky’s original piano score.

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6 This fact is accentuated further when one considers that the work was never once publicly performed during his lifetime.
Arrangements and Transformation of the Pictures

Since its initial conception, the *Pictures* have since undergone major transformations in medium, in style, and in interpretations. Russ reasons that the *Pictures* are among the most orchestrated and arranged works in the entire musical repertoire because their colourful and sometimes powerful pieces with their unsympathetic writing for the piano have left the feeling that the work should be orchestrated, but there is no evidence that Mussorgsky ever planned to do so.7

Ravel’s orchestrated arrangement of the original piano suite is by far the most popular arrangement; there exists, however, a further transformation that is twice removed: the pianistic arrangement on Ravel’s orchestration of Mussorgsky’s original suite. Does the act of rearranging upon an arrangement of the original suite detract from the piece’s effectiveness and authenticity? Furthermore, has the liberty of the musicians been so great that their interpretation fails to merely be called a “rendition” but an altogether new *creation* in itself? Most musicians today would interpret the act of rearranging a classical piece a liberty that is justifiable on the grounds that the one responsible for the rearrangement recognize and respect the original work.8

We cannot hold all musicians who rearrange the *Pictures* in contempt or criticize them of musical abuse. The truth is that the suite has become so well known and famous in the classical repertoire, that any rearrangement upon it would be simply that: a rearrangement. It is on these grounds that Horowitz is allowed to write his own transcription and perform his own rearrangement in public, as he did in his Carnegie Hall performance in April 1951.

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8 This consideration is largely compositional, as performers rarely feel the urge to rearrange a compositional work. Horowitz, however, was an exception.
Primary Goal of Research—The “Question” Explored

My research seeks to address the benefits and role of research in the intuitive rendering and application of musical interpretation to performances. In other words, how can performers be more credible (both publically and privately) and legitimize their interpretation to the work of art by using tools of research in their analysis and in their studies? Furthermore, what types of tools qualify as sufficient and appropriate for musical research?

My hypothesis surrounds the interpretative route that musicians undertake prior to the performance. How is it that hundreds of pianists who use the same score arrive at very different interpretations? I will illustrate that this interpretive discourse and deviation can indeed be quantifiable.

If research is beneficial, then, how should one apply and incorporate the results obtained through research to music, and what purpose does this serve the composition, the composer, the performer, and the audience? These posited questions of study are manifested in my public performance of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures* as well as through the specific case studies of Horowitz’s and Kissin’s performance of the suite. With the results of research incorporated as a component of my own interpretation and performance, I hope to support and enhance my interpretation, to also impart understanding and elucidate the workings of musical interpretation from a pianist’s standpoint.
METHODOLOGY

Considerations and Overview

Before beginning to elaborate upon the sources and tools utilized in my research, a distinction between quantitative and qualitative research should be made. Many may assume that because the arts and humanities are an area that subjectively affects each individual in different ways, the qualitative component is lacking altogether in the study of music. This is not so; rather, I would argue that qualitative elements are very much inherent in the musical process that lends to qualitative musical discourse. It is only after quantitative analysis is conducted that we may begin the sole work of qualitatively lifting up the art, and placing our emphasis on the aural aspect of interpretation.

How then should one objectively quantify something as abstract and seemingly intangible as music? Components in the musical score, such as rhythm, harmony, and melody are all objectively quantifiable. Analysis of these components must be conducted prior to interpretation. Though performing classical musicians have been trained to an extent where the phrasing, articulation, and style are somewhat already disciplined, consideration of the formal structure must precede each interpretation.

The quantitative analysis must be done in order for the quality to come through. The qualitative aspect involves the musical language through interpretive discourse. However, these can only come about after a close qualitative approach. Furthermore, there is another sphere of quantitative analysis that is completely non-existent in the qualitative, and that is of experience or practice. Because each experience is entirely subjective to the individual, music affects everyone to a different extent and elicits a different response.

In my research, I gathered information through various media sources: sound recordings, published books, online articles, and musical scores. There exist over 380

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9 This factor varies from one pianist to another; furthermore, it is dependent on training, ability, as well as pedagogical history.
different sound recordings of the original piano score; each one offers a unique interpretation and perspective of a pianist’s individual embodiment of the work. For my main argument, I chose to pursue a comparative case study and analysis between two performances: that of Vladimir Horowitz and Evgeny Kissin. This is done to emphasize and accentuate the different interpretive routes that pianists can take with the same compositional work. I chose these two particular recordings because of their polarity in terms of musical and stylistic performance interpretations.

The pictures of Hartmann play a prominent role in my research; each artwork was analyzed and studied in order that the aural component might be enhanced. The visual aspect of research was a great asset and comparative studies between visual and aural occurred.

I have also included in my study the research of Russian folk-song elements and the background history of the compositional work. Afterwards, I approached the suite with a theoretical analysis, which included the study of bass configuration, harmonic structure, melodic motives, themes, and sonorities. I then was able to come up with an analysis of the stylistic and cultural conventions that are most suitable for a performance of this type of composition. This was done mainly through research on the culture of Russia as well as

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10 Not all of these recordings are available, in actuality, the number is much less; consideration must be also given to the type of media upon which these recordings are made, (long-playing phonograph records, compact disks, and cassette tapes). Of these, I have listened and analyzed approximately 60 various recordings; I will limit my citation, however, to the two recordings used in analysis for performance considerations.

11 It should be noted that the recording upon which the case study is conducted is not upon the performance of Mussorgsky’s original suite, but rather, of Horowitz’s own rearrangement in his Carnegie Hall recital (1951). Vladimir Horowitz, pianist, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, by Modest Mussorgsky, BMG Music, 9026-60526-2, 1992, Compact Disc.


14 All of which qualify as quantitative study and analysis.
studying folk tunes and melodies of other Russian composers.\textsuperscript{15}

Aside from the intellectual research, I also interviewed Russian students about their heritage and culture. This was intended to highlight various facets of Russian works that would be illuminated from the perspective of one who had been raised and brought up in the culture as a child.\textsuperscript{16}

Since a performer uses instruments as a means to convey the composer’s intent, a performer’s primary responsibility is to manifest the skills, musicianship and mastery over one’s instrument. The instrument is the method through which the artwork is expressed, and so, practicing must be a first and foremost priority. Other specific research components complement and augment one’s interpretation, but ultimately, as a pianist, one needs to diligently practice for hundreds, if not thousands of hours.

Lastly, I used sources of historical, cultural, and artistic information to form a cohesive interpretation. This was manifested in my own public performance of Mussorgsky’s \textit{Pictures} as fulfilment for my bachelor’s degree recital.\textsuperscript{17} Feedback and criticism from professors, audience members, and peers were then gathered and reviewed for quantitative analysis.

Vastly different interpretations arise when one compares various performances of the same piece. In the next section, I will conduct a case study through two very different interpretive approaches to the same suite (\textit{Pictures at an Exhibition}). This not only highlights and brings up the issue of “faithful interpretation”, but also explores the vast opportunities of freedom and liberty within the musical score.

\textsuperscript{15} Among those were: Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Borodin.
\textsuperscript{16} All of the Russian students who were interviewed were musically trained and already well familiar with the suite.
\textsuperscript{17} Held on November 18, 2010, at the Howard Performing Arts Center, Andrews University, Refer to Programme (Figure 1).
Two Pianistic Interpretations—Performance Renderings

Vladimir Horowitz: Liberalism and Transgression

Vladimir Horowitz generally approaches the classical musical works with an openly liberal mindset and is not intimidated or reluctant in altering the original composition to suit his style of playing. Horowitz’s many “transcriptions” on original piano works can be best defined as transformative rearrangements or re-creations. While he does not dramatically alter the original work in such a way that it is unrecognizable, there is a great degree of personal ownership in which his own identity replaces that of the original composer. This is directly contrasted to Brahms’ theme and variations or even Liszt’s transcriptions upon operatic arias. In the later examples, the composers were already well-established and well-known composers with their own distinct styles of writing music. Furthermore, they had composed numerous substantial pieces of their own outgrowth. Horowitz, however, was first and foremost a pianist and not well regarded as a prominent composer. As such, his transcriptions are merely improvisations upon the original piano score.

Some will inevitably argue that Horowitz’s transcriptions are inappropriate because the original work upon which he elaborated was in essence a piano score. Liszt and Brahms did not have this agenda because their piano transcriptions were derived from different types of compositional works: orchestral suites, string quartets, brass ensembles, chamber music, unaccompanied violin solos, etc. Because Mussorgsky was himself a pianist, Horowitz’s act of re-writing a fellow pianists’ work in the realm of classical art approaches the issue of transcription from an entirely different perspective.¹⁸ Let Horowitz defend himself:

“They say I put graffiti on Mussorgsky, but I don't give a damn. I worked hard on that transcription; I'm not ashamed of it. I am proud of the transcription. I did a good job, and I think perhaps I played it very well. You see, I felt the Pictures had to be brought

¹⁸ Consideration must be given however, to the fact that Horowitz and Mussorgsky had never actually lived during the same period. Does such detail in any way detract or grant liberties to the former? While there will surely be diverging thoughts on this issue, the main focus should be upon the technical considerations and motives behind the rearrangement.
forward. They were too introverted, and this was possibly because Mussorgsky was a little bit of a dilettante, and he was not really a pianist. Ravel orchestrated the work, and I "pianostrated" it. When I change anything, it is only to make a better piano sound. And Mussorgsky did not know how. I'm sorry but that is true, and the score is also much more awkward to play in the original."\(^{19}\)

Does not Horowitz have the liberty and freedom to do exactly as he says—to make the piece more pianistic? At this point, I will claim that there is indeed one authority higher than that of the composer him or herself that we as performing musicians have to respond to, and that is art itself. Art demands that we struggle and practice until perfection is achieved; at the same time however, “the search for a final, acceptable artistic performance is never-ending. …Perfection is never attained! The quest for the ultimate interpretation continues into infinity; it never ends.”\(^{20}\)

Russ, as noted earlier, criticizes Horowitz of considerably adulterating Mussorgsky’s score in his performance; his intention seems to be to convert Ravel’s orchestration into a piano work rather than to return to Mussorgsky’s original.\(^{21}\) Is Russ justified in accusing Horowitz of adulterating the music because he “pianostrated” the orchestral arrangement rather than rearranging the piano score? I believe that as a performer, he should have been more faithful to the original score;\(^{22}\) as a composer, he had more freedom to write a new arrangement upon whichever version was desired.

This larger issue of faithfulness to the score from the perspective of a performer must also be explained. Faithfulness is not characterized by dull and flat playing, rather, faithfulness is the act of allowing the composer to present him or herself through the musical

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21 Russ, 26.
22 This term “faithful” is by no means a synonym for “accurate” or “true”. Rather, to be faithful in one’s performance is to adhere to the score and transparently relay the message of the music to the audience without musically abusing the performance in the process. This proves to be extremely subjective and difficult to describe, as there is no one definitive faithful approach to any work of aural art.
composition; thus, self is, in a sense, lost and the audience is able to gain access into the narrow window of the composer’s life. Traditionally, pianists are taught to interpret the music; this entails that we leave the original writing intact. This consideration will not be applicable to Horowitz, as he significantly altered the score, which the performer is to interpret.

In deconstructing Horowitz’s justification for his liberal approach of transcribing Mussorgsky’s original *Pictures*, we raise the question whether it was his genuine intent to bring forth and raise the music onto a pedestal, or was it to raise himself up on the performing platform and stage? Did Horowitz act out of duty for art, or out of duty for self? There can be no doubt that Horowitz genuinely preferred the sonorities in his transcription, but does his alteration of the original composition in any way undermine Mussorgsky as a composer or, graver still, as a pianist?

Such was the mindset and paradigm of even Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who heavily edited Mussorgsky’s *Pictures* upon their completion; he justified his alterations by saying that Mussorgsky’s manuscripts were

“In exceedingly imperfect order; there occurred absurd, incoherent harmonies, ugly part-writing, … illogical modulation, … ill-chosen instrumentation … in general; a certain audacious self-conceited dilettantism, at times moments of technical dexterity and skill but more often of utter technical impotence … publication without a skilful hand to put them in order would have had no sense save a biographical-historical one.”

What is interesting about Rimsky-Korsakov’s situation, however, was that he never replaced Mussorgsky’s original writing with that of his own. Eventually, he released Mussorgsky’s original handwritten score into circulation after his edition. Since then, musicologists have

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23 In this scenario, Rimsky-Korsakov and Mussorgsky were peers in the same school of music; this relationship is more implicit than that between Horowitz and Mussorgsky.


25 Mussorgsky’s original score may be found at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow.
been able to create a true Urtext edition upon the manuscripts that reflect the raw and brash writings of the composer.

Though Rimsky-Korsakov found Mussorgsky’s music too “unrefined, audacious, and self-conceited”, the flaws that he points out and eliminates from the original score are actually strengths of the suite. Musicologists have since undergone a revival of Mussorgsky’s manuscripts. His tonal instability, “incoherent harmonies, and ugly part-writing” are now regarded as innovative; his compositions truly embody the Russian ideals and the style of Realism.

These instances where musicians and composers edit the original score and undertake liberties to enhance the pieces must be more fervently explored in another place. In my research, I am merely interested in the role of the pianist and how one can form an interpretation based upon the original score. Does the pianist as a servant to art have the duty or obligation to “pianostrate” the score or are we as performers limited to accurately adhere to what the composer intended?

In the traditional sense, as widely accepted today in conservatories of music and schools of classical art, classical pianists are to act their roles as transparent mediums that illuminate the composer’s intention to the audience. That is not to say that they should play the repertoire with tasteless and inexpressive methods, but that they should not destroy the style, character, and intention of the piece. The piano suite of Pictures was meant to first and foremost uplift Russian music and depict realism in Russian culture and Russian life. It was written as an outburst of creative originality on the composer’s standpoint. As Mussorgsky worked feverishly on the suite, he kept in close correspondence with Stasov, to which he shared:

“Hartmann is boiling as Boris boiled—the sounds and the idea hung in the air, and now I am gulping and overeating, I can hardly manage to scribble it down on paper. Am writing 4 numbers—with good transitions (on “Promenade”). I want to do it as quickly and steadily as possible. My physiognomy can be seen in the intermezzi. I
consider it successful so far.”

Ultimately, who is to decide whether or not pianists have certain liberties, which endow them with the power to “improve upon” the work? I will again restate that the higher calling a performing musician must answer to would be art itself; it is an inherent beauty in the arts that commands that we strive for the most perfect and excellent rendering. This somewhat nebulous charge given by art is in no way an exact science. Rather, the music must first and foremost serve the people by uplifting them onto a higher plane of thought. It must transcend and illuminate in essence the spiritual and aesthetic qualities that are inherent in art.

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26 Russ, 271.
27 This of course will never be achieved; but only by aiming for perfection can one improve and represent art in its most accurate light.
Evgeny Kissin: Conservatism and Tradition

Evgeny Kissin’s interpretation differs vastly from that of Horowitz. Kissin strives and attempts to follow the composer’s original “set of instructions” as closely as possible. This is delineated not only through deciphering the score, but in analyzing the musical language as well. Furthermore, Kissin’s heritage of Russian-Jewish descent already incorporates a cultural component in his performance. Stylistically, he plays the suite accurately in terms of the realism character.

As an artist, Kissin felt the need to share music with society and to uplift art upon a pedestal. As a child prodigy, Kissin gave his first concert at the age of 10, and when he was 12 years old, he debuted with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra with both Chopin piano concertos. Reflecting back upon this memory, he claims that: “I realized that my love for playing in public was caused by a natural desire to share with other people things I loved, things that were important and dear to me.”

Unlike Horowitz, who felt the need to rearrange and “improve” upon a seemingly insufficiently written score, Kissin states that all the information that needs to be uncovered lies within the music. His interview with journalist Maxim Reider highlights the pianist’s thoughts on interpretation:

**MR: How do you prepare a new work?**
EK: “There is no special method. I just sit down and start working – and then the music itself tells me what to do. Then, at a certain stage, after I have formed my own conception and am able to execute it, I start listening to other people’s performances of the piece and learn from them. Even if I don’t like someone else’s performance, that also helps because then I know even better what I want to do.”

**MR: Are the circumstances of a composer’s life a factor when you work on a new piece?**
EK: “For certain pieces they are. If they had a direct influence on the piece – like Beethoven’s ‘Moonlight Sonata,’ for example. However, the most important thing is the music itself.”

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MR: What is important for you to consider in a performance?
EK: “To approach the level of the music performed as closely as possible. Of course, only the greatest performance can reach it sometimes; but nevertheless, we should all try to approach it as closely as our modest capabilities allow us.”

This approach to the music most directly contrasts with that of Horowitz. As such, it is no surprise that the two performers would come to such vastly different interpretive musical results.31

How does Kissin’s performance interpretation affect the audience and listeners in the concert hall? Author and music critic Vadim Prokhorov writes, “Everyone who attended the concert - including this reporter - had the impression that Chopin’s spirit was talking through Kissin that evening.”32 Kissin had played with such stylistic accuracy and transparency, that many were moved and felt the composer’s “spirit”. Kissin acknowledged his direct role as an interpreter and medium, and sought to be the best and most accurate interpreter for the highest sake of art itself.

Lastly, Kissin’s musical intuition and maturation in his interpretation of classical works constantly develops further; he explains that even though we are constantly maturing, the works themselves are constant. Therefore, it is up to the musician to perform the work in a faithful light that most accurately reflects the composer’s thought:

"Of course, I play differently now than, let's say, 10 years ago," says Kissin. "It is not a cardinal difference of ideas or perception, however; it is that in my early years some things would go unnoticed, as if I had a different set of ears. Now, however, I notice more and see many things in a different light. My definition of musical maturity is that our goal as musicians is to come as close as possible in our performance of great works to the level of those works. We have to render all the depth of a composer's thought. I agree with Goethe who said, 'A real poet has an innate knowledge of life, and for its portrayal he needs neither experience nor empiric means.'”33

30 Ibid.
31 It should not be inferred however, that Kissin held Horowitz in contempt; on the contrary, Kissin admired many recordings of Horowitz’s later works.
33 Ibid.
Kissin’s reverence and integrity to remain faithful to the composer’s creative intention is a mutual and common view among classical performing musicians today. As musicians, we strive to render the interpretation as close to the composer’s intent so that the audience will experience an unadulterated performance. This is where the elements and components of research come in to aid and augment the musician’s knowledge by shedding light on the composer’s intent.

It is given, then, that we are to truly regard research as important in the musician’s interpretation of a musical work. It is not only important for performance etiquette and certain performance practices, but helps clarify the composer’s intent so that the musician may provide a just and “fair” the performance. This is done through analysis of history, culture, and the composition itself.
ANALYSIS

The types of research involved in the musical journey of interpretation are many. In fact, they are so numerous, that each sphere could very well stand apart as an isolated focus of intense study. In essence however, they can be condensed into three broad categories: historical, cultural, and artistic. Allow me to first briefly define each area of research and follow with their application to musical interpretation.

The Historical Component

History, or the study of past events and happenings, can help us become more aware and cognizant of our past as well as illuminate the importance of how past events shape and even form our present and future. A historical study of the composer sheds important information on the origin of the piece’s conception. Knowing who and what was behind the artwork greatly helps the musician conceptualize the piece. For example, Mussorgsky was a severely depressed alcoholic in his later years, and this depression greatly influenced his art songs that were written. The grim and isolating nature of those pieces are historically reflected by his personal tragedies. Likewise, his *Pictures* were created as a result of a specific experience. It was only after the visit to Stasov’s exhibition held in memory of Hartmann that Mussorgsky was able to capture the creative spark that led to his composition.

There also exists the history of the piece itself, that is, the work of aural art. The history of the piece may have socio-politic considerations that are pertinent to stylistic and even artistic means of approach. The history of the piece may also aid the performer’s interpretation and the way in which he is to perceive the work of art. Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* is exactly that, it is a collection of aural pictures derived from visual works at an exhibition. Here lies history of composer and history of the musical suite side by side.

Analysis of the musical suite should first take into consideration that Mussorgsky’s
suite was based upon visual paintings. This transformation from visual to audio must be highlighted as well as incorporated in the musician’s interpretation. Since the composer’s intent was to convey his visual and emotional expressions through music, how can we as musicians approach the *Pictures*?

In summary, history not only illuminates and elicits awareness about music, but also enriches and deepens one’s appreciation for the work. Studying the history behind the compositional work imparts a kind of relevance to the musician’s own life and even makes one feel somewhat connected to the music and equally to the composer. In the following pages, I will relay brief histories of the composer, the artist, and the suite.

**Composer—Modest Mussorgsky**

Russian pianist and composer Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) was one of the foremost artists who paved the way for realism while embracing the essence of Russian music. His writings contain many folk-style elements and are rich with Russian melodies, harmonies, and rhythms; some of his original compositions were also based on historical (*Boris Godunov*) and supernatural (*Night on Bald Mountain*) thematic material.

At the time of Mussorgsky, there were in essence, two diverging schools of music. The Western institutions embraced music of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and other classical composers. The Russians disregarded the former composers and turned instead, to realism for their mode of expression; they embraced Glinka and Dargomyzhsky.

As Hoops remarked, “It is impossible to understand him [Mussorgsky] simply as a musician, for he was hostile to the very notion of narrow professionalism and held a lifelong

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34 This kind of appreciation is largely if not solely intellectual and cognitive. In the historical consideration of music, the beauty lies within the context and events that surround the piece.  
35 This distinction is necessary as earlier we noted that there existed two diverging schools of musical training in Russia.
disdain for composers who sealed themselves off from ‘life’.‖ This embodiment and
perception of beauty in every facet of life is well illustrated through Mussorgsky’s operas and
songs. There, the folk-tune melodies depict the elements of realism in life that came to be
associated with the “mighty five’s” musical works.

Mussorgsky’s musical career focused around his associations with the Moguchaya
Kuchka, or “the mighty handful”. These five Russian musicians were of Eastern origins and
opposed the approach and teachings of the Western European schools of music. They sought
to write music strictly in Russian traditions of melody, harmony and rhythm.

**Painter and Architect— Victor Hartmann**

Russian architect and painter Victor Hartmann was also a proponent of realism in art. His
artistic endeavours and training in schools of painting had sponsored his travels over
Europe. Though Mussorgsky wasn’t himself able to travel, he did so through Hartmann’s
artworks. Mussorgsky had a strong personal bond and friendship with Hartmann. Thus with
Hartmann’s death in 1873 of an aneurysm, Mussorgsky lamented: Grief, grief! O greatly
suffering Russian art! [...] such horror, such sorrow! And why should curs and cats live, and
Hartmann perish?

Hartmann was unlike most artists in that his artwork served functionality. His
artworks served as sketches for building designs, and used as costumes for ballets. These
were captured through Mussorgsky’s transformation of the visual element into aural
expressions.

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36 Richard Allen Hoops, V.V. Stasov: Selected Articles on Musorgsky, A Critical Annotated
37 This accepted conventional spelling of Hartmann’s first name is used in contrast to the
Russian spelling Vityushka.
38 This is evident in his artwork depicting the catacombs under the streets of Paris, Appendix
Two.
39 Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson, eds. and trans. The Musorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste
Petrovich Musorgsky in Letters and Documents. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company,
1947), 231-2.
Compositional Work—*Pictures at an Exhibition*

*Pictures at an Exhibition* was composed in late February and early March 1874; merely months after Mussorgsky had attended the art exhibition sponsored by Stasov held in memory of Hartmann’s works and artistic achievements. Mussorgsky’s musical concepts had come upon him suddenly, and he wasted no time in writing down these original ideas. Though the exhibition had showcased over 400 works of Hartmann, few have survived through time; as a result, only six works remain of the original ten that had inspired the suite.

The first publication of the piano score was actually an edited version by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) in 1886. Later, however, French composer Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) arranged the suite into an orchestral score in 1922. The orchestral arrangement was mainly responsible for catalyzing the popularity of the original piano score; though numerous orchestral arrangements exist today, Ravel’s is regarded superior to them. Among the keyboard repertoire, this substantial piece is well known and regarded highly among performers; as such, there exist numerous recordings, performances and interpretations.

The significance of the *Pictures* in the piano and musical literature today has often been attributed to its complex history and origins. The fascination with its historical origins as well as its passage through time surely accounts for a component of its widespread popularity.

“…we have already noticed that Moussorgsky’s musical fancy had full play only when it had some objective reality to work on. It is as if his creative genius always needed some slight impulse from outside, to guide it into the right way. This was so here. Hartmann’s pictures and drawings, of very varied subjects, gave every possible opportunity for musical interpretation. Moussorgsky, like most creative minds who drew their inspiration solely from some chance “idea,” was entirely dependent on the caprice of his own feeling; he could not compel this source to flow more freely than it chose. …Even Moussorgsky himself, who was seldom satisfied with his own work,

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40 Russ, 22.
41 Russ, 25.
42 Russ, ix.
thought the pieces a success.”

The Cultural Component

The study of the cultural aspect must not be neglected when taking into account that Russian music has such a deep musical history that evolved separately from Western music.\(^{44}\) The music of Russian composers Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui, Borodin\(^{45}\), Mussorgsky and others did not seek to exemplify the craftsmanship that was inherent in contrapuntal fugues. Rather, they sought to transparently portray the lives of Russian people through musical art. Their approach was direct, genuine, and true. This cultural aspect is directly related with the expressions in realism. It was realism that captured the essence of the culture as well as provided composers with tools to express their feelings toward their nation.

Until I had met a Russian who was raised in Russian culture, I had no idea what this “transparency” and “forcefulness” meant. The Russians that I have encountered are generally extremely honest, direct, and transparent in disposition. Their actions and words illuminate their genuine character. Applying this cultural perspective to the music, we see in the writings of the \textit{Moguchaya kuchka} a quality of “compressed force and directness of expression.”\(^{46}\) As such, the beauty and lyricism in Russian melodies have lines of no other character than being breathtakingly beautiful. They are rather simple, but bring to light a primitive realism.

The movement toward realism was not an intentional insubordination to a mainstream culture or school of music; the \textit{Moguchaya kuchka} rather, remained faithful to a particular source of their music. They breathed the music of daily activities and found art in all of life; music was merely a means to convey expressions of life itself.

Here, I will briefly address the folk-song element that provides the foundation of

\(^{44}\) This refers to the two divergent schools of music in Moscow; the St. Petersburg Conservatory was taught by German musicians and as such, followed Western traditions; the other school was made up of Russian nationalists who taught realism.

\(^{45}\) Though Rimsky-Korsakov is included among the \textit{Moguchaya kuchka}, he had been well trained in the Western school of music; as such, his style of musical writing greatly differed from that of the other four composers.

Mussorgsky’s works. The folk song melody taken in isolation is quite effective, issues rise, however, when one attempts to harmonize a folk-tune. For Mussorgsky, the emphasis was not placed on the supporting harmonies, but on the melodic line and the overall sonority that resulted from open chord writing. In all music, he sought to create the most round and sonorous quality that had depth and richness of timbre.

When interviewed about the *Pictures*, pianist and conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy describes the Russian mind as “suspicious”, and that it never takes the obvious meaning, it always looks instead for something deeper. As Russ advocates: “These little pieces do not simply turn Hartman’s illustrations and designs into music, they bring them to life, creating little scenes out of them which, in turn, may carry messages about Russian culture and society.”

In a recent interview that I conducted with a Russian musician, I asked her about the significance of the *Pictures* in Russian culture and society. She responded that Mussorgsky, like all the other Russian composers seeks to display hardships of Russian life. These hardships were the result of economic, political, social, or even familial situations. Artists displayed hardships with truth; nothing was hidden or marginalized. Thus the element of realism is already inherent in these descriptions of the *Pictures*.

Cultural studies are intimately tied with historical study. In order to fully understand the nationalism and the music, we have to reflect back on certain events in history. One needs only to look upon Delacroix’s “Liberty Leading the People” to capture the spirit of the French Revolution (1789-1799) manifested in the painting.

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47 This refers to a monophonic line of music.
48 Russ, x.
49 This spelling of Hartman reflects its source.
50 Russ, x.
51 Olena Rybachok, interview, Andrews University, March 29, 2011.
52 History has always maintained an intimate relationship with the arts (literature, visual, aural).
In Mussorgsky’s *Pictures*, the cultural awareness is particularly strong in the sixth movement (Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle). Anti-Semitic feelings in Russian culture is graphically displayed in Hartman’s visual painting as well as within the musical language of Mussorgsky. Each of the two Jews are given a uniquely individual musical motif characterized by a particular harmony, melody, and rhythm. Thus, even social status is written within the musical score. This direct relationship between an understanding of culture and music will reinforce even stronger the synergy of research and musical interpretation. The research component can be seen as a tool, along with study of the musical language.

Even in the opening “Promenade”, an understanding of the Russian’s ability to speak directly to other people as well as their strong disposition and character are manifested in the musical line. The very nature of the Russian style of walk is embodied in a stately and confident stride across the exhibition hall.

Many more of such examples exist of cultural relationships with the musical language. The more one researches the cultural elements, the more one will find distinct overlaps that contribute to shaping a convincing interpretation.
The Artistic Component

In this section, I will briefly summarize an overview of the various stylistic and musical components that are to be analyzed in the suite. This not only includes the aural facets but visual ones as well.\textsuperscript{53}

In Cavocoressi’s survey of Russian music, he notes about Mussorgsky that:

“In order to understand how this music came to be something apart and unique, it suffices to turn to its history. … They had their native music, an enormous variety of folk-songs and dance-tunes constituting a live and flourishing tradition. And this folk music always had a hold upon the educated classes as well as upon the illiterate masses. …In his vocal parts, he was careful to keep close to the natural pace, prosody, and inflexions of speech, especially in the words of his maturity. He seldom resorted to big leaps or to strong contrasts in note values. Intervals bigger than a sixth are uncommon. As a rule, the work is done by note-values ranging from the dotted crotchet to the semi-quaver. …Within these limitations, he achieves a surprising wealth of contrasts and shades, thanks to the variety of modes and harmonic schemes he resorts to. He had a keen feeling for the value of chords.”\textsuperscript{54}

Since the focus of my project is on applying research tools and techniques to enhance one’s understanding of the score, a primary understanding and knowledge of the score must be delineated. In this section, I will explain my findings through the score as illustrated through excerpts from each movement of the suite.\textsuperscript{55}

Generally, musical analysis focuses on three components in the score: the melody, the harmony, and the rhythm. However, one must take these three categories as smaller inherent components within form, style, character, and performance practice. In this following section, I will attempt to briefly delineate the musical factors that are critical to the performer from the perspective of a pianist. This type of analysis directly qualifies as objective quantitative work upon the score study.

\textsuperscript{53} See Appendix Two.
\textsuperscript{55} All excerpts included are from the retrieved Urtext edition upon Mussorgsky’s original manuscript. Modest Mussorgsky, \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition}, Ed. Pavel Lamm, Moscow: Muzgiz, 1934, Print.
Together with the musical component, I will also briefly join the visual considerations as well. Since only six of the ten pictures remain, only those will be commented upon and incorporated into the commentary.
The first thirteen notes in the opening phrase of the suite provide the unifying material on which the rest of the pieces are built upon. They not only create a sense of coherance and order to the suite, but also serve an important functional purpose. “Promenades” are used by the composer in order to transition between movements.\(^ \text{56} \) Within these two measures, one finds inherent Russian elements in the melodic motif.

The narrow range of the line suggest that it is applicable to or derived from traditional folk melody, and the selective placement of pitches in the writing automatically creates a natural shaping to the phrase. Furthermore, the rhythmic alterations in meter between every other measure creates a free improvisatory feel. This is characterized by a horizontal rather than vertical linearity in the musical line. In analysis of the harmonic element, one can visually detect that chords are written in open positions where intervals of sixths are found in abundance. Lastly, the pentatonic melody of the opening greatly influenced many other composers in other nations and schools of music.\(^ \text{57} \)

Since the “Promenades” serve as transitory elements, the character of how one plays each should be thoughtfully considered. Should the pianist transition abruptly or subtly? Does the “stride” and type of walk play a considerable role?

Pianistically, this should convey the composer’s consideration of Russian culture; the forceful brevity as well as the directedness of the people should be exemplified in the timbre.

\(^{56}\) Note that these “Promenades” do not exist between all of the individual movements; rather, they are found only prior to movements 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9.

Furthermore, the emphasis should always be directed toward the lyricism of the melodic line,\textsuperscript{58} and tonal colors in the harmonic structure.

\begin{center}
\textbf{I. Gnomus}
Latin: [Gnome]
\end{center}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{gnomus.png}
\end{figure}

At the end of the preceding Promenade, the composer writes \textit{attacca};\textsuperscript{59} this signals an immediate transition or onset of attack into the next movement. Often, the concluding material of the previous movement or promenade will encompass thematic material of the succeeding movement to make the transitions more seamless. This further unifies the suite and imparts stability.

\begin{center}
\textit{mm. 72-74}
\end{center}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{mm_72-74.png}
\end{figure}

Taken from the same movement as before, the short motif above illustrates the aural depiction of the gnome. The chromaticism as well as its placement in the lower register of the keyboard augments the grotesque character of the gnome.

\textsuperscript{58} measures 3 & 4.
\textsuperscript{59} Attacca is also found at the end of every Promenade, as well as at the end of movements 5, 7, 8, and 9.
This Promenade varies from the first in that it is written in a different key as well as in a different register. The melody however remains the same; this is to ensure that the melodic line is not lost through several variations of the Promenade. Through each of the successive Promenades, Mussorgsky retains the melody but alters the harmonic or rhythmic quality. Lastly, this Promenade foreshadows the next movement in that its melody is in the lower register.

**II. Il vecchio Castello**  
**Italian: [The Old Castle]**

In this movement, there are two melodic lines; one is presented in the bass, and the other is in the treble clef. The texture of this movement is homophonic, and the melody is characterized by a simple linear phrase within a narrow pitch range. Again, this illustrates the folk-influenced Russian style of melodic writing. Furthermore, the ornamentation shown above increases the improvisatory and folk-song element in the style.
Promenade

This Promenade is different from the previous two in that it voices the melody in octaves. In fact, both registers have octave movements in which the sonorities are open and very brash-sounding. As indicated by the composer, it is to be played *pesamente*, or very heavily.

However, this heavy feeling should not be slow, as dictated by *Moderato non tanto*. In the tempo marking, we are not only given the speed at which the octaves are to be played, but also the character which they are to be played. They are to be confident and strong, but in no way must they sound slow.

III. Tuileries—Dispute d’enfants après jeux
French: [Tuilleries—Dispute between Children at Play]

This movement manifests the feeling of a capricious dispute, where the nature of argument is not serious or solemn, but rather fleeting. The motive of the first measure can be thought of as a taunt between children; where one echoes: “nah, nah-nah, nah-nah, nah!” The articulated staccatos in the upper register can be thought of as a lighthearted chase or game of tag.
Articulations are extremely important in conveying character. As shown above, the descending staccato passage immediately succeeding the legato line changes the mood; in one instance, the children may be walking, and in the other, running.

IV. Bydlo
Polish: [Cattle]

In the Urtext edition, the opening of this movement is characterized by a fortissimo. This dynamic marking has been widely debated by numerous musicians. Many interpret the heavy cattle cart to be approaching from far away, with a gradual increase in volume (crescendo poco a poco). A true adherence to the score however, requires that the performer...
attack the first chord with heavy weight and remain strong throughout.

**Promenade**

Again we have a variation upon the Promenade; this time, the melody is taken up two octaves into the high register. Here, the sonorities and timbral quality again forshadow the succeeding movement. Furthermore, the composer’s indication of *Tranquillo* indicates not only a tempo, but a character of the Promenade. We can perhaps picture in our mind’s eye Mussorgsky as he walks solemnly from one portrait to the other in deep thought.

Here are the last two measures of the Promenade that transition into the next movement via *attacca*. As noted, the thematic material from the succeeding movement is already apparent here, and the character will be set prior to the onset of the movement.
The musical substance for this movement was the only one not based upon a painted artwork. Hartmann had been working on costumes for the Russian ballet *Trilby*. It was from the costumes that were displayed in the exhibition that Mussorgsky was inspired to write this movement. Again, the *Scherzino* indication conveys a playful and lighthearted character which is further supported by the mental image of a chick ballet. Mussorgsky further illustrates the character by musically writing the grace note motives in the upper register.

These brilliant\(^{60}\) trills in successive thirds convey the fluttering wings of the unhatched canary chicks. What is interesting about the visual component of this movement is that the painting was not merely for aesthetics, but served a functionality as well. Hartmann’s sketches of the “unhatched chicks” were fitted costumes for a Russian ballet. As such, there are human dancers portrayed wearing a canary costume within the egg shell. The influence

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\(^{60}\) The term “brilliant” in this context is used to describe a tonal colour, one that is bright and luminous.
and dominant role of ballet in Russian culture is an integral part of understanding the musical
and visual work. The nature of most ballet works were about supernatural elements as well as
those which portrayed realism. This canary dance belongs most likely to the former category.

VI. Samuel Goldenberg und Schmuýle
Yiddish: [Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle]

What is most notable about this movement is the manifestation of two contrasting roles or
characters within the movement. Mussorgsky first introduces the “rich” Jew, who is
characterized by strong rhythms of parallel octaves. This conveys a sense of confidence and
power in the brash sonorities.

mm. 9-10

In the second part, the “poor” Jew is presented to the listener; this is aurally depicted with a
thin texture where the Jew seems to be whining; furthermore, the single melodic line of
repeated notes maintains a sense of uncertainty and annoyance. Lastly, the dynamic is written
at a piano in contrast with the forte marking in the section personified by the rich Jew.
In the final part of this movement, the two Jews are brought together in a dialogue. The poor Jew in the upper register and the rich Jew in the lower register. Though the texture of both is characterized solely by octaves, we can visually see that the rich Jew has a moving part. Furthermore, the rhythm of the poor Jew is more subdivided and imparts less stability as well as elicits a timbre quality of uncertainty.

This movement not only musically depicts two characters, but they were also depicted visually. Mussorgsky had taken two of Hartmann’s paintings (one of the rich Jew, the other of the poor) and synthesized them into one piece where the two major characters were used to provide an element of contrasting material. In the musical score, the two works are translated: “A rich Jew wearing a fur hat: Sandomierz,” and “A poor Sandomierz Jew”. These two are collectively referred to as “Vityushka’s Jews.”

Visually, the rich Jew is presented as a side portrait; what is predominant is the stereotypical crooked and enlarged nose. Furthermore, his clothing suggests that he is an individual of importance. In the painting of the poor Jew, he is displayed with a bowed head, as if too weak and destitute to lift up. He is an elderly man, aged, with white hair, and aided with a walking staff. Furthermore, he is a vagabond, carrying all his possessions in his bag. Elements of colour and light between the two Jews also highlight their character. The rich

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61 Leyda and Bertensson, 272.
Jew is painted with darker hues and the poor with lighter tones.

**Promenade**

This Promenade is most similar to the very first Promenade in terms of sonority and harmonic support. It opens with parallel octaves in the first two measures, followed by open sonorities as seen in the first Promenade. This Promenade however, is the most substantial in terms of sheer length; furthermore, it is very repetitive and characterized by a thick harmonic homorhythmic texture.

**VII. Limoges le marché—La grande nouvelle**

*French: [The Market—The Big News]*

The character, or rather scene, for this movement is set in a bustling marketplace where street vendors and merchants are jovially chattering with the buyers. Even though the dynamic is marked as *forte*, the character is not heavy, as dictated by *scherzando*. The Big News that is included in the title is that: “Monsieur de Puissangeout has just recovered his cow ‘Fugitive’. But the good wives of Limoges are not interested in this incident because Madame de Remboursac has acquired very fine porcelain dentures while Monsieur de Panta-Pantaleon is
still troubled by his obtrusive nose which remains as red as a peony.”⁶² This seemingly meaningless title emphasizes the occurrences and happenings in small towns such as Limoges. The purpose of folk music was to express the daily lives of the people as well as connect them through music. This movement also exemplifies the Bytovye⁶³ type of song, where the everyday working lives of the Russian people are played out within the score.

m. 40

This ascending and accelerating passage concludes this movement and transitions into the next; a similar transitory passage is seen at the end of movement 9.

VIII. Catacombae—Sepulcrum romanum
Latin: [The Catacombs]

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⁶² Russ, 45.
This movement is characterized by a dark and ominous mood. The dense isorhythmic texture highlighted by strong dissonance truly captures the atmosphere of the catacombs.

Furthermore, the sudden contrasts between dynamics augment the looming grasp of death that lies beneath the streets of Paris.  

Promenade: Con mortuis in lingua mortua  
Latin: [With the Dead in a Dead Language]

This last Promenade embodies the same character as the preceding movement; it is ominous and foreboding. Though the texture is not as dense and it is played in the upper register, the harmonic element of dissonance elicits an eerie quality.

IX. Izbushka na kur’ikh nozhkakh—Baba-Yaga  
Russian: [The Hut on Hen’s Legs—Baba-Yaga]

Baba Yaga is part of the folklore in the Russian tradition. She is a witch who lives in a hut which is grounded upon Chicken legs. As a witch, she terrorizes the children from villages.

64 While Mussorgsky had never actually physically visited Paris, it was through Hartmann’s visual painting that he experiences the catacombs under the streets of Paris.
and eats them up. This story has many similar parallels with the German tale of Hänsel and Gretel. The opening of this movement characterizes the menacing entry and arrival of Baba Yaga. The composer’s indication of *feroce* imparts a ferocious quality that is malevolent in character as well as brash in timbre.

**mm. 37-40**

This is a second dominant musical theme in the movement; it is characterized by triadic chords in root position. The F-sharp in the chord acts as a chord of addition and provides an unstable dissonance.

**mm. 75-77**

Octaves are a very effective and pianistic technique used in keyboard writing. Here, Mussorgsky alternates octave pitches rather than playing them together. It creates an altogether different effect of climax and frenzy.
As alluded to prior, this ascending scalar passage transitions from the Baba Yaga movement into the final movement of the suite. It not only ends the reign of the witch, but ushers in the nobility of the ancient palace.

X. Bogatyrskie vorota—vo stol’nom gorode vo Kieve
Russian: [The Knight’s Gate—In the Ancient Capital, Kiev]

These seven chords provide the foundation for the entire last movement. Again, the melodic line is written in a relatively narrow range, and the sonorities are open. This chordal writing differs from the chords found in the Promenade in that the former are more triadic whereas the latter are more open.
Again, the seven chord theme is prominently displayed in the bass, while a scalar figure descends in octaves in the upper registers. As indicated, this is to be played with energy (energico). The character thus is polarized with that of the opening, which calls for a majestic and noble expression (Maestoso. Con grandezza).

*mm. 64-68*

The second theme is also built upon a seven-chord progression. This character is also different from the first two; it is to be expressive and lyrical (sempre espressione). The intentionality of Mussorgsky cannot be mistaken, as his indicative character markings are extremely specific and call for vastly contrasting expressions.

*mm. 107-110*

This final grandiose motive embodies the cultural element of Russia that is found in the tolling church bells within the town square. This not only places identity on the people, but creates a nostalgic feeling through familiarity of tradition.
mm. 114-116

This final motive is a variation upon the main seven-chord theme. These sonorous chords resonate between the upper and lower registers. Mussorgsky indicated that the finale should not be taken too slow, but should move forward with direction and in a majestic and noble character (\textit{Meno mosso, sempre maestoso}).

Upon these ten movements that comprise the suite, Calvocoressi remarks that,

\begin{quote}
“Mussorgsky has, as it were, left a musical record of a visit to the exhibition of Hartmann’s work organized a month or two before by Stasov. Nothing could characterize Mussorgsky’s own art more sharply than the complete absence of subjective emotion from a composition directly inspired by a deeply felt personal loss. … But broadly speaking the pantomimic numbers—the ‘promenades,’ the darting, pausing, limping gnome, the heavy lumbering \textit{bydlo}—are even more vivid than those which work out musical stylizations of realistic sound: the squabbling children in the Tuileries garden, the chatter of the women in Limoges market. The double portrait of the two Jews, one fat and pompous, the other whining and begging, deserve a place beside the best of the song caricatures.”\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

The artistry and generous contribution Mussorgsky had made to the world of music is surpassed only by his creativity and love of music. It was because of this that he was able to create something so beautiful despite of such a tragedy.

CONCLUSIONS

Incorporation of Research into Musical Interpretations

Once the various facets and avenues of research have been discussed, how should they be collectively used to shape and contribute to a performing musician’s interpretation? As earlier noted, the primary research involves practicing upon one’s instrument. The historical, cultural, and artistic work done, however, can greatly augment and inform the practice and give directions for character and style. For example, it was not until I visually saw a picture of the catacombs, which Hartmann painted that I realized how grim and eerie the music should sound. The music then, should paint a visual picture in the mind’s eye of the audience through an aural medium. The goal of my playing was to impart the visual element in Mussorgsky’s *Pictures* through aural effects.

Notable piano pedagogue and performer Heinrich Neuhaus speaks of the “artistic image” of a compositional work:

“How many times have I heard pupils who have had no real musical or artistic schooling, i.e., no aesthetic education, who are musically insufficiently developed, attempt to render the compositions of great composers! Musical language was not clear to them; instead of speech, they achieved only some sort of muttering; instead of a clear idea—only some meagre fragments of though; instead of a strong emotion—some abortive pangs; instead of profound logic—“effect without cause”, and instead of a poetic image—a prosaic shadow.”

The artistic image must be formed as a combination of intellect, talent, aural work, technique, and of imagination. The goal of the musician is to develop the inner ear and to constantly work on capturing the ultimate interpretation.

As Neuhaus also mentions, technique is extremely important to a pianist. Technique is merely a means to an end; it is one of the tools that pianists must use to successfully convey

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66 This is simply another term for the “musical interpretation.”
67 Neuhaus, 7.
68 Used to refer to the practice of “aural training”, not of anatomical structure or physiological function.
the composer’s intent. Without technical abilities, the interpretation is lost, and the meaning is obscured.
Benefits of Research

It is quite shocking today how many musicians would argue that such research is inhibitory to the “creative process” of artistry and does not allow for freedom of expression.

The role of research is two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to investigate in a systematic manner the study of a particular topic in a field; this is primarily done through positing a hypothesis question. Secondly, and more crucial, research attempts to establish facts and reach new conclusions from a systematic investigation. In this manner, research when applied to the study of music, seeks not only to systematically investigate the work of aural art, but also to establish and reach new conclusions from this investigation. This process is termed “musical interpretation”. Therefore, the research cannot be separated from the interpretation. The methods of approach to research, however, are endless.

As one of art’s many facets, music involves aural cognition and it is through this aural perception that the experience is manifested. As such, the research should be done in a way that would most effectively cater to and serve the ear as well as the aesthetics of sound.69

As noted earlier, many would attempt to argue that research displaces the creativity and originality of musical art and, instead, replaces the passion with a systemic study void of feeling. This is truly not the case; rather, research can do nothing less than enhance one’s appreciation and passion toward the piece. It is through research that we can deepen our understanding of the context, history, and artistry of the work from which comes our interpretation. Furthermore, knowing from research how to stylistically approach a work, the performing musician can be confident in his or her interpretation as well as freely express his or her creativity through methods that are stylistically appropriate.

69 This important detail cannot be overemphasized. Currently, there is a greater move away from the aural detail of music to an emphasis on the physical and visual. It should be stressed that it is primarily through the ear that one experiences music.
Consequences of Neglecting Research

It is equally valid to raise questions on the ramifications and consequences that may result from a neglect of research with respect to musical interpretation. As a direct effect, the audience members would be disappointed and suffer frustration, for when members of society attend a classical concert, the come with certain expectations. Furthermore, the artist would also be directly affected through negative reviews that might jeopardize his or her reputation. Drier still would be the consequence of slighting art itself. For if the pianist’s role is to act as a medium through which the music is to be performed, then it is an obligation to be taken seriously.

There is a wealth of information that lies within the score itself. Professional classical musicians already know how to analyze a score, as well as what kinds of hidden instructions lie within the music. However, often the work of practicing and score study is not sufficient enough. In order to truly encompass and embody the character of the piece, one must take into account the historical and cultural components of the piece.

The composer is able to communicate to the musician in a variety of ways. The most explicit of these would be a personal interaction, where the composer would tell the pianist how the work was to be played, as well as the kind of character the performer would need to embody.

For Mussorgsky’s *Pictures*, we must extrapolate and analyze more implicit instructions through articulation, phrasing, rhythm, harmony, melody, and tempo. These various elements that are inherently in the musical language collectively make up the musical interpretation. As Neuhaus remarks on the purpose of a true pianist:

“Our purpose is modest, and at the same time vast; it is to play our amazing, our magnificent piano literature in such away as to make the hearer like it, to make him love life still more, make his feelings more intense, his longings more acute and give greater depth to his understanding. … What the musician acquires in knowledge, he
expresses in his compositions or his performance.”

Though musicians must allocate an extensive amount of time, energy, and mental faculty for refinement of their skills, the study and research component must not be neglected. This process not only provides a context for the piece and promotes depth and maturity, but also forms a creative yet original interpretive approach that substantiates the performance by enhancing one’s ability to convey a convincing re-creation of the original piece.

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70 Neuhaus, 22-8.
Future Musical Research and Considerations

In music, there exist two divergent schools of study. One places emphasis on the performance aspect and interpretive considerations. The other, however, is the theoretical and methodological approach, which emphasizes the importance of tools and analysis, rather than aesthetics and performance considerations. My research seeks to show how the seemingly divergent schools actually complement each other in practice. Performers may not be comfortable with labelling their work as methodological, but this must be so, for an established objective quantifiable research is done in such a way.\textsuperscript{71}

Successful performers are fluent in theoretical analysis and conduct thorough score study while all the time incorporating these components with practicing their instrument. Such synergy and complementation are mutual of each other, they strengthen one’s musicianship and enrich the performer’s “artistic image” of a piece. I hope that more study would be conducted in the future on this synergistic relationship with other compositional works as well. When this type of work is done, not only will the musician feel satiated with a profound sense of accomplishment and the audience be content with having their expectations met, but also art itself may look downward with a loving gaze upon the mutuality and embodiment of the universality of music.

\textsuperscript{71} Perhaps this “discomfort” arises from social stigmas that performances should solely manifest the raw passions and feelings, rather than become identified with intellectualism.
Appendix One
Recital Program

DENNY HONG
Fall 2010 Recital
18 November 2010—7:30 PM
Howard Performing Arts Center

French Suite No. 5 in G-dur, BWV. 816  Bach, Johann Sebastian
I. Allemande
II. Courante
III. Sarabande
IV. Gavotte
V. Bourrée
VI. Loure
VII. Gigue

Piano Sonata No. 10 in C-dur, K. 330  Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus
I. Allegro moderato
II. Andante cantabile
III. Allegretto

Pictures at an Exhibition  Mussorgsky, Modeste
Promenade
I. Gnomus (Latin: Gnome)
Promenade
II. Il vecchio Castello (Italian: The Old Castle)
Promenade
III. Tuileries—Dispute d’enfants après jeux
(French: Tuileries—Dispute between Children at Play)
Promenade
IV. Bydlo (Polish: Cattle)
Promenade
V. Balet nevylupivshikhysya ptentsov
(Russian: Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks)
VI. Samuel Goldenberg und Schmuyle
(Yiddish: Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle)
Promenade
VII. Limoges le marché—La grande nouvelle
(French: The Market—The Big News)
VIII. Catacombæ—Sepulcrum romanum
(Latin: The Catacombs)
Promenade: Con mortuis in lingua mortua
(Latin: With the Dead in a Dead Language)
IX. Izbushka na kur’ikh nozhkakh—Baba-Yaga
(Russian: The Hut on Hen’s Legs—Baba-Yaga)
X. Bogatyrskie vorota—vo stol’nom gorode vo Kieve
(Russian: The Knight’s Gate—In the Ancient Capital, Kiev)
Appendix Two
Works from Hartmann’s Exhibition

Sketch of Theatre Costumes for the Ballet *Trilby* (Movement 5)
Jew in a Fur Cap (Movement 6a)
The Sandomir Jew (Movement 6b)
A Clock in the Russian Style: Representing Baba-Yaga’s Hut on Hen’s Legs (Movement 9)
Project for a City Gate in Kiev—the Main Façade (Movement 10)
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