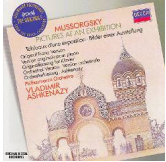


Modest Mussorgsky – Pictures at an Exhibition (Askenazy) [1990]



1. *Pictures at an Exhibition – for Piano – Promenade – Gnomus* 4:06 2. *Pictures at an Exhibition – for Piano – Promenade – The Old Castle* 5:10 3. *Pictures at an Exhibition – for Piano – Promenade – The Tuileries – Bydlo* 3:48 4. *Pictures at an Exhibition – for Piano – Promenade – Ballet of Unhatched chicks – 2 Polish Jews* 4:11 5. *Pictures at an Exhibition – for Piano – The Market Place at Limoges – The Catacombs* 6:36 6. *Pictures at an Exhibition – for Piano – The Hut on Fowls Legs – The Great Gate of Kiev* 8:28 Vladimir Ashkenazy - piano 7. *Pictures at an Exhibition – Orchestrated by Vladimir Ashkenazy – Promenade – Gnomus* 4:02 8. *Pictures at an Exhibition – Orchestrated by Vladimir Ashkenazy – Promenade – The old castle* 5:24 9. *Pictures at an Exhibition – Orchestrated by Vladimir Ashkenazy – Promenade – Tuileries – Bydlo* 3:54 10. *Pictures at an Exhibition – Orchestrated by Vladimir Ashkenazy – Promenade – Ballet of the unhatched chicks – 2 Polish Jews* 4:33 11. *Pictures at an Exhibition – Orchestrated by Vladimir Ashkenazy – Promenade – The Market Place at Limoges* 7:03 12. *Pictures at an Exhibition – Orchestrated by Vladimir Ashkenazy – The Hut on Fowls Legs – The Great Gate of Kiev* 9:09

Philharmonia Orchestra Vladimir Ashkenazy – conductor

While one honors Vladimir Ashkenazy for his many outstanding recordings as both a pianist and a conductor, one cannot honor his 1983 recording of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Coupling a performance of the original piano version of the work with a performance of his own orchestration played here by the Philharmonia Orchestra, this disc might have been entertaining, even brilliant except for two things. First, Ashkenazy's playing in the piano version is badly compromised by his inability to nail the notes in the most difficult passages. Ashkenazy turns in fine performances of the slower and more lyrical movements -- his *Il vecchio castello* is very lovely and quite soulful -- but deeply flawed performances of the faster and more virtuosic movements -- his *Baba Yaga* and *The Great Gates of Kiev* are full of dropped notes and smudged passages. Second, Ashkenazy's orchestration, while technically accomplished, is badly compromised by his inability to say anything interesting about Mussorgsky's often orchestrated suite. His brass section leads, his string section sings, his wind section adds color, and his percussion section adds weight, but unlike Ravel's wildly imaginative orchestration, Ashkenazy's orchestration reveals nothing about the music that we didn't already know. And as

lovely and soulful as his piano playing could be, Ashkenazy's orchestral writing is neither one nor the other, but rather merely pro forma. It should be added that Decca's early digital piano sound is harsh and clangorous and that the Philharmonia's playing seems under rehearsed and under enthusiastic, but given the merely mediocre quality of Ashkenazy's playing and orchestration, even the most stupendous sound and spectacular orchestral execution would not have improved the performances. ---James Leonard, Rovi

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