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A “virtual” Coffee Concert recorded at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Sunday November 22, 2020 at 11:15

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This is one of the virtual Coffee Concerts recorded and streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings throughout autumn 2020. (These concerts will be available for a limited time after release.)

Petr Limonov (piano)

- **Beethoven: Piano Sonata no 30 in E major, op 109**
- **Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition**

Winner of Nikolai Rubinstein International Piano Competition, Russian-British pianist and conductor Petr Limonov frequently appears in the UK and Europe as a soloist or in collaboration with, among others, Nicola Benedetti, Laura van der Heijden, Jennifer Pike, the Van Kujik Quartet, Leonard Elschenbroich and Liana Isakadze. He has recorded for Decca, Onyx, Deutschlandfunk and Champs Hill, and has made notable appearances at La Roque d'Antheron Festival (Boris Berezovsky's Carte Blanche, broadcast by Radio France Musique); Wigmore Hall; iTunes Festival; Cadogan Hall; St Martin-in-the-Fields; Southbank Centre; the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory; and the Duke's Hall (for HRH Prince Charles).

Petr has made television appearances for BBC Proms Extra and Russia's "Culture" channel, and broadcasts regularly for BBC

Radio 3. In 2017, his arrangement of Auld Lang Syne (issued on Decca in 2014 as a part of Nicola Benedetti's best-selling "Homecoming" album) was performed in the Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. His repertoire stretches from Orlando Gibbons to Arvo Pärt.

Born in Moscow, Petr started playing the piano at the age of five. He entered the prestigious Central Music School in Moscow a year later to study under the guidance of Siavush Gadjiev, Valery Piasetsky and Andrei Pisarev. After winning first prize at the 1998 Nikolai Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Paris, he began giving concerts throughout Europe and Russia, supported by the Vladimir Spivakov International Charity Foundation. Petr went on to study with Hamish Milne and Alexander Satz at the Royal Academy of Music in London on a full scholarship, followed by a

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year at the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot, where his teachers were Ramzi Yassa and Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy.

In 2010 Petr returned to London to commence postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Music with Dimitry Alexeev, obtaining his Masters degree in 2012. During his studies, Petr participated in masterclasses

with Alfred Brendel, Stephen Hough, Vitaly Margulis and Stephen Kovacevich. He also studied conducting under Peter Stark. In November 2013, Petr made his conducting debut at Cadogan Hall with the London International Chamber Orchestra performing works by Glazunov and Rachmaninov.

More information: <https://www.petrlimonov.com/>

Piano Sonata no 30 in E major, op 109 by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

1. Vivace, ma non troppo/Adagio espressivo; 2. Prestissimo; 3. Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung.

In February 1820 Beethoven was asked by his friend Friedrich Starke for a short piece for a piano tutor he was compiling. Shortly after completing it, he received a commission from the Berlin publisher Adolf Schlesinger for a set of three piano sonatas. Following a suggestion from Franz Oliva, a bank clerk who had been an unpaid secretary to the composer since 1810, Beethoven used this piece as the opening movement of Op 109 Sonata, the first of the three sonatas for Schlesinger, eventually offering Starke five Bagatelles from his set of eleven, Op 119. It is even possible that Beethoven conceived the sonata originally as a two-movement work, with the present first movement added at a later stage.

The first movement is built on the contrast between extremes. The lively opening, with its lute- or guitar-like figuration, is interrupted, almost before it has properly got going, by a slow, improvisatory passage which, in one manuscript, Beethoven labelled 'Fantasie'. The consistent patterning of the quick music is in strong contrast to the elaborate writing of the adagio, but Beethoven brings the two

closer together in the movement's coda by breaking into the quick music with a hesitant chord sequence, similarly withdrawn in character, though with this time with no actual change of tempo.

The terse, single-minded second movement is propelled by a powerful rhythmic drive. In the middle section Beethoven allows its energy to run down, but after all motion has been suspended for a moment the full force of the opening music breaks out again.

The sonata ends with a set of variations which is more than twice as long as the other two movements put together. It is based on a gentle melody marked "song-like, with the most intimate sensitivity". The music traces an arc of steadily increasing activity followed by a return to the calm inwardness of the theme. The delicate second variation reminds us of the arpeggio figures from the first movement. The third variation is the quickest of the set, No 4 the slowest, while No 5 is texturally the most complex.

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In the culminating sixth variation the music seems to dissolve in a shimmer of rapid runs

and trills. Out of this the original theme emerges – the same serene music, but sounding even more profoundly expressive after all that has gone before.

Pictures at an Exhibition **by Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)**

In 1874 the leading St Petersburg art and music journalist Vladimir Stasov organised an exhibition of paintings and drawings by architect and painter Victor Hartman, who had died the year before. Mussorgsky, who had been a close friend of Hartman, took the exhibition as a starting point for his own tribute. He wrote the work in less than three weeks, partly buoyed up by the excitement of seeing his opera *Boris Godunov* finally staged. "Hartman is boiling as Boris boiled," he wrote to Stasov, "sounds and ideas have been hanging in the air... I barely have time to scribble them down on paper."

The result is series of vivid character-sketches, bound together by the recurring Promenade, whose changing moods offer clues to Mussorgsky's own reactions as he walks round the exhibition. In many cases, Hartman's original pictures have been lost, and we have only Stasov's preface to Rimsky-Korsakov's 1886 edition of the score to indicate their subject.

Promenade. A stately, almost ceremonial, piece based on a theme in the style of a Russian folk tune.

1. **Gnomus.** Hartman's drawing depicts a dwarf moving awkwardly on crooked legs. It is often said to have been a design for a nutcracker, but Stasov makes no mention of this. A quieter, shortened version of the Promenade leads to...

2. **The Old Castle.** Hartman often added human figures to indicate the scale of his drawings. Here it is a medieval troubadour; Mussorgsky gives him a rather melancholy song, a typical example of the way he often showed more interest in small details in the pictures than the main subject.

After a more forceful version of the Promenade comes...

3. **The Tuileries.** Children Squabbling After a Game. The public garden in Paris, with a group of children and nannies.

4. **Bydło.** A heavy Polish ox-cart rumbles past on its huge wheels. The piece begins loudly in Mussorgsky's original; Rimsky-Korsakov's edition (on which Ravel based his orchestration) amended this to start quietly.

The Promenade, quiet and delicately scored, leads into...

5. **Ballet of the Chicks in their Shells.** A costume design for a ballet called *Trilby*, or the demon of the heath staged at the Bolshoy Theatre, Moscow, in 1871, with choreography by the leading Russian choreographer of his day, Marius Petipa.

6. **Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle.** According to Stasov, Hartman had given Mussorgsky sketches of two Polish Jews,

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7. one rich, one poor, and he was delighted with their expressiveness. The names for the two figures seem to have originated with Mussorgsky himself.

The Promenade, in more or less its original form (omitted in Ravel's orchestration), is followed by...

8. **Limoges – The Market Place.** Hartman's picture, according to Stasov, showed women having a fierce argument.
9. **Catacombs.** Hartman depicts himself and a friend examining piles of skulls in the Roman catacombs in Paris by the light of a guide's lantern. The second part of this number is a quiet variation of the Promenade headed, in Mussorgsky's rough-and-ready Latin, 'Con mortuis in lingua mortua' (With the Dead in a Dead Language). He added a further note in the manuscript: "The late Hartman's creative spirit leads me to the skulls and

invokes them; the skulls glow gently from within."

10. **The Hut on Chicken's Feet.** A design for a clock in the shape of the hut belonging to Baba-Yaga, a terrifying witch in Russian fairytales. Mussorgsky also depicts her riding through the forest in a mortar which she propels with a pestle.
11. **The Great Gate at Kiev** (A mistranslation of Mussorgsky's original title – The Bogatyrs' (Knights') Gate). Hartman's entry for a competition in 1869 to design a ceremonial gateway commemorating Tsar Alexander II's survival of an assassination attempt three years earlier. The main archway is based on a traditional women's head-dress, and the top of the bell-tower is in the shape of a helmet. Mussorgsky's finale is a processional on a grand scale, incorporating Orthodox chant, massive bell-sounds, and a snatch of the Promenade theme.

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Virtual Oxford Coffee Concerts coming up...

Sunday November 29, 2020

Gould Piano Trio

- Mozart: Piano Trio in G major, K 564
- Ravel: Piano Trio in A minor

Sunday December 6, 2020

Adderbury Ensemble directed by David Le Page with Fiona Cross (clarinet)

- Mozart: String Quartet no 14 in G major, K 387 ("Spring")
- Mozart: Clarinet Quintet in A major, K 581

Sunday December 13, 2020

Maria Wloszczowska (violin), Steffan Morris (cello) and Dinis Sousa (piano)

- Haydn: Piano Trio no 45 in E flat major, Hob XV:29
- Schubert: Piano Trio in B flat major, D 898

Sunday December 20, 2020

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

- Walker: Lyric for Strings
- Beach: Romance for Violin and Piano, op 23
- Elgar: Piano Quintet in A minor, op 84
- Mancini: Moon River