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# Pictures at an Exhibition

September 29 & 30, 2023 • Schuster Center

## ARTISTS

Neal Gittleman, *conductor*  
Aleksandra Kasman Laude, *piano*  
Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra

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## PROGRAM

Jessie Montgomery *Banner*

Sergei Rachmaninoff *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43*  
Aleksandra Kasman Laude, *piano*

- INTERMISSION -

Modest Mussorgsky *Pictures at an Exhibition*

(orch. Maurice Ravel)

Promenade

1. Gnomus
2. The Old Castle

Promenade

3. Tuileries (Squabbling Children at Play)
4. Bydło

Promenade

5. Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells
6. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
7. The Marketplace at Limoges
8. Catacombs

With the Dead in a Dead Language

9. The Hut on Chicken's Legs (Baba Yagá)
  10. The Great Gate of Kyiv
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**Aleksandra Kasman Laude appears as the Bill and Dianne Schneider Endowed Guest Artist**

**This performance is part of New Season Ministry Weekend**

# About the Artist



## **Aleksandra Kasman Laude** Piano

Pianist Sasha Kasman Laude's playing is praised by the *Palm Beach Arts Paper* as "powerful and vivid" and having "such an abundance of intelligence that it can only be described as relentless" (*Ludwig van Toronto*). She is in demand as a soloist and pedagogue with

engagements across three continents. Kasman Laude appears as a guest artist and teacher at the invitation of such festivals as International Keyboard Institute and Festival, Southeastern Piano Festival, Utah State University Summer Piano Festival, Kyiv International Summer Academy (Ukraine), Busan International Music Academy (South Korea), and PianoCity Milano (Italy). She has given solo recitals at such major venues as Steinway Hall in New York City, Yamaha Ginza Hall in Tokyo, Salle Cortot in Paris, and Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa.

A native of Moscow, Kasman Laude began her musical studies with her parents, acclaimed pianists and pedagogues Yakov and Tatiana Kasman. She continued studying with her father at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and received an MM degree from The Juilliard School. In 2023, Kasman Laude received a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan.

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# Program Notes

## ***Banner***

**Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)**

*Banner* is a tribute to the 200th Anniversary of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which was officially declared the American national anthem in 1814 under the penmanship of Francis Scott Key. Scored for solo string quartet and string orchestra, *Banner* is a rhapsody on the theme of "The Star Spangled Banner." Drawing on musical and historical sources from various world anthems and patriotic songs, I've made an attempt to answer the question: "What does an anthem for the 21st century sound like in today's multicultural environment?"

## **COMPOSED**

2014

## **PREMIERE**

April 28, 2021  
Chicago, IL

## **LAST DPO PERFORMANCE**

DPO premiere

## **APPROXIMATE DURATION**

8 minutes

“The Star Spangled Banner” is an ideal subject for exploration in contradictions. For most Americans, the song represents a paradigm of liberty and solidarity against fierce odds, and for others it implies a contradiction between the ideals of freedom and the realities of injustice and oppression. As a culture, it is my opinion that we Americans are perpetually in search of ways to express and celebrate our ideals of freedom. And for many of our nation’s people, that was the case: through work songs and spirituals, enslaved Africans promised themselves a way out and built the nerve to endure the most abominable treatment for the promise of a free life. Immigrants have sought out a safe haven here and though met with the trials of building a multi-cultured democracy, continue to find rooting in our nation and make significant contributions to our cultural landscape. In 2014, a tribute to the U.S. national anthem means acknowledging the contradictions, leaps and bounds, and milestones that allow us to celebrate and maintain the tradition of our ideals.  
– Jessie Montgomery

## ***Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini***

**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)**

In 1934, at the peak of his maturity as a composer, Rachmaninoff composed his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. He had by this time become an American citizen, having left Russia in its throes of Revolution decades earlier. His love of his Russian roots, however, continued to inform his music, and this Russianness is deeply evident in his *Rhapsody*, so filled with sumptuous Russian Romantic harmonies and lyricism. It quickly became one of Rachmaninoff’s most popular masterpieces, never failing to entice and excite audiences since its premiere.

### **COMPOSED**

1934

### **PREMIERE**

November 7, 1934;  
Baltimore, MD

### **LAST DPO PERFORMANCE**

September 2016; Neal  
Gittleman, conductor

### **APPROXIMATE DURATION**

22 minutes

Using the famous 24th *Violin Caprice* by the fabled Italian virtuoso violinist, Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840), Rachmaninoff created a set of 24 variations for piano and orchestra for his *Rhapsody*. Rachmaninoff reminds us of his musical heritage which has long cherished church chant. We hear hints of the *Dies irae*, that ancient chant from the Mass for the Dead made so famous by Berlioz in *Symphonie fantastique*, and a theme that plays prominently in several of Rachmaninoff’s other works. By the end of this *Rhapsody* we will have heard the *Dies irae* several times outright, and the beauty of its inclusion is its somewhat hidden reference: It pokes fun at the tale that Paganini sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for his superhuman gifts on the violin—a tale too enticing for Rachmaninoff to resist a sly musical reference to the chant of the Last Judgment.

Section 3 of the *Concerto* begins to ramp up faster and faster with spellbinding excitement. But just when we would expect a full force ending of bombast, Rachmaninoff suddenly brings everything to a halt, and the very last notes are essentially the first five notes of Paganini’s *Caprice* motive, played as a whisper. Like a musical wink, it’s a delightful way to end this tour-de-force of virtuosity for piano and orchestra alike.

## ***Pictures at an Exhibition***

**Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881)**

**Orchestrated by Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)**

*Pictures at an Exhibition* is one of those masterpieces that is a sum greater than its parts. And yet, were it not for the friendship between Modest Mussorgsky and artist Viktor Hartmann, or the exquisite orchestration supplied by Maurice Ravel, this masterpiece may never have come into being.

The man to whom Mussorgsky dedicated this musical homage, Viktor Alexandrovich Hartmann (1834–1873), was a Russian architect and artist who, like his peers, was a staunch supporter of the Nationalist artistic movement that swept through Russia in the 19th century. His works—architectural drawings, costume/set designs, and watercolor scenes of Paris, Poland, and Russia—were some of the first to evoke native Russian themes and legend, fusing fancy, notions of ancient Russia, with occasional grizzly realism to produce vividly alluring creations. A year after his death in 1873, a commemorative exhibition of his works was mounted at the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg. But were it not for his musician friend Modest Mussorgsky and this musical evocation of that exhibition, Hartmann's works might have been forgotten.

Like Hartmann, Mussorgsky too was a staunch proponent of Russian Nationalism. Mussorgsky was a close friend of Hartmann's, and after attending the exhibition, he was inspired to create a suite of musical portraits for solo piano to depict some of Hartmann's works—*Pictures at an Exhibition*. That original version, a colossal tour-de-force for any pianist, sat unperformed for some years after Mussorgsky's premature death at the age of 42 from alcoholism, although several orchestrations of that piano score were attempted. But the French composer Maurice Ravel's 1922 version added the magic that made this piece so famous. In a rare fusion, Ravel's genius for orchestral colors made Mussorgsky's original masterpiece and its rendition of Hartmann's artwork even more enchanting.

One of Mussorgsky's most imaginative techniques in *Pictures* is the simple but effective idea of linking the musical images together with a theme. He does this through the first notes we hear sounding on solo trumpet, called the *Promenade*—representing Mussorgsky strolling through the exhibition, it's a musical thread linking the pictures together. Throughout the suite, Mussorgsky capitalizes on the kind of musical Realism that inspired many composers of the Romantic Era, especially the Russians. Ravel's expert orchestration brings them all the more to life. As a brilliant touch, Mussorgsky's *Promenade* theme is heard less and less, until, finally, it's absorbed into the catacomb's theme, uncannily transporting the listener into Hartmann's vivid pictures. Lastly, the heroic majesty that Mussorgsky captures in his *Great Gate* creates one of the most thrilling endings in all of music.

### **COMPOSED**

1874; orch. 1922

### **PREMIERE**

Ravel orch.: October 19, 1922; Boston, MA

### **LAST DPO PERFORMANCE**

September 2018;  
Neal Gittleman, conductor

### **APPROXIMATE DURATION**

35 minutes



Scan the QR code to view Hartmann's works in color

*Program Notes* © Max Derrickson