

# HSO SHORTS

EDUCATIONAL VIDEO SERIES

## ORCHESTRATION GUIDE

## Listening links

- National Youth Orchestra: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUfSstK3MOc&t=31s>
- Evgeny Kissin, piano: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH\\_Rsl7fjok](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH_Rsl7fjok)

## The Composer



Modest Mussorgsky was born in Russia on March 9, 1839.

Mussorgsky is best known for *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which you can learn more about in the “HSO Shorts: Orchestration” video.

Mussorgsky grew up listening to fairy tales, and some of these fairy tales (like the tale of Baba Yaga) show up in *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

He was part of “The Five,” a group of Russian composers who wrote music about being Russian. (The *Star Spangled Banner* or *America the Beautiful* would be examples of music about being from the United States of America.) In his adult life, he worked as a civil servant while composing on the side.

## Pictures at an Exhibition

Mussorgsky was good friends with an artist named Viktor Hartmann. When Hartmann died in 1873, an exhibition (an art show) of his work was arranged. Attending this exhibition inspired Mussorgsky to compose *Pictures at an Exhibition* in memory of his friend. Mussorgsky wrote the piece for piano and many of the movements are based on Hartmann's pictures (see below). In fact, Mussorgsky structured the movements in the order that listeners would see them if they were

walking through the exhibition. Unfortunately, most of the pictures that inspired Mussorgsky have been lost.



## The Orchestrator



Maurice Ravel was a French composer born in 1875. His most famous orchestral piece is *Bolero*. In 1922, he took the original piano version of *Pictures at an Exhibition* and **orchestrated** it for a full orchestra. Ravel's version for orchestra has become more popular than the original version.

## Orchestration

**Orchestration** is the process by which a composer chooses which instrument plays which part and when and how it is played. For example, Mussorgsky originally wrote *Pictures at an Exhibition* as a solo piano work (for one piano). But today, we'll be listening to *Pictures at an Exhibition* as an orchestral work. How did that happen? Because Ravel **orchestrated** Mussorgsky's piece and the **orchestrated** version became more popular than the original piano. Use the exercises below to create your own **orchestrations** of the Promenade theme from *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

### ORCHESTRATION EXERCISE 1

- Step 1: Clap the rhythm of the Promenade theme (Fig. 1). (Or make your own!)
- Step 2: Add voices to orchestrate your rhythm! If you started with clapping, try getting a partner to stomp along with you. If you started with a recorder, try getting a friend to play percussion with you.
- Step 3: Try changing the orchestration of the rhythm! For every quarter note, do one action, and for every eighth note, do another. For example, for every quarter note, stomp. For every eighth note, clap (Fig. 2). See combinations you can create!
- Step 4: Assign the sound of different classroom or household objects to the rhythms. (Ex: cowbell, pots and pans, bottles, etc.)

The first staff of music is in 4/4 time. It contains the following notes: a quarter note (C4), an eighth note (D4), a quarter note (E4), an eighth note (F4), a quarter note (G4), an eighth note (A4), a quarter note (B4), an eighth note (C5), a quarter note (B4), an eighth note (A4), a quarter note (G4), an eighth note (F4), a quarter note (E4), an eighth note (D4), a quarter note (C4), and a final quarter rest.

[illegible]

clap clap

- Step 1: Teachers – using a music notation software (NoteFlight or MuseScore are free online services), assign an instrument to play the Promenade theme (Fig. 3) and listen. (Alternatively, have students compose their own one-voice melody using the software, compose a melody as a class, or use a children’s song like *Row Your Boat*.)
- Step 2: Ask students to choose which instruments should be added to the orchestration and add accordingly, listening after each new instrument is added (Ex: Fig 4). Try mixing and matching different combinations of instruments to see what sounds good.
- Step 3: Add (or remove) some more instruments (Fig. 5). What happens when you add more instruments to your piece?
- Step 4: Try splitting instruments! Maybe one instrument plays the first half of the melody and another plays the second! Or, maybe a low instrument (like trombone) plays only the lowest note in the melody (F) (Fig. 6).

(Fig. 3: Simplified Promenade theme)



(Fig. 4: Two-voice promenade theme)

Two staves of music in 4/4 time, labeled 'Pno.' and 'Fl.'. Both staves contain the same simplified melody as in Fig. 3: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), and a whole rest.

(Fig. 5: Five-voice promenade theme)

Five staves of music in 4/4 time, labeled 'Pno.', 'Fl.', 'C Tpt.', 'Vn.', and 'Snare Drum'. The first four staves (Piano, Flute, Cornet/Trompete, and Violin) contain the same simplified melody as in Fig. 3. The Snare Drum staff contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), and a whole rest.

(Fig. 6: Trombone low-note orchestration)



The image displays a musical score for five instruments: Piano (Pno.), Flute (Fl.), C Trumpet (C Tpt.), Violin (Vn.), and Trombone (Tbn.). The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of three measures. The first four instruments (Pno., Fl., C Tpt., Vn.) are in treble clef, while the Trombone (Tbn.) is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The notation for the first four instruments is identical across the three measures, featuring a sequence of notes: a half note G4, a quarter rest, a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note C4, and a quarter note B3. The Trombone part is more complex, starting with a half note G2, a quarter rest, a quarter note F#2, a quarter note E2, a quarter note D2, a quarter note C2, and a quarter note B1 in the first measure. In the second measure, it has a whole rest. In the third measure, it has a half note G2, a quarter rest, a quarter note F#2, a quarter note E2, a quarter note D2, a quarter note C2, and a quarter note B1.