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Fantasia *in C Minor, K. 475*
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was a composer by the age of five. A recognized child prodigy, Mozart had an incredible ear and memory for music and was able to transcribe entire pieces by ear at a very young age. Mozart grew up touring Europe, playing for courts, churches, and the public, and learning valuable compositional skills, techniques, and styles from various mentors. When Mozart finally returned to Vienna in 1784, after having worked in Salzburg and Paris for several years, he found himself in the most successful period of his life. The *Fantasia* was written during this time (1785), along with a very large chunk of his piano concertos (K. 413 and on) amongst other works.

The *Fantasia* in C minor, K. 475 (1785), is widely considered one of Mozart's most striking keyboard works. A *fantasia* ("fantasy") is a very vague categorization, but is generally very free in form, character, and tonality, bringing the listener on a journey filled with unexpected turns. Mozart's *Fantasia* opens dramatically, setting the stage like the opening of an opera.

As the piece continues, we find that the next time we return to the original key of C minor is in the very last section of the piece, when the opening theme returns. Between these two markers, we are taken on a fantastical journey in which we experience many different characters and moods that can be interpreted as the listener likes, all of which flow seamlessly into each other in sometimes surprising ways. These frequent, surprising changes in character are very representative of the *fantasia* form, but also contain hints of the (future) Romantics' increased uses of dissonance, modulation, rubato, and dynamic differences that allow for greater emotional variance and expressiveness.

Although he wrote many pieces for the piano, Mozart's preferred genre was opera, and the *Fantasia* contains many operatic elements. The singable melodies with left hand accompaniment evoke the aria, and the dramatic, spoken quality of the passage just before the return of the first theme is written like a recitative. The various sections of the piece have strong and distinct characters, which are subjective and may be interpreted in various ways, but the sharp contrasts between sections are similarly reminiscent of characters in an opera.

Toccata in C minor, BWV 911
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was born in Eisenach, Germany, to a musical family. He was ten years old when his parents passed away, after which he moved in with his eldest brother, Johann Christoph Bach, who further guided his musical training and knowledge. His studies at

the St. Michael's School gave him access to a wider range of European culture as well as experience singing in choirs and playing the organ and harpsichord. After graduating in 1703, Bach worked as a court musician in Weimar and later as an organist in Arnstadt before marrying his second cousin, Maria, and moving back to Weimar in 1714.

The Toccatas were written around this time and represent Bach's earlier style of composition. Following the tradition of the Baroque toccata, these virtuosic pieces show off the performer's technical mastery and are very improvisatory and free in form. This type of writing is also an adaptation of the *stylus phantasticus* ("fantastic style") of Bach's predecessors, a free and improvisatory style full of unusual dissonances, harmonies, and rhythms.

However, they are not nearly as well-constructed or complex as Bach's later works. Most of Bach's Toccatas include an introductory section and a fugue, with various sections in between. The C minor Toccata (1714?) opens with a declamatory improvisation that leads into a chorale-like Adagio in four voices before the fugue subject enters as a single voice. The C minor Toccata stands out among the others in the set due to the sheer length of its fugue, which spans most of the piece and is interrupted occasionally by brief cadenzas. The piece ends in C Major, with a dramatic, virtuosic flourish.

Ballade No. 2 in B minor, S. 171

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) began learning the piano at age seven and composing at age eight. Guided by well-known mentors including Carl Czerny and Antonio Salieri, Liszt became relatively well-known by the time he was a teenager as both a pianist and composer. In his twenties, Liszt was inspired by Nicolo Paganini, the great violinist, to become an equally virtuosic performer as well as to compose incredibly difficult piano repertoire. As a performer, Liszt commanded with ease both the piano and the audience's attention, gaining himself a reputation as the world's "first rock star." The term "Lisztomania" was coined by Heinrich Heine to describe the hysterical frenzy that followed him. After a short but robust performing career, Liszt was convinced to retire at the age of 35 by his partner, Polish Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, who encouraged him to focus on composition instead. Liszt composed many pieces during this time, including the second Ballade (1853).

The Ballade No. 2 is a programmatic piece that tells the Greek myth of Hero and Leander. Hero is a priestess of Aphrodite who resides in a tower on one side of the Hellespont Strait; on the other bank lives a young man named Leander, who falls in love with Hero and swims across the strait every night to be with her. One night, Leander drowns during a harsh winter storm, and Hero throws herself over the side of the tower in despair.

The specific elements of the story can be heard in the piece as it progresses. The opening rumbling bass evokes the sound of water, representing Leander's struggle as he swims across the strait at night. He is successful, and there is a passionate, melodic "love theme" as the two lovers reunite. Leander's journey repeats three more times in the music, with each variation becoming successively more difficult, until the climax of the piece, when he drowns. The "love theme" following this is much more melancholy than the previous variations, with tolling "funeral bells" in the left hand; the physical distance between the bass and the melody also create a sense of

emptiness. Finally, the theme from the opening is transformed from B minor into B Major, perhaps representing Hero's fondness for her lover and her eventual decision to be with him in death. The piece ends with a final transformation of the love theme, this time both peaceful and somewhat resigned, as though closing the curtains on the tragic scene.

The term "ballade" originated in late 18th century German literature, describing narrative poetry that was then occasionally set to music by composers. In classical music, the Ballade genre is generally attributed to Frederic Chopin, whose four Ballades remain a core part of the piano repertoire. Ballades generally have a narrative style but are otherwise free in form, with no particular guidelines for how they should be composed.

Pictures at an Exhibition

Modest Mussorgsky wrote *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) in memory of his friend, artist-architect Viktor Hartmann (1834-1873). The actual "pictures" in this piece are based on sketches and paintings displayed in a temporary memorial exhibition of Hartmann's works following his death, some of which are separated by interludes called "promenades." In a letter to Vladimir Stasov in 1874, Mussorgsky states that the promenades are representative of people, including himself, wandering through the exhibition, and even that the heaviness and verticality of many of the promenades reflect his own physiognomy (as by then he had gained quite a bit of weight).

Mussorgsky was part of a group known as the "Big Five," who aimed to create a distinct Russian sound that would stand up to Classical music of Western Europe, such as Italian opera and German *lieder*. In *Pictures,* likely following this philosophy, we can hear hints of Russian folk music, church music, and bells, most distinctly in the final movement. What further sets Mussorgsky's music apart is its effectiveness and brutality; many composers, including his friend and mentor Rimsky-Korsakov, considered his writing to be unrefined, and re-orchestrated much of it. *Pictures* is no different; Ravel's arrangement for orchestra (1922) is arguably more popular than the original composition for piano. With this said, perhaps the rough edges of Mussorgsky's writing are exactly as he wanted them to be.

Pictures is a piano suite, a collection of short character pieces with an overarching topic or theme. The genre was pioneered by Robert Schumann (*Carnaval, Papillons,* etc.) and differs from Bach's suites in that the movements are not baroque dance forms. The contrasting characters in *Pictures* are intended to create intense drama. Below is a list of the character movements and a short description of each:

> **Promenade**: The piece opens with a grand promenade that alternates between a single voice and a chorus.
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> ***"Gnomus"* ("Gnome")**: The gnome, described as a nutcracker-like children's toy, comes out of nowhere to scare the audience.
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> **"*Il Vecchio castello*" ("The Old Castle"):** A programmatic movement with a pained, expressive melody over a repeating drone (ostinato) in the bass.

"*Tuileries*": A reference to the historical *Tuileries* Gardens in France, located just beside the Louvre. This lighthearted movement depicts quarreling children playing in the park.

***"Bydlo"* ("Cattle")**: In contrast, this is heavy, thundering, and miserable, like an oxcart being dragged along a muddy road.

"Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks": This movement has a very comical, satirical tone. It is written in a traditional scherzo form, with a repeating A section, a Trio in the middle, and an exact repeat of the A section. The inspirations for this movement, several drawings of birds with humanoid bodies, survive.

"Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle": This movement was inspired by two separate paintings that Mussorgsky owned. Importantly, this is a clearly anti-Semitist piece; "Schmuyle" is the Yiddish (diminutive) form of "Samuel," and although its exact meaning can be debated, it depicts a rich Polish Jew (Samuel), contrasted with a poor one (Schmuyle). Schmuyle's theme is repetitive and "whiny," and some sources argue that Mussorgsky saw them as two sides of the same person; in his eyes, no matter how rich or dignified a Jewish person may be, inside they are all "Schmuyles."

"*Limoges*": Limoges is a city in southwest France. This movement depicts a busy marketplace and is likely inspired by a composite of many sketches of people walking by. The movement is fast and forward-moving, with many repeated notes driving the piece forward and a sharp, confident melody. Little interjections in the middle might represent disagreements and/or skirmishes.

***"Catacombae"* ("Catacombs")**: Depicting the famous catacombs of Rome, this movement has a very unusual harmonic and formal structure, with notes of unpredictable length and volume. It is meant to be a bit creepy, scary, and uncertain. The second half of this movement, *"Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua"* ("With the dead in a dead language"), has an ongoing tremolo in the right hand that creates suspense and a song-like variation of the promenade theme in the left hand, although it has been reharmonized in a minor key.

"The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba Yaga)": In Russian folklore, Baba-Yaga is a witch who lives in the forest in a hut that stands on chicken legs. She is very unpleasant and scary and is known to eat children. This movement is fast and fierce to represent the witch, although Hartmann's painting is of an elaborate Russian clock.

"The Great Gate of Kiev": The final movement follows the previous one without pause. It is by far the loudest and grandest movement of the piece and makes use of the entire range of the instrument. Mussorgsky's writing draws an orchestral sound from the piano, depicting brass, choir, and clanging Russian bells. The promenade theme comes back for the final time in the middle, growing out of a slow crescendo to the climax of the movement. The huge grandeur of the end of the piece parallels the massive choral finales of Mussorgsky's operas.