

8–11 March
Sydney Opera House

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION



SYDNEY
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Principal Partner



SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON **Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley** AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Orchestra's first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australia-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

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* = Guest Musician

= Contract Musician

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Grey = Permanent Member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra not appearing in this concert

EMIRATES MASTERS SERIES

Wednesday 8 March, 8pm

Friday 10 March, 8pm

Saturday 11 March, 8pm

THURSDAY AFTERNOON SYMPHONY

Thursday 9 March, 1.30pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

DRAMATIC & EVOCATIVE

MIHHAIL GERTS conductor
MARIE-ANGE NGUCI piano

MIRIAMA YOUNG (born 1975)
Reflections on the Harbour Light

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)
Piano Concerto No.2 in G minor, Op.22
i. *Andante sostenuto*
ii. *Allegro scherzando*
iii. *Presto*

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839–1881)
orch. MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Pictures at an Exhibition
i. *Promenade*
ii. *Gnome*
iii. *Promenade*
iv. *The Old Castle*
v. *Promenade*
vi. *Tuileries*
vii. *Bydlo*
viii. *Promenade*
ix. *Ballet of the Unhatched Chickens*
x. *'Samuel' Goldenburg and 'Schmuÿle'*
xi. *Limoges Market*
xii. *Catacombs (Roman Sepulchres)* —
xiii. *Cum mortuis in lingua morta (With the Dead in a Dead Language)*
xiv. *The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Yaga)*
xv. *The Great Gate of Kiev*

Pre-concert talk by Francis Merson in the Northern Foyer at 7.15pm (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday) and 12.45pm (Thursday)

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

4 minutes, 24 minutes,
interval 20 minutes,
35 minutes

The concert will conclude at approximately 9.30pm (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday) and 3pm (Thursday).

COVER IMAGE

Rebecca Shaw

Miriama Young's Reflections on the Harbour Light was made possible through the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's 50 Fanfares project and was commissioned by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, supported by the Neilson Foundation.

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



CONCERT DIARY

MARCH 2023



GERSHWIN'S RHAPSODY IN BLUE NEW YORK STORIES

PAUL BONETTI The Bright Day Clarion
Calls the Quaking Earth
50 Fanfares Commission

BERNSTEIN

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

IVES Central Park in the Dark

GERSHWIN Rhapsody in Blue

ANDREA MOLINO conductor

SIMON TEDESCHI piano

Royal Caribbean Classics Under the Sails
Sunday Afternoon Symphony

Friday 17 March, 7pm
Saturday 18 March, 7pm
Sunday 19 March, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



MOZART'S GRAN PARTITA SERENADE RADIANT & JOYFUL

BEETHOVEN

Quintet for Three Horns, Oboe and Bassoon

MOZART Serenade No.10, Gran Partita

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MUSICIANS

Classics in the City

Thursday 30 March, 7pm

City Recital Hall



JS BACH'S MAGNIFICAT IN D EXHILARATING & BEAUTIFUL

BPÄRT Trisagion*

JS BACH Magnificat in D

EŠENVALDS Passion and Resurrection

**Great Classics performance only*

STEPHEN LAYTON conductor

AMY MOORE soprano

CHLOE LANKSHEAR soprano

STEPHANIE DILLON mezzo-soprano

CHRISTOPHER WATSON tenor

DAVID GRECO baritone

SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MUSICIANS

Great Classics

Thursday 30 March, 7pm
Friday 31 March, 11am
Saturday 1 April, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

APRIL 2023



DONALD RUNNICLES **CONDUCTS BRAHMS 2** LUSH & TRIUMPHANT

DETLEV GLANERT Idyllium

SCHUMANN Piano Concerto

BRAHMS Symphony No.2

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

ANDREA LAM piano

Royal Caribbean Classics Under the Sails
Sunday Afternoon Symphony

Friday 14 April, 7pm
Saturday 15 April, 7pm
Sunday 16 April, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



ELGAR'S CELLO CONCERTO POWERFUL INSPIRATIONS

ALEX TURLEY Mirage

50 Fanfares Commission

ELGAR Cello Concerto

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No.10

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

NICOLAS ALTSTAEDT cello

Emirates Masters Series
Emirates Thursday Afternoon Symphony

Wednesday 19 April, 8pm
Thursday 20 April, 1.30pm
Friday 21 April, 8pm
Saturday 22 April, 8pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

WELCOME

Emirates and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra have enjoyed one of the longest standing partnerships in Australia's performing arts. This year marks over 20 years of partnership, and we are pleased to continue our support of this world class Orchestra.

Emirates and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra share a common goal of creating journeys of excitement and discovery for people around the globe. Emirates is passionate about supporting incredible local and international talent, in particular the Sydney Symphony's Chief Conductor Simone Young AM.

Emirates is proud to be investing to bring Sydney audiences world-class experiences, whether through its support of the Sydney Symphony or through its customer service, and in December 2022, Sydney was the first city on Emirates' network to offer the new Premium Economy cabin on all flights between its Dubai hub; putting Australia at the forefront of Emirates' 2-year retrofit programme, consisting of a multi-billion-dollar investment to ensure customers continue to fly better in the coming years.

We are delighted by this continuing partnership, and we wish the Sydney Symphony all the best in this exciting new year. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this performance, and we hope today's music points the way to an increasingly brighter future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Brown', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Barry Brown

Divisional Vice President for Australasia
Emirates

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

MIHHAIL GERTS conductor

Hailed by critics as ‘a name to remember’ thanks to his ‘astonishing precision, highly expressive gestures and warmth’, the prominent Estonian conductor Mihhail Gerts has made a name for himself following recent successful debuts with the Orchestre Nazionale dell’ Accademia di Santa Cecilia, BBC Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France with the acclaimed baritone Matthias Goerne as soloist. He is also the artistic director of the TubIN Festival, initiated to promote the outstanding symphonic music of the Estonian composer Eduard Tubin.

Gerts looks forward to returning to many of these orchestras in the 2022/23 season, and to making highly anticipated Australian debut with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in addition to European debuts with the Oslo Philharmonic, RTV Slovenian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and Staatskapelle Dresden. He will also return to the National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin and to the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra.

Highlights from the last seasons include successful debuts with the NHK Symphony Orchestra, Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg, Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, Gulbenkian Symphony Orchestra, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National d’Ile de France, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo, Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg, Orchestre national de Belgique, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Aalborg Symphony, Orquesta Sinfonica de Castilla y Leon, and many others.

In addition to his symphonic concert career, Gerts has also gained extensive operatic experience as First Kapellmeister and deputy GMD of the Hagen Theater (2015 to 2017) and resident conductor of the Estonian National Opera (2007 to 2014). During these years, he conducted over forty different productions of opera and ballet - most recently, a new production of *The Flying Dutchman*. As a guest conductor, he has appeared at the Teatro la Fenice, Teatro delle Muse, Mikhailovsky Theater St. Petersburg, Belarus National Opera, and many others.

Gerts studied conducting at the Estonian Academy of Music and the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, Berlin; in 2011, he was awarded his PhD. From 2013 to 2017, he was a Stipendiary of the Dirigentenforum Programme of the German Music Council, and in 2014 was a finalist in the London Symphony Orchestra’s Donatella Flick Competition and Evgeny Svetlanov Conducting Competition.



Mihhail Gerts
Photo by Kaupo Kikkas

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

MARIE-ANGE NGUCI piano

The 2022/23 season sees Marie-Ange Nguci appear with NHK Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Paavo Järvi, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra under Xian Zhang, Sydney Symphony Orchestra under Mihhail Gerts, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI under Petr Popelka, Bournemouth Symphony under Gabor Kali, Mozarteumorchester Salzburg under Howard Griffiths for a Mozart recording, Kammerorchester Basel under Umberto Benedetti Michelangeli, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse under Robert Trevino and Belgium National Orchestra; as well as recitals at Radio France and Lyon Auditoriums, Lucerne Festival and Oslo Opera.

Among the highlights of the two last seasons, Nguci was invited by such major orchestras as Orchestre de Paris, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, BBC Symphony Orchestra at Barbican Hall, Tonkünstler Orchestra for her Musikverein debut, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Symfonieorkest Vlaanderen on tour, Orchestre National de Lyon, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Orchestre National d'Île-de-France, as well as Lille, Bordeaux and Pau National Orchestras, working with first-class conductors: Fabio Luisi, Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider, Dalia Stasevska, Pierre Bleuse, Kriistina Poska, Tabitha Berglund and Case Scaglione.

She is invited to prestigious international Festivals and series such as Ravinia Festival in Chicago, Beethovenfest Bonn, Musikmesse Frankfurt, Gstaad Menuhin Festival, Piano à Lyon, International Keyboard Institute and Festival in New York and Festival Musiq'3 Festival in Brussels. In France, she has performed at Bergen international Festival, International Piano Festival of La Roque d'Anthéron, La Folle Journée in Nantes (as well as in Tokyo and Ekaterinburg), Festival Radio France Occitanie Montpellier, Festival La Grange de Meslay, Festival Chopin in Bagatelle, L'Esprit du Piano in Bordeaux and Nohant Festival Chopin.

Her extensive repertoire ranges from Baroque, Classical and Romantic to contemporary. Passionate about the music of our time, she has worked closely with composers such as Thierry Escaich, Bruno Mantovani, Graciane Finzi, Pascal Zavaro and Karol Beffa in preparing her interpretations of their works.

Nguci came to wide public attention in 2018 with the release of her first CD, *En Miroir* on the Mirare label. It featured the piano works of composers best known as organists and improvisers – Franck, JS Bach, Saint-Saëns and Thierry Escaich. The recording received the coveted Choc de Classica for 2018 and was warmly praised in the press.

Marie-Ange Nguci was accepted into the Paris Conservatoire at the age of 13 in Nicholas Angelich's class. She plays organ and cello, and spent a year studying conducting at Vienna's Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst.



Marie Ange Nguci
Photo by Caroline Doutre

ABOUT THE MUSIC

MIRIAMA YOUNG (born 1975) ***Reflections on the Harbour Light***

Australian composer Miriama Young's *Time and Tide: Echoes of Sydney Harbour* was composed for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellows in 2018. In this new fanfare, *Reflections on the Harbour Light*, she returns to the Harbour as a source of inspiration, prefacing the score with the following remarks from the architect of the Sydney Opera House, Jørn Utzon:

It is important that such a large, white sculpture in the harbour setting catches and mirrors the sky with all its varied lights, dawn to dusk, day to day, throughout the year.

The composer writes:

To celebrate the renovation of the Sydney Opera House, *Reflections on the Harbour Light* is based structurally and conceptually on the principles of design of this iconic venue. In translating Utzon's vision, the piece captures musically the changing dark to bright of harbour light, reflected in the shimmering patterns of the tiled surface. Swirling arpeggios depict the soaring shell forms musically, with structural modulations moving by cycle to emulate the spherical relationship of the shells to one another. Solo violin sonifies the architectural soaring of an eagle's wing.

Miriama Young's Reflections on the Harbour Light was made possible through the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's 50 Fanfares project and was commissioned by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, supported by the Neilson Foundation.



Miriama Young

ABOUT THE MUSIC

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921) **Piano Concerto No.2 in G minor, Op.22**

The Paris that we all love in the springtime — those of us that don't actually live there, that is — came into being in the 1860s. After a cycle of revolution and reaction, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte was elected President of the French Republic on the abdication and flight of Louis-Philippe, King of the French, in 1848. In 1851 he staged a coup d'état, becoming President for Life; the following year he had himself crowned Emperor Napoléon III, a title he held until deposed during the debacle of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. From dictatorial beginnings, Napoléon III's regime became progressively more liberal in its politics from about 1860. The 'Second Empire' was, moreover, a time of huge renovation in Paris: Georges-Eugène Haussmann oversaw the demolition of medieval slums and the creation of those boulevards and avenues which give the city its spacious character; part of a fever of new construction, now-iconic buildings such as the Gare du Nord, L'Opéra and the Trinité church appeared. This fusion of modernism and classicism is evident in the visual arts — this is the period of the Realist painters like Corot, Manet and the young Degas — and perhaps, too, in music.

Saint-Saëns began his studies at the Paris Conservatoire in 1848, so by the late 1860s was in the period of his early maturity as an artist. From 1857 he had been organist at La Madeleine; in 1861 he took up a teaching position at the École Niedermeyer. (Niedermeyer, the school's founder, was determined to train musicians who were able to build on the long traditions of Catholic church music; he had written a treatise on how 'modern harmony is submitted to the form of the ancient modes', another case of the fusion of modern and classical ideas.) There Saint-Saëns met the young student composer Gabriel Fauré, beginning a life-long friendship.



Camille Saint-Saëns

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Debussy and Saint-Saëns, by contrast, loathed each other, but writing as his alter-ego Monsieur Croche in 1903, Debussy observed that a

scientific approach to music has meant that Saint-Saëns will never allow himself to overload his music with too many of his personal feelings. We are indebted to him for having recognized the tumultuous genius of Liszt, and we should remember that he professed admiration for old Bach at a time when such an act of faith was also an act of courage.

Debussy was, of course, a small child when Saint-Saëns' Piano Concerto No.2 appeared in 1868, but M Croche's remarks are pertinent to it. The piece was composed in 17 days, when at the last minute Saint-Saëns was invited to perform a concerto with visiting Russian conductor Anton Rubinstein. One wag has noted that it 'starts with Bach and ends with Offenbach', a *bon mot* that illustrates the concerto's fusion of baroque and nineteenth century sensibilities. It also recognizes one of Saint-Saëns' structural innovations in this piece: each movement is notably faster than the one before.

A church organist was expected to be able to improvise, and organists who were also composers, like Bruckner and Saint-Saëns, regarded improvisation as an important skill. While we don't, sadly, have any recording of Saint-Saëns improvising at the keyboard, the opening of his Second Piano Concerto might give us a hint of that might have sounded. The expansive opening flourish for piano over a pedal note is frankly Bachian; one can almost imagine Saint-Saëns trying it out on the instrument at the Madeleine. (Saint-Saëns later said of Bach and Mozart that 'as high as their expression may soar, their musical form remains supreme and all-sufficient'.) The orchestra's tutti entry breaks any baroque spell, however, and leads into the main body of the movement. The principal theme of this movement is a melody written by Fauré for a discarded setting of the hymn *Tantum ergo* (the words, from St Thomas Aquinas' *Pange lingua*, are traditionally sung in the liturgy of Benediction; Fauré made several settings of the text).

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The central scherzo has become one of Saint-Saëns' best known pieces. Just as the composition had been rushed, the concert at which the concerto was premiered was woefully under-rehearsed, but the critics and audience all loved the scherzo. It is arguably the most 'Offenbachian' movement in its light step, glittering scoring and good-humoured themes. The faster final movement is a tarantella in all but name, mounting in speed and intensity and with hints, in certain harmonic sequences, of the *Danse macabre* of six years later.

This concerto is in many ways a document of artistic life in Second Empire Paris. It also brings together Saint-Saëns' trailblazing interest in the baroque with the 'tumultuous genius' of the nineteenth-century concerto, and demonstrates the immaculate craftsmanship for which Saint-Saëns is rightly celebrated. Indeed Liszt himself praised the fact that Saint-Saëns had not compromised either his compositional rigour or his pianistic virtuosity.

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839–1881)

orch. MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Pictures at an Exhibition

Early 1874 provided the only high point of Mussorgsky's career as a composer. His opera *Boris Godunov* had received its premiere and was an immediate popular success. The critics, however, were uniformly unkind, and the negative response from one in particular upset the composer deeply. This was César Cui, one of the group of composers known in English as 'The Five', or 'The Mighty Handful', which also included Mussorgsky. Cui's criticism centred on certain technical faults in Mussorgsky's writing and this in itself was a betrayal, as The Five, under the leadership of Mily Balakirev, had assiduously avoided the techniques and formal designs they associated with Western (as against Russian) music. Mussorgsky, in a letter to VI Stasov (a critic who had coined the 'Five' epithet), equated technique with 'diapers, braces, straps' and the symphonic tradition



Modest Mussorgsky

ABOUT THE MUSIC

as a stultifying ‘Talmud’ of rules. The deliberate ‘roughness’ of The Five’s music was part of the charm: in raving about Mussorgsky’s work Debussy, meaning no disrespect, likened him to ‘an inquisitive savage discovering music for the first time, guided in each step by his emotions’.

Perhaps as a way to harness Mussorgsky’s emotions at this time (which might otherwise have led Mussorgsky further into the alcoholism which killed him), Stasov suggested that the composer write a tribute piece to the artist Viktor Hartmann. Mussorgsky had been distraught when his friend Hartmann had died the previous year, and was happy to contribute such a piece when Stasov proposed a memorial exhibition of Hartmann’s work. The result, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, is one of the more extraordinary works for solo piano from the 19th century — so much so that it was not immediately understood, and was only published after the composer’s early death. It experiments freely with unusual metres (much of the opening alternates 5/4 and 6/4), dissonant harmony (as in the *Gnome* movement), and sheer brute force (as in *Bydlo*).

Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov both jumped ship and embraced Western techniques, the latter going on to ‘improve’ Mussorgsky’s orchestration in *Boris Godunov* after the composer’s death. But composers as unlike as Mussorgsky and Ravel are difficult to imagine. Where one prided himself on his untutored roughness, the other sought technical perfection. And yet in 1922 Ravel made his celebrated orchestration — not by any means the only orchestration of this work, but for good reason the one most often played. Ravel and Stravinsky — a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov’s, after all — had collaborated on Mussorgsky’s unfinished opera *Khovanshchina* a few years before, so Ravel was familiar with Mussorgsky’s style and the characteristic sounds of the Russian orchestra. His version of *Pictures* was performed by Serge Koussevitzky in Paris later that year.



Victor Hartmann

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The work begins with a *Promenade* where a solo melody (given by Ravel to the trumpet) is answered by a series of chords for full ensemble. This music recurs at various times and in different timbral and metrical guises to represent the composer strolling through the exhibition. It is interrupted by the *Gnome*, a short, cantankerous movement inspired by Hartmann's design for a nutcracker shaped like a gnome.

A new statement of the *Promenade* takes us to *The Old Castle*, a watercolour of a troubadour singing in front of a medieval pile. In one of many orchestral masterstrokes, Ravel gives the troubadour's melody, in a lilting compound metre, to the alto saxophone.

The *Promenade* returns in a sombre form, but this time leading into a delicate sketch of the gardens of Tuileries. In response to Hartmann's watercolour, Ravel uses a texture of fluttering winds to depict the subtitle 'Children quarrelling at play'.

Bydlo was said to depict an ox-cart, which in Ravel's imagination of it, we hear approaching slowly and deliberately from a long way away, coming close as the music reaches its loudest point, and retreating unhurriedly into the distance. It is an example of Ravel as *composer* stepping in, as Mussorgsky's manuscript has the music starting very loudly.

The *Promenade* now leads to *Ballet of the Unhatched Chickens*, Mussorgsky's response to a design for a ballet on the fairy-story *Trilby*. Ravel's orchestration wonderfully captures the image of chickens, inside their eggs apart from their legs, racing about on stage.

'*Samuel' Goldenburg and 'Schmuyle'* (often sanitised as 'Two Jews, one rich, one poor') raises the unfortunate issue of Mussorgsky's anti-Semitism. As musicologist Richard Taruskin has pointed, the composer frequently referred disparagingly to Jews in his letters. There is, moreover, no known picture of two Jews in Hartmann's catalogue. Mussorgsky may have been conflating two images,

ABOUT THE MUSIC

but with a distasteful message: the two men's names are the same, but in different forms; however Europeanised 'Samuel' may seem, he will always be the wheedling 'Schmuyle'.

Omitting a *Promenade*, Ravel moves straight to the glittering world of the *Limoges Market*, which provides a huge contrast with the baleful austerity of the *Catacombs (Roman Sepulchres)*. This in turn passes into *With the Dead in a Dead Language*, of which Mussorgsky wrote 'Hartmann's creative spirit leads me to the place of skulls and calls to them — the skulls begin to glow faintly from within'. Here the music is based on that of the promenade.

The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Yaga) evokes a Russian fairy-tale of Baba-Yaga, a witch who flies through the night in an iron mortar (of the kitchen, not military, variety) propelling herself with a pestle. Mussorgsky's music depicts the witch in full flight, although Hartmann's image was of a clock-face which showed Baba-Yaga's house with its distinctive feature of a pair of hen's legs. The wild excitement of this movement builds inexorably into the final section, *The Great Gate of Kiev*.

Hartmann's design for such a gate in Kyiv, the present-day capital of Ukraine, was never built, and was not as grandiose as Mussorgsky's music suggests. Ravel further ups the ante, marshalling the entire force of the orchestra with bells on. Ravel's creates an overwhelming finale which can't help but remind us of the end of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, and, more appropriately, the Coronation Scene from Mussorgsky's great opera *Boris Godunov*.

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