

# Instrumental



**Mussorgsky • Tchaikovsky**  
**Pictures At An Exhibition,**  
**Album For The Young**  
 Simon Tedeschi p  
 ABC CLASSICS 4811963



## TEDESCHI'S PICTURE PALACE

Mussorgsky's Russian show-and-tell gets a very human touch

Seldom have the oxen of *Bydlo* lumbered so effectively or the bells of the *Great Gate of Kiev* tolled so weightily as they do in Simon Tedeschi's characterful version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The Sydney pianist, justifiably lauded as one of Australia's finest, has stamped his mark on this much-loved and evocative masterpiece inspired by a series of paintings and sketches by the composer's friend Viktor Hartmann.

Coming so close on the heels of Scottish pianist Steven Osborne's multi award-winning recording with Hyperion in 2013, comparisons are inevitable. But whereas Osborne's reading is brisk and brilliant, for me Tedeschi's more measured approach plumbs the emotional depths and finds the quirks and eccentricities of Mussorgsky's subjects – the *Ballet of the Unhatched Chickens* or the menacing, nightmarish *The Hut on Hen's Legs*, for example – giving us a more human interpretation.

Tedeschi is not afraid to be adventurous with some of the timings. He stretches out the *Great Gate of Kiev* to a very weighty eight minutes-plus and in the final bars the listener is almost lurching groggily through the cacophony of bells with its hymn-like counterpoint of a religious procession, at first distant then close by. You think he has gone too far, almost, but it all holds together and the effect is very powerful.

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But back to those oxen. You can almost hear their laboured breath as they toil up the hill getting slower and slower until they pass by and disappear in the distance in one of the most effective fade-outs in the piano repertoire.

Tedeschi says two of his inspirations have been his grandparents who survived the Holocaust – adding an extra layer of meaning to his playing on *Samuel Goldberg and Schmutyke* – and watching his three-year-old niece at play. This latter influence is of course evident in the delightful, short *Tuileries* section in the Mussorgsky but more so in the companion work on this beautiful album, Tchaikovsky's simple and charming *Album for the Young*.

These 24 exquisite pieces may have been inspired by Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, but unlike that collection these were written for children with little fingers rather than concert hall pianists. Most of them last a minute or two but they cover a wide range of moods and styles, from the Chopinesque *Doll's Funeral* (a bonsai variation on the famous Funeral March) to the balletic *Mazurka*. All are delivered here with Tedeschi's characteristic technical aplomb and sense of musical adventure. Buy it now!

Steve Moffatt reviewed Simon Tedeschi using Sennheiser HD650 headphones

