

## Russians between heaven & earth



**Mikhail Ippolitov Ivanov**



**Nikolaj Rimsky Korsakov**



**Sergei Rachmaninoff**



**Modest Mussorgski**

The members of the Hexagon Ensemble have a strong affinity with the Russian repertoire. Years ago, this resulted in the acclaimed CD 'The Russian Connection'. More recently – in 2014, 2015 and 2017 – the Hexagon Ensemble toured in the Russian Federation, including the Republic of Bashkortostan. The program *Russians between heaven & earth* consists of works by Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Modest Mussorgsky.

### Program

**Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov (1872-1956)**

An evening in Georgia (1926)

*flute-oboe-clarinet-bassoon-piano*

**Nikolaj Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)**

Quintet in B flat major opus posth. (1876)

-Allegro con brio

-Andante

-Rondo, allegretto

*flute-clarinet-bassoon-French horn-piano*

Intermission

**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

From the Chrysostomos liturgy opus 31: Dostojno jest (1910) Arr. Christiaan Boers

*flute-oboe-clarinet-bassoon-French horn*

**Modest Mussorgski (1836-1881)**

Paintings at an exhibition (1874) Arr. Kees Olthuis

*flute-oboe-clarinet-bassoon-French horn-piano*

### Program notes

*One single Russian tradition spanning over two generations of Russian composers*

The **Quintet in B flat major** by **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov** still fully fits the context of the 'little father Tsar's' Russia.

The same applies to Mussorgsky's masterpiece *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Rachmaninoff's *Dostojno Jest*. Off all the pieces in the program, only Ippolitov-Ivanov's piece was composed later, in the first decades of the Soviet Union. Rimsky-Korsakov's body of work can be categorized into different periods. Before 1873, he mostly focused on writing music for symphonic orchestras. But around 1873 he also started composing an impressive set of operas. The five years that separate these two periods resulted only in a small number of works for solo piano, a string quintet and the quintet that has been included in this program.

The opening movement kicks off spectacularly with a powerful, rhythmic sound that immediately catches the listener's attention. This is followed by a second, more flowing theme. The middle movement starts off with a solo by the French horn, which is then taken over by the other wind players. Halfway the slow movement we hear a fugato by the wind players. Just like most fugues written in that era for the piano, Rimsky-Korsakov might have

wanted to show off his craftsmanship as a composer here. He was in any case satisfied to such an extent with these passages, that he specifically mentioned them in his memoirs. The Rondo, then, is so playful that it reminds the listener of the first movement of the piece. Each of the musicians – except the bassoon player – is offered the chance to shine in a solo, each of which is separated by arpeggios from the piano.

During the time in which Rimsky-Korsakov worked on the quintet, he also published two collections of Russian folk songs. Folkloristic colours would become one of the most striking characteristics of his work. And it was just in the period that he was working on this piece, that Rimsky-Korsakov first taught composition to **Mikhael Ippolitov-Ivanov**. After his studies, Ippolitov-Ivanov spent some time in what is today called the Republic of Georgia, where he deepened his knowledge of folk music. **An Evening in Georgia** is a work full of typical Russian melancholy, invoked by the memory of a beautiful summer evening. This melancholy is beautifully expressed in the oboe solo, supported by the other instruments. Halfway into the work, the atmosphere is livened by a dansant element reminiscent of Borodin or Rimsky-Korsakov. After this, a sense of calm returns and the oboe solo continues.

The Russian orthodox religion describes the **Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom** as ‘transcending time and worldliness’. All of the pieces from the liturgy – whether they be exuberant or more modest – have been ascribed a symbolic value. John Chrysostom lived in the fourth/fifth century and is one of the most prominent saints of the Russian Orthodox Church. **Sergei Rachmaninoff’s** liturgy clearly mirrors the style of orthodox church music. Despite this, the Russian orthodox church rejected this impressive work, which made it fall into desuetude. Only decades later it was reconstructed on the basis of archival pieces and vocal parts from a monastery in, remarkably, New York. Досто́жно е́сть (Dostojno est) is part of a Eucharistic prayer, in which the concept of ‘dignity’ plays a role in all sorts of ways. ‘It is truly right to bless you, Theotokos, ever blessed, most pure, and Mother of our God’: here the praising of the Theotokos is central. The ‘Dostojno es’t beautifully comes to life in this special arrangement for the five wind players of the Hexagon Ensemble by Hexagon’s horn player Christiaan Boers.

**Modest Mussorgsky** wrote **Pictures at an Exhibition** – consisting of 16 pieces for piano – as he was inspired by a visit on June 23rd 1874 to an exhibition of works by the painter Viktor Hartmann. This exhibition was put together by Hartmann’s friends after his untimely death in 1873. Mussorgsky, too, had been a good friend of Hartmann’s. Together with his group of friends, they had strived towards creating purely Russian art, free of western influences. The Hexagon Ensemble plays this classic work in an arrangement made by the Dutch composer Kees Olthuis. For this arrangement Olthuis used the original piano version of the work, rather than the famous orchestration by Maurice Ravel.