



American Record Guide

MOUSSORGSKY: *Pictures at an
Exhibition; Piano Pieces*
Maurizio Baglini
Decca 4811413 [2CD] 114 minutes

I have reviewed around 40 recordings of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, and this is the most unusual. It is never heavy, never hard—not even in the 'Great Gate at Kiev'. The scenes in the catacombs and the ox-cart are much lighter than one would expect. Everything is phrased most beautifully; nothing is just plowed thru. Piano tone is consistently beautiful; emotion and lyricism are always present. It's even rather operatic. In fact, it's Italian Moussorgsky—not what you expect to hear—and it's refreshing and moving. It will not replace some of my favorite recordings, but I have to have it as a different "take" on the suite. It is elegant where others are forceful, sweet where others are bitter, light where others are heavy. There are many unheard-of hesitations and holdings of notes. No one else plays it like this!

I should not be surprised. This is a pianist I have liked very much from the beginning of his career. I have exchanged messages with him; I have met him for a meal in Venice. I always seem to know right away when a pianist will become a favorite, and I knew it with him. He has always been different; he has always followed his own vision of the music, not the accepted style and approach. And that has always paid off.

He did not record this to beat other pianists who have recorded it. He recorded *Pictures* because he was taken with the composer and his piano writing. And many of the other pieces are very beautiful—they are not just "fill", and in fact they force the recital onto two discs. They are mostly short, but there is a four-hands sonata (with Roberto Prosseda) and there are two pieces from *Sorochintsi Fair* (the famous Gopak is similar to some of Grieg's Norwegian Folk Melodies). I could have done without both versions of the six-minute Scherzo. We are reminded again that this was a great composer, and the pianist is again delicate and elegant—and songful.

VROON