

# Isis Ensemble

## Transcriptions for Strings

*Arranged & Conducted By Jacques Cohen*

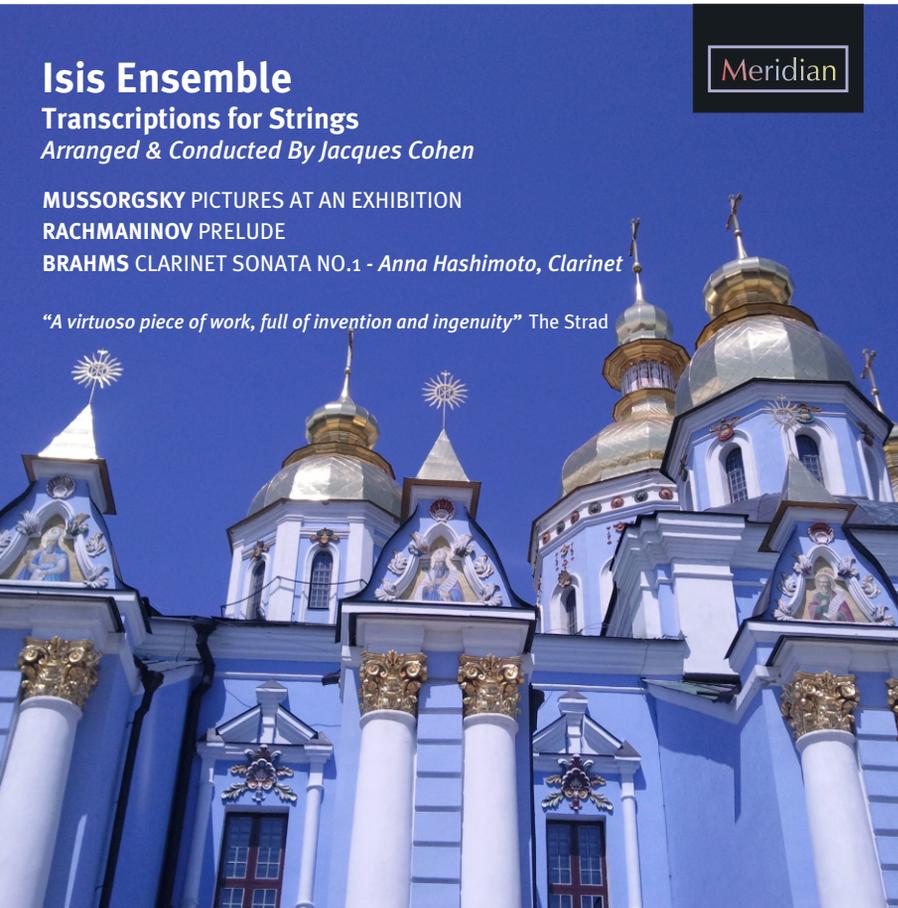
**MUSSORGSKY PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION**

**RACHMANINOV PRELUDE**

**BRAHMS CLARINET SONATA NO.1 - *Anna Hashimoto, Clarinet***

*"A virtuoso piece of work, full of invention and ingenuity" The Strad*

Meridian



**TRANSCRIPTIONS FOR STRINGS**

**By Jacques Cohen**

**World Première Recordings**

**Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)**

**Pictures at an Exhibition**

[1]	Promenade	1:30
[2]	Gnomus	2:46
[3]	Promenade	1:00
[4]	Il Vecchio Castello	4:32
[5]	Promenade	0:30
[6]	Tuileries	1:09
[7]	Bydlo	2:36
[8]	Promenade	0:49
[9]	Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks	1:24
[10]	Samuel Goldenberg & Schmuyle	2:24
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[12]	Limoges	1:30
[13]	Catacombs	2:05
[14]	Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua	2:11
[15]	The Hut on Fowl's Legs	3:37
[16]	The Great Gate of Kiev	6:04

**Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)**

[17]	<b>Prelude, Op. 3, No. 2</b>	3:47
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**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

**Sonata, Op. 120, No. 1**

[18]	Allegro Appassionato	8:23
[19]	Andante un poco Adagio	5:45
[20]	Allegretto grazioso	4:50
[21]	Vivace	5:34

*with Anna Hashimoto, clarinet*

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### ***Pictures at an Exhibition***

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

In 1874 Mussorgsky was invited to a commemorative exhibition of 400 pictures by his friend and fellow nationalist Victor Hartmann (1834-1873). Within a mere 20 days of viewing the pictures, Mussorgsky wrote a suite for piano describing 10 of them. Although the composer was himself a brilliant pianist, this turned out to be his only substantial work for the instrument, and it did not come to be published and well-known until some time after his death. Hartmann may not have been the most renowned of artists but his pictures, some of which still survive, inspired in Mussorgsky music of exceptional brilliance and originality. Indeed, such is the power of the music that countless arrangers have been unable to resist transcribing it for almost every instrumental medium imaginable - orchestra, brass band, wind band, organ and even accordions - to the extent that one could easily overlook the fact that this masterpiece was originally conceived for solo piano. But, as far as we know, at the time of its première in London in 2009, this version was the first arrangement of the complete suite for strings.

A string transcription has several advantages: it can sustain the harmonies more than the piano, but at the same time, whilst it cannot compete with the might and vast spectrum of a symphony orchestra, its more consistent tone colour brings it closer to the original piano version. This means that the chords are always clear so that the quintessential *Russianness* of the music is more immediately apparent. Moreover, as you can hear, the variety of sound and character that can be produced by even a small string group can be quite astonishing.

***Promenade*** (1) This prelude with its noble melody so distinctively Russian in flavour, reappears as an interlude throughout the suite and represents the composer strolling from picture to picture. As the suite progresses, however, it emerges less frequently as the viewer becomes less aware of himself and more involved in the pictures. Indeed, after its 5th official rendition, its 2 remaining appearances are integrated into the other movements. It has been suggested that the irregular, changing meter reflects the composer's uneven gait, but it seems more likely that this trait, more commonly associated with 20<sup>th</sup> century music, is attributable to the influence of Russian folk-song.

***Gnomus (The Gnome)*** (2) The design for a wooden nutcracker that inspired this extraordinary composition must have been a fearful creature. A unique juxtaposition of alternately fast and slow music punctuated by abrupt silences builds up to a terrifying climax. The whole short movement is pervaded by a mood of fear and menace. A more subdued ***Promenade*** (3) follows.

***Il Vecchio Castello (The Old Castle)*** (4) A melancholy troubadour sings nostalgically by a medieval Italian castle on a mysterious, warm summer evening. This movement is notable for its sad, beautiful melody underpinned throughout by a drone. An upbeat ***Promenade*** (5) follows.

***Tuileries*** (6) This delightful miniature depicts children quarrelling after play in the famous Parisian gardens. The middle section depicts the governesses (in this version played by a sedate solo quartet) trying in vain to pacify them.

***Bydlo*** (7) An old Polish peasant sings as he drives an ox-cart towards us, reaching a climax before disappearing back into the distance. ***Promenade*** (8) follows, this time in a minor key.



**Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks** (9) This humorous piece represents Hartmann's illustration of ballet costumes - resembling eggshells - to be worn by small children.

**Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle** (10) Although these 2 stereotyped Polish Jews originally appeared in separate paintings (judging by the surviving pictures), Mussorgsky seems to have imagined a scenario in which they interact. First appears Samuel Goldenberg, the rich Jew, and then the beggar Schmuyle (represented here by solo violin) who, after a brief discussion, is abruptly dismissed! **Promenade** (11) follows.

**Limoges** (12) This hilarious *scherzando* portrays the ferocious bickering of fishwives in the well-known French marketplace. It leads directly into:

**Catacombs (Roman Sepulchre)** (13) The original picture showed Hartmann himself with a lantern, actually in the catacombs of Paris, not Rome.

**Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua (With the Dead in a dead Language)** (14) Pencil notes in the autograph score reveal that this subsection conveys the composer, represented by the **Promenade** theme, communing with the soul of Hartmann.

**The Hut on Fowl's Legs** (15) This drawing was a design for a clock in the shape of the home of Baba Yaga, the infamous, cannibalistic Russian witch. The outer sections are thought to describe the savage movements of the hut as it travels from place to place, whilst the middle section probably represents the witch herself flying through the air - not on a broomstick as most witches are apparently wont to do, but with a pestle and mortar - as she pursues her victim. This leads straight into:

**The Great Gate of Kiev** (16) The gate was designed to celebrate the escape from assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1866, but it was never built. The triumphant theme is twice interrupted by a religious procession, the 2nd procession climaxing with the final appearance of the **Promenade** theme - perhaps to suggest the composer walking home. Here, in this version, the strings divide into 20 separate parts.

**Prelude, Opus 3, No.2**  
Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Rachmaninov premièred this short piano prelude at his official début when he was only 19 and it has remained one of his most popular pieces ever since. Indeed, throughout his playing career he was so often urged by audiences to perform it as an encore that he grew to dislike it. It is nevertheless a remarkably powerful piece which, whilst making wonderful use of the piano in its original version, lends itself beautifully to transcription. The composer wrote 4 more piano pieces to go with it and together they were published under the title *Morceaux de Fantaisie*. Unlike Mussorgsky, Rachmaninov gave no indication that this work might have a programme, but the piece is so evocative and dramatic that many listeners have been unable to resist inventing their own, early publications giving it such titles as *The Burning of Moscow* and *The Day of Judgement*.



**Sonata, Opus 120, No.1**  
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

- (18) Allegro appassionata
- (19) Andante un poco Adagio
- (20) Allegretto grazioso
- (21) Vivace

Although Brahms had privately resolved to end his composing career in 1890, he was later inspired by the clarinet playing of Richard Mühlfeld to write a series of late masterpieces for the instrument. These include the Clarinet Trio, Clarinet Quintet and this, the first of two sonatas originally written for clarinet and piano in 1894 and first played by Brahms and Mühlfeld the following year.

The piano part for this version was arranged for strings and premièred in London in 2008. The string accompaniment provides a wonderful support for the soloist, especially in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, sustaining and arguably making more apparent the originality and beauty of Brahms' harmonies. Moreover, the clarinet is sufficiently strong and distinctive to ensure that the strings can play with all the passion and energy that the music demands without risk of swamping the soloist. This enables the 2 protagonists (clarinet and, in this instance, string orchestra) to compete on equal terms. This is particularly evident in the 1<sup>st</sup> movement where the passionate struggle between them is at its most intense.

**Isis Ensemble**

1<sup>st</sup> Violins:

Susanne Stanzeleit (leader),  
Matthew Scrivener, Lucy Waterhouse,  
Juliet Hughes-Rees, Marina Gillam,  
Vladimir Naumov

2<sup>nd</sup> Violins:

Tim Warburton, Steven Dinwoodie, Kate Conway,  
Chihiro Ono

Violas:

Robin Ireland, Kate Musker, Morgan Goff,  
Janina Kopinska

Cellos:

Andrew Fuller, Miriam Lowbury, Orlando Jopling,  
Nicholas Allen

Basses:

Kenneth Knussen, Catherine Ricketts

The **Isis Ensemble** was launched as a fully professional orchestra in 2005. Its members are comprised of international soloists, high-profile chamber musicians, and experienced orchestral players with collective experience of virtually every major professional orchestra in the UK.

The Isis Ensemble gives regular concerts in London performing at such venues as Southbank Centre and Cadogan Hall and performs a wide range of music from Bach through the classical and romantic repertoire to the present day. It is committed to promoting new music alongside works from the standard repertoire and takes pride in the energy and passion of its performances. It has given premières of works by such composers as Arvo Pärt, Martin Georgiev, Rohan Kriwaczek and its music director, Jacques Cohen.



**Jacques Cohen** is equally known as conductor and composer. He has recently conducted concerts and broadcasts with such groups as Kremerata Baltica, National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, Sofia Soloists, BBC Concert Orchestra, Albania Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra and Bucharest Philharmonic with whom he has been a regular guest conductor since 2003. He read music at Oxford where he conducted the university orchestras and performed his own compositions. On leaving Oxford, he was awarded the Conducting Scholarship at the Royal College of Music where he won several prizes including the Tagore Gold Medal, the college's award for its most outstanding student. He then worked as Assistant Conductor with the London Symphony Orchestra and Conductor of the Bombay Chamber Orchestra before taking First Prize in the British Reserve Conducting Competition and being a prize winner in the Leeds



Conductors' Competition. He is also a passionate communicator who explains music in an entertaining way to get audiences more involved in concerts.

Jacques' compositions are published by Norsk Musikforlag and include *Passion Fragment (The Denial of St Peter)*, *Yigdal*, *Quiet Music*, the award winning *Elegy on a floating Chord*, a symphony and the chamber opera *The Lady*

*of Satis House*. Other recent commissions include *Castle Lament* for the Primrose Quartet, *Concertino* for Onyx Brass and *Pantheon* for the National Youth Wind Orchestra of Great Britain. This year has seen the première of *Nun danket alle Gott* (Fitzwilliam String Quartet) and *Love Journeys* for soprano and strings (Marie Vassiliou with the Isis Ensemble). He has also completed numerous arrangements in addition to the 3 featured on this disc.

**Susanne Stanzeleit**, has performed worldwide as a soloist and chamber musician. Her extensive repertoire has featured many commissions and UK premieres of works by composers such as Peter Maxwell Davies, John Adams, Lou Harrison, György Kurtág, John Woolrich, Philip Cashian, Rebecca Saunders and many more. Susanne has recorded over 30 CDs which have all attracted rave reviews worldwide. She has been 1st violin in the Maggini and Edinburgh String Quartets and co-leader of Sinfonia 21, as well as guest-leading many of the foremost chamber orchestras and contemporary music groups in the UK. Alongside the Isis Ensemble's principal violist (Robin Ireland) and cellist (Andrew Fuller) she also plays in the Primrose Piano Quartet.



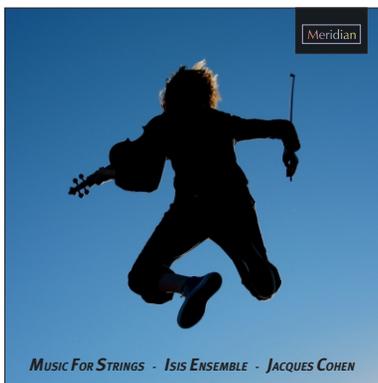
**Anna Hashimoto** won the International Clarinet Competitions in Kortrijk (Belgium), Carlino (Italy), and the Young Clarinetists Competition in Tokyo in 2003. In 2004 aged 15 she made her Barbican debut with the English Chamber Orchestra, with whom she appears regularly as a soloist. She has performed concertos with orchestras such as Brussels Philharmonic, Japan Philharmonic, New Japan Philharmonic, Tokyo Symphony, and Asia Philharmonic Orchestras. She has performed in major venues in the UK, Europe, USA, Mexico and Japan, including South Bank Centre, Wigmore Hall and Royal Albert Hall in London, Dvorak Hall in Prague, and Suntory Hall in Tokyo, with sold-out recitals at the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan and Kioi Hall. She has been broadcast on NHK TV and FM, FM Tokyo, ABC Radio and BBC Radio 3, including BBC Radio3's 'In Tune', NHK-FM's 'Best of Classic' and NHK TV's 'Classic Club'. Anna's debut solo album 'A Touch of France' (also released by Meridian) has had very favourable reviews in UK, USA and Japan. Artists she has collaborated with include Vladimir Ashkenazy, Paul Watkins, Myung-whun Chung, Michael Collins, Leon McCawley and Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, and string quartets such as Panocha, Ciurlonis, Kodaly, Endellion and Prazak Quartets. Anna graduated with the Regency Award from The Royal Academy of Music, and was Meaker Fellow the following year, and is now an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music. She has been guest principal with BBC Symphony, English Chamber, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras, City of London Sinfonia and Philharmonia.



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Also Available CDE84561 - Music for Strings

The Isis Ensemble's début CD, *Music for Strings*, was released in 2008 and comprises world première recordings of a variety of works. As well as being a great critical success and a best seller for Meridian, it has been frequently broadcast on BBC Radio and internationally.



**Bee Sting Dance in Rohan's Kitchen**

Rohan Kriwaczek

**Yigdal**

Fantasia on a Traditional Jewish Theme for Strings  
Jacques Cohen

**Suite for Strings**

Salomón Cuéllar

**The Old Castle from Pictures at an Exhibition**

Modest Mussorgsky arr. Jacques Cohen

**Variations on a Ukrainian Folksong**

Malcolm Arnold arr. Roger Steptoe

**Modlitwa ('Prayer')**

Andrzej and Roxanna Panufnik

*"Very well played and recorded, an excellent showcase for the Isis Ensemble and its music director."*  
Edward Greenfield, Gramophone, May 2008

*"The ensemble brings an almost vocal passion, with some fine solo playing...crisp and sensitive performance...with a multitude of vivid colours and virtuosic flourishes, which is dispatched with aplomb. The recorded sound is rich and clear."*

Tim Homfray, The Strad, May 2008

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Meridian

Transcriptions for Strings *Isis Ensemble Jacques Cohen*

CDE 84632

Meridian

A Natural Sound Recording

CDE 84632 TT 64'04"



LC 13637 DDD MCPS

Recorded in the church of  
St. Edward the Confessor, London.  
27th & 28th February 2014

Recorded by Richard Hughes  
Produced by Michelle Taylor-Cohen  
Edited by Susanne Stanzeleit  
Assistant Engineer Alex Gettinby

[www.isisensemble.com](http://www.isisensemble.com)

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