

# Society for the Performing Arts

Presents

## Leif Ove Andsnes

### *Pictures Reframed*

Sunday, November 22 at 2 p.m.  
Wortham Theater Center

## The Program

### *Memories of Childhood*

MUSSORGSKY

1. Nurse and I
2. First punishment (Nurse shuts me in a dark room)

### *Candle*

RHODE

### *Kinderszenen, Op.15*

SCHUMANN

1. Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (Of foreign lands and people)
2. Kuriose Geschichte (Curious story)
3. Hasche-Mann (Catch me)
4. Bittendes Kind (Pleading child)
5. Glückes genug (Happy enough)
6. Wichtige Begebenheit (Important event)
7. Träumerei (Dreaming)
8. Am Kamin (By the fireside)
9. Ritter vom Steckenpferd (Knight of the hobby-horse)
10. Fast zu ernst (Almost too serious)
11. Fürchtenmachen (Frightening)
12. Kind im Einschlummern (Child falling asleep)
13. Der Dichter spricht (The poet speaks)

### *Spray Painting*

RHODE

### *What Becomes*

LARCHER

### *Pictures at an Exhibition*

MUSSORGSKY

1. *Promenade*
2. Gnomus
3. *Promenade*
4. Il vecchio castello (*The Old Castle*)
5. *Promenade*
6. Tuileries *Dispute d'enfants après jeux (Dispute between children at play)*
7. Bydło (*The Ox Cart*)
8. *Promenade*
9. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
10. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
11. *Promenade*
12. Limoges – Le Marché *La grande nouvelle (The Market at Limoges – The Great News)*

13. Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum) and Con mortuis in lingua mortua
14. The Hut on Fowl's Legs
15. The Great Gate of Kiev

## PROGRAM NOTES

**Robin Rhode**

*Pictures at an Exhibition*

### *1. Promenade 1. Kadet. 2009 (part 1)*

**Why this idea of a character whose feet never touch the ground? This is a very particular way to imagine a promenade.**

The character in 'Kadet' (Promenade 1,2,3) is loosely based on Mussorgsky's youth, and relates to his military rank in the Russian army as 'cadet'. The character in the animation represents a youth on a path of self discovery, his feet grounded onto cubes that truncate as they shift through space. This geometric representation highlights a struggle to define one's own position in the world; as the cube transcends time its form begins to change as if the 'Kadet' has placed the exerting force onto it. The character remains physically suspended, his feet never touching a given ground, thus rejecting reality.

In Promenade 3 the 'Kadet' stumbles within his geometric surroundings almost as if he is in a drunken state. Mussorgsky's close encounters with alcohol abuse surfaced during his youth whilst serving in the army. The visual accompaniment in Promenade 3 alters the frame as if it is depicting the 'Kadet' from an aerial perspective. This visual device alters our perception of space, as if - being guided by the character - the 'Kadet' is stumbling, searching for his reality, while rejecting it because he is intoxicated.

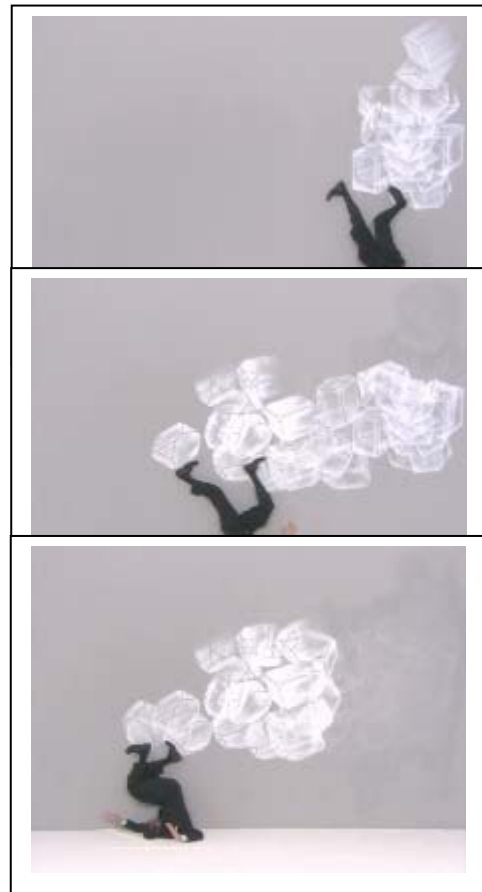
### *2. Gnomus. Wire Ballet. 2009*

On a white theatre stage, tangled piano wires fall from the ceiling to begin an abstract ballet. The wires become reminiscent of anthropomorphic line drawings, three dimensional drawn studies of the body in space. This stage-piece is inspired by Tchaikovsky's ballet of the Nutcracker. The forms within this ballet embody both an abstract as well as an anthropomorphic quality that relates specifically to *Gnomus*, the original sketch by Hartmann of a gnome waddling on bow legs. For *Wire Ballet*, I was interested in highlighting a more playful element.

**As in Drowning piano and Chalk Piano, you play with the piano as an object and the piano ends up drowned, decomposed. Why this idea of destroying the piano?**

The idea of destroying the piano becomes an attempt to deconstruct its given function and meaning beyond that as a symbol of acoustics. The nature of its decomposition and destruction allows for a new narrative to arise that can link to the history of the musical composition. This was my thinking for 'Drowning Piano' (Mussorgsky's final movement known as 'The Great Gate of Kiev'). Hartmann's original drawing depicted an architectural proposal for the gate of Kiev, a structure that was never realised. The artist's intention was for the architecture to fail and to crumble to the earth. The destruction of the architecture would be an attempt to critically view the actual powers and rulers of that given time. The drowned piano becomes an object embodying our own desires and histories, now submerged at the bottom of the ocean, becoming kind of a lost treasure.

### *3. Promenade. Kadet. 2009 (part 2)*



Here the music describes Mussorgsky's walk and his intended feeling as he approaches the next picture in Hartmann's Memorial Exhibition at St. Petersburg Architectural Association.

In this visual component the 'Kadet' juggles a truncated cube with his feet, slowly fragmenting the shape. The 'Kadet' stands on his hands, feet hovering on the sculptured cube, as we begin to lose sense of up and down, right and wrong. The action is circus-like, playful, yet assured, conveying Mussorgsky's stroll within the exhibition.

#### **4. *Il Vecchio Castello. Medieval Castle. 2009.***

This video depicts a forest in the shape of a pentagon. The shape refers to architectural diagrams and models - I was specifically looking at the pentagonal shape of the Castle of Good Hope situated in Cape Town, South Africa. The Cape Castle was designed in the 1660's by the colonialists as a mechanism to prevent attack from any geographical side.

As time passes in the animation, we see metallic spheres begin to appear amongst the trees as if a humanised construction challenges the natural landscape. The pentagonal forest begins to shift outwardly in the shape of a five-pointed star. In many of Hartmann's architectural drawings he adorned the sketches with human figures to indicate scale. In his painting of an old castle in Italy Hartmann suggests the size of the building with the figure of a troubadour singing in a serenade-like manner. The interesting depiction of the troubadour extends beyond the notion of architecture vs man, but also towards a poetical fiction and rhetoric that is inherent with troubadour songs, poems, and music.

This visual accompaniment uses the star-shaped forest to evoke the five extremities of the human body - the head, two arms, two legs - and relates to the human figure of the troubadour. The metallic spheres denote man's existence within nature and the tension arising from this given state.



#### **5. *Promenade 3. Promenade. 2008/2009***

The Promenade movement appears vigorous and confident while the recurrent character of the Promenades, the 'Kadet', is assailed by a cloud of diamond shapes that begin to overwhelm him. Slowly the geometric forms subside like a tidal wave, allowing the character to grasp out and almost control the nature of these abstract shapes.

This shape relates to a rhombus, a geometric form defined by the Greek mathematician Euclid, 'The father of Geometry', as something that 'spins'. In the end the character, or 'Kadet', grasps a corner of the rhombus as if to make sense of his fictional world.

#### **6. *Tuileries Garden. Kite. 2008/2009***

Hartmann painted a watercolour of the famous gardens of Paris and enriched it by including a group of quarrelling children. The geometric shape - the rhombus - in the visual component appears again, this time as a window that references the shape of a kite, almost passing through a path of trees as if being guided by a breeze.



surrounding area of a train station. The wire, the dried grass blowing in the wire fencing, all depict a social decay

#### **7. *Bydlo. Old Station. 2007/2009***

Bydlo is a Polish word meaning 'cattle'. Hartmann spent a month in the Polish town of Sandomir. Whilst on this trip the artist sketched many ghetto scenes and happenings. Hartmann was deeply conscious of society's social struggle. Therefore 'Bydło', the ox cart, could also be seen as a symbol for the poverty and suffering of the people of Sandomir.



The visual accompaniment is a black and white film (transferred to video) depicting the metal fence with its barbed wind, a black bag caught on frozen within a single

location. The train also has a strong significance to South Africa's dark political past. Masses of people from rural areas suffering under the constraints of Apartheid Laws travelled long distances into the cities for employment in the surrounding gold mines. The train and Bydło share a common symbol.

The image of the train arriving and then departing from the station without anyone disembarking becomes a powerful metaphor for loss. As within European history, when filmed in grainy monochrome footage the train relates specifically to the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War. Millions of people were taken by train to death camps and this visual accompaniment becomes a reminder of the dark struggle for forgiveness that still informs our present history.

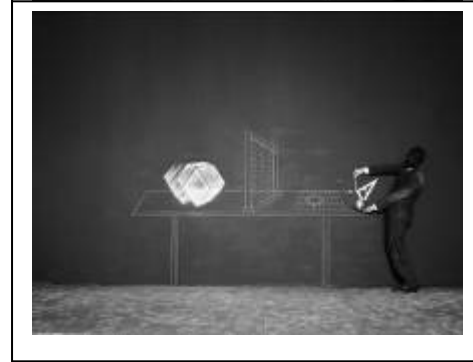
#### **8. Promenade 4. Apparatus. 2009**

This visual animation depicts a table in the form of a drawing apparatus used by artists and architects in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The function of the apparatus is to place an object or still life on one of the table; a grid or graph paper is placed on the other half on which to draw. Using the string grid situated in the centre of the table the artist is able to view through and scale the subject by using the string grid as an optic scaling mechanism.

In this Promenade the artist begins to draw at first a rhombus or diamond shape on his paper. While engaging with the drawn outline the rhombus appears as a three-dimensional form on the other side of the string grid. The object thus functions as an extension of the artist's imagination: reality appears first as fiction. The rhombus then projects itself metaphysically into space while the artist balances a triangle on the apparatus. This activity functions as a mechanism to deny gravity as the artist's spheres begin to elevate into space, almost mimicking the movement and projection of the drawn rhombus.



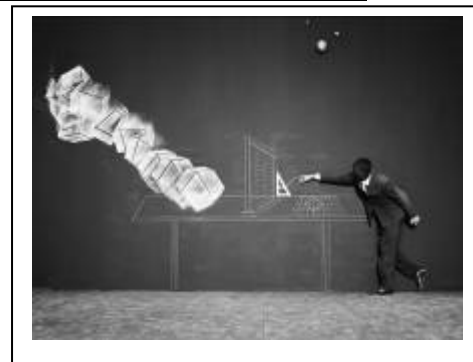
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#### **Why is the rhombus a shape that is very present in this sequence and in Promenade and Kite?**

The interest in the rhombus shape extends beyond the geometric but also towards the diamond form and its meaning. diamond possesses unique physical properties. As one of the strongest and valuable minerals, it also inherits properties relating to light refraction.

In the visual component accompanying Promenade 4 we see a geometrician drawing the outline of a rhombus, a homage to the Greek mathematician Euclid and his definition of the rhombus as a spinning top, 'to turn round and round'. This concept of a cycle or revolution allows for a new re-evaluation of Viktor Hartmann's work both as artist and engineer and his invested interest in societies pushed to the brink of the margins.



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#### **9. Ballet of the unhatched Chicks.**

*Ballad of the unhatched Chick.*  
2009

Hartmann's sketch is of children in chicken eggshell costumes for Russian ballet 'Trilbi'. The visual accompaniment to this movement begins with a child formally introducing a compass into the picture frame. The frame, a white



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positive space, functions as a dance floor or stage. This introduction between child and mathematical instrument

appears as if partnered in a choreographic dance. The compass is then set free by the child and, with its two legs moving briskly across the white surface, it leaves outlined arc-like traces as if embodying the spirit of a ballerina.

### 10. *Two Polish Jews. Bank. 2009*

Mussorgsky's movement is referred to as 'Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle'. The music is descriptive of one of Hartmann's drawings from Polish town of Sandomir. Here Hartmann again refers to the economic and social differences of that time, between the rich Jew and the other, a dirt-poor beggar. It's a scenario depicting the noble vs tragic. Mussorgsky's picture (both drawings were his own property) carries this emotion very clearly into the music with the exaggerated self-importance of the rich man the apprehensive, timid beggar.

The visual accompaniment consists of a graphic black and white animation depicting symbols taken from banks around the world. Here the bank symbols are rendered superfluous as they morph from one symbol into the next. The formal property of each symbol functions as an optic device. Its graphic nature symbolises a split second narrative that becomes frozen on retina of the eye. These symbols begin to represent our economic climate in way that is both abstract and relative, inclusive and exclusive.



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### 11. *Promenade 5. Kadet. 2009*

(part 3)

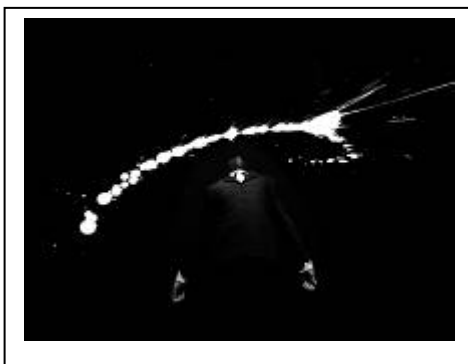
We see the 'Kadet' character reappear, leaning on a wall that is at same time the ground, stumbling as a drunken state. With difficulty he manages to balance himself onto the cubes under his feet, that in one moment become his ground or promenade while in the next vanish, thus leaving the 'Kadet' perplexed in his current state.

This visual component relates directly to Mussorgsky, himself an abuser of alcohol, walking awkwardly towards the next picture in the exhibition.

### 12. *Marketplace in Limoges. Chalk Piano. 2009*

Hartmann painted more than 150 watercolours in Limoges. These paintings celebrated the cathedral, others depicted picturesque scenes of women in the marketplace quarrelling. It was this scene that inspired Mussorgsky's movement.

The *Chalk Piano* visual component uses this movement as a breakaway from Hartmann's pictures, exploring the possibility of the piano as an instrument that could compose a picture (in this case with chalk) if your imagination allows it to. A row of chalk is lined up in the form of the piano keys. As the fingers of the pianist begin to touch the chalk the pieces shift across the blackened space creating starburst lines. The creation of these lines mimics the fast-paced rhythm of Mussorgsky's movement while the pianist struggles to maintain the fast tempo. The chalk keys rotate on the black surface creating a white trace, a remnant of the sound evoked by the keys when touched by the finger of the pianist. This haphazard routine creates tension between visual and audio, a conflict which highlights the true source of Hartmann's image.



### 13. *Catacombs - Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua. Ink Strikes. 2009*

Hartmann's painting depicts him inspecting the Paris catacombs with

a fellow architect. Mussorgsky's music for this section is a restatement of the Promenade theme. Mussorgsky added the following in Russian: "*A Latin text: 'with the dead in a dead language'. Well may it be in Latin! The creative spirit of the departed Hartmann leads me to the skulls, calls me close to them, and the skulls glow softly from within.*"

The visual component is white abstract ink that splatters across a black space. The painted action denotes a clear emotive rupture when the white mark is thrown into the black void before it slowly disappears. An emotive moment becomes shortlived, ephemeral.

When the Promenade theme recurs under the title *Con Mortuis in Lingua Mortua* a character in shadow silhouette is seen standing inside the picture. The character symbolically relates to Hartmann, re-appearing in a dream amongst splashes of ink strikes. The white ink and ghost become Hartmann with lantern in hand generating light into the bowels of the catacombs.

#### **14. The Hut on Hen's Legs. Baba Yaga. 2009**

According to Russian folklore, Baba Yaga refers to a witch-like character who dwells in a wooden house which stands on hen's legs.

Hartmann had designed a clock in the shape of Baba Yaga's wooden hut standing on chicken feet. Mussorgsky's movement however relates more to Baba Yaga and her flying through the air rather than the actual clock designed by Hartmann.

For the visual accompaniment I used printed fabrics used by Southern African witch doctors, known as *sangomas*, who practice a form of traditional healing. They perform a holistic and symbolic form of healing, embedded in the beliefs of their culture that ancestors in the afterlife guide and protect the living. Sangomas are called to heal, and through them ancestors from the spirit world can give instruction and advice to heal illness, social disharmony and spiritual difficulties. In many cases a ritual sacrifice of an animal is performed, usually a chicken. The spilling of this blood is meant to seal the bond between witch doctor and the spiritual ancestors. The colours represented in the visual component - black, white and red - are the sacred colours of sangomas in Africa. The colour white represents spiritual love, purity and virginity. Black represents sorrow, despair, death, marriage and regeneration. Red represents physical love, strong emotion, anger and heartache. The colour blue embodies the holistic state of the sky.

These three colours, white, red and black, also refer to a Russian fairytale 'Vasilissa the Beautiful' collected by Alexander Afanasyev. In the fairytale Vasilissa is sent to the house of Baba Yaga to collect light. During her time at the house she discovers three riders who pass by the house of Baba Yaga. The first rider in the colour white represents Day, the red rider the Sun, and the black the Night.

The visual component essentialises the meaning of Baba Yaga in a formalistic sense, thus beginning to touch on aspects of the spiritual world and its meaning in contemporary society.



#### **15. Great Gate of Kiev. Drowning Piano. 2009**

Mussorgsky's ceremonial movement 'The Great Gate of Kiev' was inspired by an architectural drawing by Hartmann for the gateway of Kiev, and provides us with a striking example of Russian imperial censorship exercised during this time. According to contemporary accounts, a competition was announced to commemorate the date April 4<sup>th</sup> 1866. What the censors withheld was that, on that day, the Czar narrowly escaped an attempted assassination.

Hartmann's design - an arch resting on two columns with the intention of sinking to the ground or even collapsing - could be seen as a contemporary critique on the abuse of power exercised by Russia's Imperialists and the City Council of Kiev's commemoration for a monument.

The visual component titled 'Drowning Piano' functions as a powerful motif evoked by Mussorgsky's processional movement. Here we see the piano being submerged in water, slowly drowning as water cascades onto the piano keys, then later into the piano. The relentless flow of the water into the grand piano acts as a metaphor of purging history. Once totally submerged the piano becomes a kind of lost treasure beneath the

ocean. The piano as object becomes an antiquity of our time that at first has been hidden and then finally is discovered before our eyes.

Robin Rhode.  
2009.

## PICTURES REFRAMED

*Pictures Reframed* unites two strikingly original artists—pianist Leif Ove Andsnes and visual artist Robin Rhode—in a collaborative performance centered around Mussorgsky’s epic piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Composed in 1874, *Pictures at an Exhibition* was experimental in its day and highly visual in its content. It is one of today’s most famous pieces of classical music, a work which has been visited and revisited by countless artists over its 130-year history.

Robin Rhode is known for his bold, moving creations and performance-based videos. He and Leif Ove Andsnes have conceived a program which brings together music and film in an evocative performance, featuring other solo works by Mussorgsky and Schumann, as well as a new commission by Austrian composer Thomas Larcher; the work culminates with Mussorgsky’s masterpiece.

Supporting *Pictures Reframed*, commissioning sponsor Statoil has a long tradition of supporting musical talent and presented Leif Ove Andsnes with the Statoil Award for musical excellence in 1990 as part of Young Heroes, a program which now supports many young and up-and-coming artists throughout Norway. This was the starting point for an ongoing partnership.

### LEIF OVE ANDSNES, Piano

Leif Ove Andsnes, described by *The New York Times* as “the most accomplished pianist of the new generation,” devotes much of his 2009-2010 season to *Pictures Reframed*, centered around and inspired by Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, developed in collaboration with South African artist Robin Rhode. The project (whose commissioning sponsor is Statoil) made its world premiere at Lincoln Center and will tour throughout North America and Europe. EMI Classics will release *Pictures Reframed* on CD and DVD, and Norwegian TV is documenting the project on film.

Other highlights of the season include performances of Rachmaninov’s second and fourth piano concertos and the completion of his Rachmaninov recording cycle for EMI Classics; the world premiere of a new work by Danish composer Bent Sørensen; performances of Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 23, K488 with the New York Philharmonic and Alan Gilbert; and a tour of Japan and Asia with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra.

As an exclusive EMI Classics artist, Andsnes has recorded more than 30 discs spanning repertoire from Bach to the present day. He has been nominated for seven Grammys and received four Gramophone Awards. *Shadows of Silence*, his most recent disc, features works by Sørensen, Dalbavie, Kurtag, and Lutoslawski.

Highlights from recent seasons include performances of Brahms’s Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the San Francisco Symphony; performances of Rachmaninov’s second and third piano concertos on both sides of the Atlantic, including his National Symphony Orchestra debut; a high-profile North American tour with Christian Tetzlaff; and a UK tour with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra.

Leif Ove Andsnes is co-artistic director of the Risør Chamber Music Festival, and a Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav. Born in Karmøy, Norway, in 1970, he studied at the Bergen Music Conservatory under Professor Jiri Hlinka. He has been the subject of several television programs, including England’s “South Bank Show.” He is a professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, and a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. In 2004-2005, Andsnes curated and performed seven Carnegie Hall *Perspectives* concerts, becoming the youngest artist to be honored in this prestigious series. For more information visit [www.andsnes.com](http://www.andsnes.com).

### ROBIN RHODE

Born in Cape Town in 1976, and raised in Johannesburg, the 33-year-old South African artist Robin Rhode has emerged as one of the most exciting young artists in his field, avoiding the limitations of working in one artistic realm. Rhode regularly uses performance, drawings, video, and photography to create multi-disciplinary masterpieces. His work often consists of physical human interaction with the images he creates. He draws commonplace objects on walls or on the floor, and then takes photographs or films using these objects to create a sequence of events, a fluid action or interaction. Rhode's work is convincing, especially because of its ability to straddle these opposite worlds: the real and the imaginary. He considers the world as a huge sheet of paper; every place is a potential framework for his drawings.

Based in Berlin since 2002, Rhode's growing success has shifted his guerilla tactics from the street to museums and galleries, though he continues to work in any and all locations that inspire him. In 2005 he was the youngest artist ever to be featured at the Venice Biennale's Italian Pavilion in the company of Francis Bacon, William Kentridge, and Stan Douglas, and since then he has mounted solo exhibitions at leading galleries and institutions including the Perry Rubenstein Gallery in New York, Haus der Kunst in Munich, and White Cube and the Hayward Galleries in London. His recent Hayward Gallery exhibition marked him out as the youngest ever solo exhibiting artist there. Previewing the show the *Times* wrote, "Rhode is a new kind of voice – a young, post-apartheid, mixed race South African making art that engages both with modern art and street culture."