

Night on Bald Mountain

Modest Mussorgsky

transcribed by Thomas Knox*

Modest Mussorgsky was born in Russia in 1839. Although he showed an early talent in music, he joined the army around 1856. He continued his interest in music and eventually decided to leave the army to devote his life to composition. He became one of the best-known Russian composers and was best known for his opera *Boris Godunov* and *Pictures at an Exhibition* for piano.

As early as 1860 Mussorgsky began to sketch a piece describing a brood of witches and sorcerers dancing and performing their rites. He made several attempts to finish the piece and incorporate it into larger works but was never able to complete it. Following his death in 1881, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov brought together the various sketches, edited and reorchestrated them, and produced the orchestral fantasy *Night on Bald Mountain*. Bald Mountain was actually Mount Triglav near Kiev. According to folklore, witches, sorcerers and evil spirits gathered there on Saint John's Eve for revelry. Eerie sounds and savage dances create the image of the scene. When the excitement reaches a peak, distant church bells are heard in the distance. As the witches and spirits disperse a rooster crow is heard, signaling the approach of dawn and the end of the darkness.