



Uncommon Lyricisms: Modest Musorgsky's Early Songs

Sheila D. Gunter

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Modest Musorgsky is most often considered a composer of remarkable opera, symphonic and piano works. He is not as well known, however, particularly outside his native Russia, for his art songs, possibly excepting his song, "The Song of the Flea," and his song cycles, *Songs and Dances of Death* and *The Nursery*. This book aims to present to the reader six of Musorgsky's early songs (1857-1867) that reveal his striking mastery of the smaller form of the art song. Furthermore, the brilliant ways in which Musorgsky structures and seems to conjure each song's lyrical "veins," which are often poetically astounding, are argued to possess literary and musical images and expressions that, at the very least, approach the achievements of the great song composers, such as Schubert, Schumann, Debussy, Verdi, Wagner and Musorgsky's compatriots, Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich.

Uncommon Lyricisms strives to show Musorgsky's ability to orchestrate his spontaneous lyrical "strata" in songs with the forms or character of the genres of the romance, folk song, opera and vaudeville, and to introduce the songs' poetic texts, three of which Musorgsky wrote himself, with translations and transliterations in English to aid English speakers, or speakers of languages with the Latin alphabet, with the language "barrier." It is the author's belief that, once the reader becomes more acquainted with Musorgsky's songs, he or she will be struck, in these compositions' – supposedly – smaller scale, by the powerful expression, atmospheric beauty and comic humor that Musorgsky summons forth within them.

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