



The world of the child is marvellous, magical, naïve, pure, carefree and vulnerable. I wanted to delve into this world, to see through the eyes of a child myself. The Russian composers whose pieces I play here felt the same nostalgia for this lost innocence, and hoped as I did to recreate the world as seen from a child's perspective. Upon crossing this threshold one enters the marvellous universe of sparkling colour and bright, dazzling sound that occurs in fairy tales, games, and children's imaginations, and partakes of the beauty that praises the loving heart and kindness towards others. Fables, games and the imaginary are paths that lead to the heart of the child, to his world, his thoughts, his desires and his way of seeing. They also open the door to bubbling springs of beauty. All that ennobles the soul and allows the child to commune with the splendours of the natural world and to marvel at the beauty of humankind and its myriad accomplishments heightens his sensibilities and shapes his mind, awakening in him the desire to live and create in accordance with the laws of beauty.

Music for children includes descriptive tableaux of nature and youthful entertainments. It is a world of fairy tales and joyful dances. Writing music to be played by children is not a simple task for a composer. He must convincingly combine artistic qualities with a pedagogical approach that targets a specific stage in the child's musical development. Achieving this goal requires special talent and a great deal of experience.

The 'children's album', a group of pieces written specifically for children, mirrors their world. It presents a colourful universe of games, dances, and impressions, brought together in a creative synthesis addressed to children rather than adults. When they are studied, however, these pieces raise questions whose resolution demands a certain degree of maturity: they are, in fact, for children and adults alike. When taken literally they can be given a pure, naïve and playful 'childlike' reading, but they may also be played in a more profound 'adult' way that brings out their musical substratum. Pieces in children's albums have specific characteristics including a highly precise structure and great clarity of form. Their melodic language, linked by songs and dances to the child's everyday activities as well as his musical practice, makes them comprehensible and accessible.

One of the conditions for writing children's works is the use of much-loved themes from fairy tales such as the witch Baba Yaga, the villainous Barmaley, Thumbelina, wooden soldiers, dolls and bells. These themes are portrayed with broad brush-strokes in a way that enables them to be easily recognised and reproduced. The child's world portrayed in these albums is a rich and complex one. It touches upon games, entertainment and fairy tale characters as well as the first inklings of the mysteries of life, death and God, and feelings of nascent sensuality. Just as in their works for adults, composers of children's albums attempt to portray life in all its variety. In children's pieces, however, they avoid life's difficulties, and confer sincere, deep feelings upon the characters they portray. When listened to carefully, children's albums seem to overflow with adult wisdom. The child who enters their musical space comes into contact with the spiritual values of universal culture.

These albums also contain material with pedagogical value. They cover a very wide period – almost two centuries of Russian music – and were written for students of varying ages, from the youngest beginner to the more experienced adolescent. The composers of these works ask a great deal of their youthful performers, on the grounds that such demands are a necessary condition for musical progress. They aim to develop the child's ear as well as his imagination, to help him acquire basic knowledge of their stylistic rules, the melodic characteristics of their harmonic language, and of the forms that are used in creating a perfectly realised musical image.

Almost all the members of the Russian piano school were brought up on this repertoire. These cycles offer innumerable possibilities for artistic expression for both students and professionals. They should unquestionably be played not only in music schools but also on the concert stage. Dmitry Shostakovich's advice to young musicians is eminently a propos in this wise: "Love and study the great art that is music. It will enable you to enter a world of deep emotion. It will enrich you spiritually, making you purer and more perfect. Through music you will find strengths of which you were unaware. You will see life with unexpected nuance and colour."

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