Somnia

Denis Kozhukhin

PROKOFIEV · SHOR · TCHAIKOVSKY

SOMNIA

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Music for Children, Op. 65

1	No. 1, Morning	2. 07
2	No. 2, Promenade	1. 06
3	No. 3, A little story	2. 30
4	No. 4, Tarantella	1. 09
5	No. 5, Regret	2. 01
6	No. 6, Waltz	1. 18
7	No. 7, Parade of grasshoppers	1. 03
8	No. 8, The rain and the rainbow	1. 20
9	No. 9, Playing tag	0. 56
10	No. 10, March	1. 11
11	No. 11, Evening	2. 12
12	No. 12, The moon strolls in the meadow	1. 30

Alexey Shor (b. 1970)

Piano Sonata No. 2

13	I. Moderato. Allegretto	5. 07
14	II. Adagio con grazia	4. 20
15	III. Molto Allegro con fuoco	3. 50

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Children's Album, Op. 39

16	No. 1, Morning prayer	1. 25
17	No. 2, Winter morning	1. 05
18	No. 3, Playing hobby-horses	0. 36
19	No. 4, Mama	1. 07
20	No. 5, March of the wooden soldiers	0. 53
21	No. 6, The sick doll	1. 54
22	No. 7, The doll's funeral	2. 01
23	No. 8, Waltz	1. 16
24	No. 9, The new doll	0. 31
25	No. 10, Mazurka	1. 12
26	No. 11, Russian song	0. 43
27	No. 12, The accordion player	0. 55
28	No. 13, Kamarinskaya	0. 34
29	No. 14, Polka	0. 54
30	No. 15, Italian song	0. 52
31	No. 16, Old French song	0. 59
32	No. 17, German song	0. 55
33	No. 18, Neapolitan song	1. 03
34	No. 19, Nanny's story	1. 23
35	No. 20, The witch	0. 43
36	No. 21, Sweet dreams	1. 49
37	No. 22, Lark song	0. 53

38	No. 23, The organ-grinder sings	0. 55
39	No. 24, In church	2. 33

Total playing time: 59. 12

Denis Kozhukhin, piano

This album is very special to me, as it is in a way like traveling back in time to my childhood. Tchaikovsky's "Album for the Young" was among the pieces I performed at my first “official” recital. The work is a unique journey across children's fairytales, toys, dreams, losses and discoveries. The brief tale of a doll who falls ill and then dies captures the beauty and transience of life, offering a subtle philosophical introduction to the fragility of human existence. Prokofiev's naughty and hypnotic set of pieces was meant indeed to encourage young pianists to broaden and sharpen their technical abilities. The title “easy”, I'd say, is meant rather sarcastically, something which characterises many of his works. Alexey Shor's music is often autobiographical and nostalgic. His Sonata with its emotional fluctuations, bold contrasts and reflective melodies completes this album with something very special, as we are hearing the voice and the sounds of a life’s journey, with all its angles along the way, of a composer who lives and creates today.

Is this album a view of the world through the eyes of a child?
Or is it maybe the view of an adult, realizing that it is through the eyes of a child that the world really looks as it should...

Denis Kozhukhin

In loving memory of my parents

Pyotr Tchaikovsky's was a busy life. When not teaching at the Moscow Conservatory (at least until 1878, when he could finally hand in his resignation from a job he roundly disliked), he travelled extensively throughout the Russian Empire, Western Europe, and – on one occasion – even to North America. Composition took up much of his time, of course, as did administrative matters and social obligations. Relaxation came in the form of holidays spent on the country estates of his family and friends. He was particularly fond of Kamianka, the estate belonging to his sister, Alexandra, and her husband, Lev Davydov. He was also a frequent visitor to Brailiv and Verbivka, which belonged to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck. All of these are now situated in an independent Ukraine, but at the time, they were part of the Russian Empire – and are, for this reason, sometimes still referred to by their Russian names of Kamenka, Brailov, and Verbovka.

Tchaikovsky sketched his *Children's Album*, Op. 39, in April and May 1878, whilst staying at Kamianka, completing it at Verbivka that summer. He had first had the idea of writing a sequence of short piano piece that February, shortly after finishing his opera, *Eugene Onegin*, as well as the Fourth Symphony. Work on these major compositions had left him drained, as had the emotional crisis that followed his disastrous marriage to a young music student, Antonina Milyukova, in 1877, whom he married largely to quell rumours about his homosexuality. Piano miniatures were, it seemed, all that Tchaikovsky was capable of, and they had the added appeal of bringing in some much needed income. As he wrote to his publisher, Pyotr Jurgenson: "I want to try to write a series of simple pieces, or *Kinderstücke*. This will be a pleasure for me, and for you – possibly even profitable." Piano miniatures indeed sold well, and around this time, he also composed *The Seasons*, Op. 37a, and the *Twelve Pieces of Moderate Difficulty*, Op. 40, all of which were clearly aimed at the lucrative amateur market.

There were other sources of inspiration too. The *Children's Album* is subtitled "à la Schumann" and it certainly has many affinities with the famous *Kinderszenen* that Schumann composed some forty years earlier. The twenty-four short movements pieces that make up Tchaikovsky's homage to his German predecessor evoke the everyday pleasures of the life in the nineteenth-century gentry home – at least for its residents upstairs. It is a wholesome world full of childish games, play-acting, dancing, and genteel music-making, often at level of accomplishment that can be hard to imagine nowadays. Its dedication is to Tchaikovsky's beloved nephew, Vladimir, then aged six. Fifteen years later, Tchaikovsky would dedicate his intensely emotional Sixth Symphony, Op. 74 – the *Symphonie pathétique* – to him.

Sergei Prokofiev's early years were spent on a country estate at Sontsivka, near Donetsk in modern-day Ukraine (the city's airport is still named after him). His father was an agronomist who managed the estate, whilst his mother oversaw the education of her precocious son, who was just four when he had his first piano lessons. He soon began to compose too, writing piano miniatures and even attempting a number of juvenile operas. In the summers of 1902 and 1903, he received his first formal instruction from the Kyiv-born composer and teacher, Reinhold Glière, before transferring to the conservatory in St Petersburg, then the capital of the Russian Empire, in 1904.

There, Prokofiev gained a reputation as something of an *enfant terrible*, as infamous for his modernist music as he was for his aloof, acerbic personality. After the October Revolution, he lived mostly in Western Europe and North America, where he was often hailed – or

equally derided – as a musical "Bolshevik". Unlike many members of the emigration, he retained his Soviet passport, and from 1927, he made a number of trips back to the Soviet Union. One of these took place in 1935, when he brought his Spanish-born wife, Lina, and their two young sons, Sviatoslav and Oleg. They spent an idyllic summer together in the village of Polenovo in the countryside to the south of Moscow. A year later, Prokofiev and his family settled permanently in the Soviet Union.

It was in Polenovo that Prokofiev composed the dozen short and simple pieces that make up his *Music for Children*, Op. 65. He was clearly inspired by the summer he had spent with his wife and children, walking, swimming, and playing tennis and volleyball with fellow musicians from the Bolshoi Theatre.
He was also inspired by the beauty of the natural environment, as well as by similar cycles of piano miniatures by Schumann and Tchaikovsky. But there was a potentially ideological aspect to the work too. Artistic policy in the Soviet Union was based on the doctrine of Socialist Realism, which expected artists to produce works that were readily accessible to the masses. For Prokofiev, this entailed abandoning the often dissonant and avantgarde style he had espoused in the 1920s and embracing instead a new form of simplicity. In fact, he had been moving in such a direction for some time already, so the composition of *Music for Children* – like that of the much more famous *Peter and the Wolf* – feels more like a fortunate coincidence than a piece of political opportunism or creative expediency.

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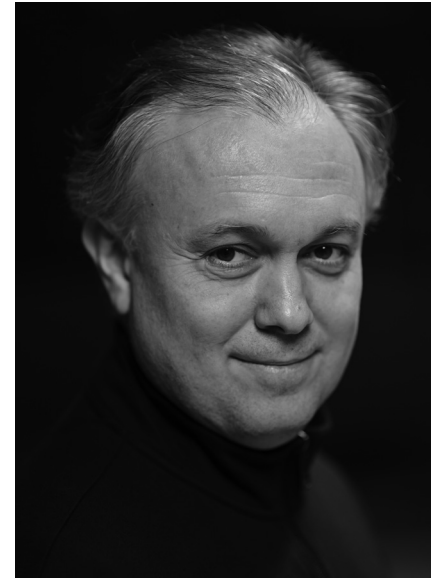
Born in Ukraine in 1970, Alexey Shor emigrated to Israel in 1991 and now resides principally in the United States. Having initially trained as a mathematician, he embarked on a musical career later in life, and his compositions have been taken up by instrumentalists and ensembles around the world.

Shor's Piano Sonata No. 2 takes listeners on a rich emotional narrative, where the piano becomes a vessel for the complexity of human experience. Permeated by dramatic contrasts and with shifting moods that suggest the highs and lows experienced over the course of a lifetime, the work captures a range of emotions, from turmoil and introspection to eventual hope and renewal. Each movement brings a distinct world of emotional exploration, blending Shor's signature lyrical melodies with complex harmonic choices.

The opening movement – which adheres to the conventional sonata form that emerged in the classical period – explores a dialogue between contrasting moods. This is followed by a more contemplative slow second movement, where Shor brings a sense of quiet introspection, inviting a moment of clarity. The finale is a rondo that brings about an energetic conclusion, propelling us forward with unstoppable momentum unto a final, optimistic resolution.



Alexey Shor
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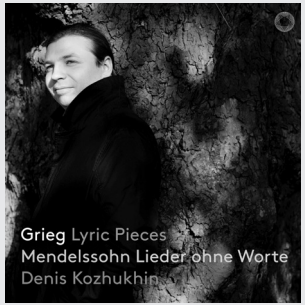

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