

The genre of pictures in music has a special place in programmatic piano music. Famous predecessors in this genre of Russian piano music were Rachmaninoff's *Etudes-Tableaux* and Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. While the pieces in the *Etudes-Tableaux* are not programmatic pieces, the title suggests a picturesque album of characteristic pieces.. Both sets of pieces recorded on this CD, *The Musical Toys* by Sofia Gubaidulina and *Echoes of the Theatre* by Anatoly Alexandrov, are albums with pictures of the past.

The title of the CD, *Impressions*, is closely related to the meaning of each piece on the CD. Each piece in each of the sets is a reflection of something external: sound, image, scene, or atmosphere. Each set invites the listener to also reflect on and co-experience the world. As in today's world, many people identify themselves through the picture on a screen, the album invites one to reflect upon life through the sound and atmosphere. If we attend to our experiences carefully, the impressions of life beautifully translate into the language of music, language of symbols, and imagination. This CD is exactly a portrayal of such: impressions of the world through sound.

Sofia Gubaidulina, *Musical Toys*

Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931) is considered to be one of the most important Russian female composers of the 20th century. A student of Dmitri Shostakovich, Gubaidulina composed many pieces for orchestra, chorus, chamber instruments, and solo instruments. Her piano works include *Toccata-Troncata* (1971), *Invention* (1974), *Chaconne* (1962), *Sonata* (1965), and the *Concerto Introitus* (1978). Sofia Gubaidulina's set of 14 short pieces is subtitled *A Collection of Piano Pieces for Children* (1969). The set was composed during Gubaidulina's early period ("The date

of my birth as a composer was quite late – 1965, when I was already 34."¹). Each piece in the cycle represents a memory of the composer's childhood experience. Each miniature presents us with an intricate blend of the composer's emotions for each object or atmosphere, memory, and experience of it. A performer is challenged to find a set of tone qualities and to have a vivid imagination to relate to each piece. The composer uses various compositional techniques to evoke a sound image: tone clusters ("Mechanical accordion", "Trumpeter in the Forest", "Echo"), silently depressed keys ("Trumpeter in the Forest", "Echo"), counterpoint ("April Day"), modes ("Song of the Fisherman"), jazz idioms ("Bear Playing the Double Bass and the Black Women"), and the 12-tone method ("The Trumpeter in the Forest", "April Day", "The Elk Clearing"). Even though, the composer herself regarded *The Musical Toys* as pieces she would have loved to perform when she was a child, the set requires a wide range of musical, imaginative, and technical skills. Finally, the set is a soulful homage to her early years, and it is done with a masterful composition technique and with intricately instilled expressions that only a mature musician could fully understand and appreciate.

The Mechanical Accordion

"The Mechanical Accordion", a playful and upbeat piece, reflects upon a fleeting memory of a winding toy. A simple, vocal-like melody is interwoven with the mellow tone-clusters, creating a tuneful and somewhat dance-like atmosphere. This kind of texture imitates a folk singer who accompanies him or herself on an accordion, a typical image from the Russian folk culture. The piece lasts less than 30 seconds, but it is metrically inconsistent: the meter switches almost every

¹ Dimitri Smirnov, "From Where I Sit: Sofia Gubaidulina," *Gramophone*, September 2001, 23. Quoted in Jennifer Denise Milne, "The Rhythm of Form: Compositional Processes in the Music of Sofia Gubaidulina" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2007), 21.

measure, ranging from 3/4 to 4/4 to 5/4. The melodic notes are syncopated and repeated, and with the interrupted tone clusters and metric instability, the piece engages in a momentous spontaneity.

Magic Roundabout

If you have not experienced being on a merry-go-round in a long time, you surely will enjoy a giddy ride in this piece. This magic carousel invites one to experience the world spinning out of control and upside down. Gubaidulina found a perfect compositional device to portray such an activity. The piece starts with the call-and-response pattern, a typical form of interaction in Russian traditional culture. Moreover, the pattern of the 'call' element is repeated 37 times in the piece, starting from different notes! The composer marks the piece with the tempo “Vivo” and assigns a metronome marking of 126 beats per whole note. The piece is surely set to spin your head around!

The Trumpeter in the Forest

When I was a little girl, all the trees in the forest seemed to blend with the high blue skies. It was a happy time. The forest was this magical place where nature could talk to you with a gentle shift of the air and hear you back through the sound of an echo. I never felt alone or scared, as I always knew my way through the woods. This piece is truly fascinating; it should be called "The Trumpeter in the Magic Forest." In this miniature, you can hear a distinct call of the trumpeter. However, the sound of the trumpeter disperses through the woods fast, leaving only a trace of the brass sound. The trace of that sound, however, does not seem to mirror the original call. Moreover, it is not really an echo from the trumpeter. What you hear as an echo is really a response from the forest. The pianist needs to find a variety of tone qualities for each of the

characters: the precise brass sound of a trumpet and a rich tone palate for the forest. The composer uses three compositional techniques to create this mysterious and magic atmosphere. First, she uses an extended piano technique: silently depressed keys. There are only three silently depressed keys in this piece (G-flat, D-flat, and C). These notes are depressed during the holding of other notes, which creates a different dimension in the sound. Usually, this action allows the corresponding strings to vibrate freely, thus creating a kind of reverberating effect. However, since the keys are silently depressed while other notes are held, the longer notes project the faintest bleat of recently struck keys. The second technique that Gubaidulina featured in this piece is the complex 12-tone technique, a compositional device that explores all 12 notes of a chromatic scale. The music brings a sparse burst of energy accurately divided into three short sections. Each of the sections unfolds a chromatic tone collection: the first section explores 10 pitches, leaving out C and C#, while the second section explores 11 tones pitches, leaving out G#, and finally, the last section picks up these 3 notes and features an entire 12-tone row. The third technique of tone clusters was already featured in "The Mechanical Accordion". While in "The Mechanical Accordion" the tone clusters represent the character of the accordion (as opposed to the vocal-like melody of a folk singer) and the "call" part from the call-and-response pattern, the tone clusters in "The Trumpeter in the Forest" is the "response". It is opposite to The Mechanical Accordion in its presentation. While in the first piece two set clusters are featured throughout, tone clusters here are an unfolding element. A tone cluster here only becomes it in time, through chromatic note-by-note formation reminiscent of a dispersed echo through the forest. This 'response' of the forest is featured in all three sections, outlining three different intervals: a perfect fifth in the first and second sections (D-A and C-G), and a perfect fourth F-B-flat in the last section. Interestingly, if the first two intervals are flipped from a perfect fifth to a

perfect fourth and disassembled, then the following notes formulate a scale: F-G-A-B-flat-C-D. This scale is only missing E to be called a diatonic F major or D minor scale. It is magnificent to see that the composer employs a combination of chromatic and diatonic collections to portray the conversation between characters: trumpeter and the forest. It is also symbolic that the composer used two opposite properties of wood and brass to create a conversation between a trumpeter and nature.

The Magic Smith

The translated title of the piece, *The Magic Smith*, is somewhat incorrect as it does not pick up the connotation of the original Russian title “кузнец-колдун”. This piece was inspired by the composer’s own music to the animated movie *Blacksmith the Magician* after the fairy tale “Blacksmith Enrie” by the French writer Luda. The moral of the fairy tale is that envy, gossip, and ill judgment have no power over truth and righteousness. The movie was produced in 1967, two years before *The Musical Toys* set was composed. In the music for the movie, the composer turned to a marimba to imitate the work of blacksmiths. The piano piece is divided into three sections and a codetta. The piece clearly features two distinct characters or actions in sections one and two. The first section communicates a busy and highly energetic work at a blacksmith shop, featuring repeated notes in alternating hands. This texture changes quickly in the second section, where a lower, syncopated voice immerses with accents and rushing dynamics. The piece finishes on a low A-flat minor chord and the soaring notes E-A-B spread across nine measures.

April Day

The mood of the piece is rather worrisome and wary. The instability of dynamics, the restless repetitiveness of certain notes, and motives give a sense of an unpleasant and somewhat diabolic atmosphere. Gubaidulina employed two compositional techniques that add to the odd feeling of this piece. First, the piece has traces of the two-voice fughetta genre. While the form of the fugue is the most complex of contrapuntal forms, the fughetta is not as strict. The composer features both essential elements of the genre: the “subject” and “answer”. While in a strict fugue the “answer” must enter a perfect fifth above the “subject”, in this fughetta the “answer” emerges as a diminished fifth below the “subject”. Also, the “subject” in its original structure is seen only once, but its motivic resemblance returns in the second half of the piece in forte with a pecking-like sound. The second technique that Gubaidulina employs is a 12-tone technique, the same technique she used for "The Trumpeter in the Forest". Both the “subject” and the “answer” explore the full 12 tones of the scale. An exploration into the 12-tone technique explains why the “answer” is written a diminished fifth below the “subject”: it is a midpoint, first tone of the second half of the 12-tone scale (seventh tone). An exploration of the 20th-century compositional device (the 12-tone technique) within the contrapuntal genre that goes back into the Middle Ages really creates a bizarre and out-of-place atmosphere in this piece.

The Song of the Fisherman

"The Song of the Fisherman" evokes a song from afar. The title also serves as a reminder of a biblical story of Christ as he called four fishermen to follow him. It is intriguing that Gubaidulina revealed at one time that she “has never written non-religious pieces.”² A peaceful

² Lukomsky, “The Eucharist in my fantasy: Interview with Sofia Gubaidulina.” *Tempo* 206 (Sept. 1998): 29-35

diatonic collection of notes is presented in different rhythms six times in the piece. Each time the melody is featured, it is wholesome and amiable. Written not in any particular key but with lots of accidentals, it emphasizes the spontaneity of nature and the power of freedom. The accompaniment, though, is based on an open interval of a perfect fifth often resembling a deep and profound organ sound. While the accompaniment features a predictably steady perfect fifth, the right hand's melody also outlines a perfect fifth between the starting and finishing notes of the melodic line. Later, this interval occurs 31 times, crossing all of the registers of the piano and with the last one played on silently depressed keys. Both elements, the soft and expressive melody featured solely in the middle register and a constantly sounding interval of a perfect fifth across all registers of the piano, could also be understood symbolically: human voice as the melody and celestial sonorities presented by the perfect 5ths across registers of the piano. Once, Gubaidulina mentioned in an interview regarding her chamber piece *In Croce* that she uses two different instruments, the cello and the organ, as two different personalities:

In that particular combination, I imagined the organ as a mighty spirit that sometimes descends to earth to vent its wrath. The cello, on the other hand, with its sensitively responsive strings is a completely human spirit. The contrast between these two opposite natures is resolved spontaneously in the symbol of the cross. I accomplished this first of all by crisscrossing the registers (the organ takes the line downward, the cello upward)...³

³ Kurtz, Michael, Malcolm Hamrick Brown, and Christoph K. Lohmann. *Sofia Gubaidulina: A Biography*. Foreword by Mstislav Rostropovich. 1st English ed., revised and expanded. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

The Little Tit

The Little Tit is a singing bird that is famous for its diverse range of calls and trills. In this miniature, Gubaidulina depicts delicate birdsong and its travel from place to place. Wide range of registers and dynamic create expressive dialogue between different calls.

A Bear Playing the Double Bass and the Black Women

To a young child, any large object seems to be even bigger and more powerful, be it a person or a musical instrument. Through this piece, the composer might have recalled a powerful memory of her first experience of jazz music when she naively imagined a bear, not a person, playing the double bass. From the very beginning, the lower registers of the piano are mimicking the double bass' characteristic walking bass-line in a distinct improvisatory style.

The Woodpecker

There are two commonalities between "The Woodpecker" and "The Song of the Fisherman". First, the accompaniment and the melody present two opposing elements with chords travelling across registers. Second, as in "The Song of the Fisherman", the accompaniment in "The Woodpecker" features an interval of a fifth, only this time brought in a combination with a middle note, forming a triad. True to the woodpecker, the tapping sound in this piece takes center stage as the melody. The illusion of real tapping is always done on one note. As in "The Trumpeter in the Forest", the effect of echo is also important here. While there

is no direct reference to an echo, the undamped strings of the sustained chords create slight resonances, bringing a distant allusion to echo.

The Elk Clearing

As in April Day, this piece is in a contrapuntal style with “subject” and “answer”, both also featuring a full 12-tone row. But as opposed to the suspenseful atmosphere of April Day, The Elk Clearing brings a calm and serene mood.

Sleigh with Little Bells

This piece reminds me of a dear Christmas ornament kept from childhood that brings intimate and cherished memories of winter festivities. The miniature opens in a higher register with a static winding flow, suggesting an impersonal toy-like character. In the very opening, we hear a sound painting of a delicate toy. The miniature communicates more of a detached feeling than a memory of a real sleigh ride. Closer to the middle of the piece, the dynamic changes and the motion becomes more adventurous as the tinkering melody is replaced by more subtle tone clusters in middle registers.

The Echo

One of the most conceptual pieces in the set, "The Echo" features the B-A-C-H motive, the motive used by the composer Bach as his musical signature (the notes B-flat-A-C-B). First, it is only an echo of the B-A-C-H motive, as it is transposed (G-F-sharp-A-G). Second, it is the last reflection of the Baroque style in the set (previously, the pieces "April Day" and "Elk Clearing")

featured contrapuntal form). Third, this motive is performed on the silently depressed keys and heard as a distant echo through the notes of the lower register on the left hand.

Another element that is significant here is how the tone cluster technique has been transformed since its appearance in the first piece of the set. While in "The Mechanical Accordion" the tone clusters were used to simulate the sounds of a toy, in "The Echo" the tone clusters outline seven notes of the C-major scale. Moreover, the featured seven notes of the full C major scale are written partially on the silently depressed keys (G-A-B-C) and partially on the fully pressed accentuated notes (C-D-E-F). This reference to a C-major diatonic scale after the B-A-C-H motive is not an accident. During Bach's era, featuring a certain key carried some emotional value, and composers considered it common information when writing their compositions. With the dominance of the equal temperament since the second decade of the 20th century, the consideration of a key characteristic became an old art. Through this piece, Gubaidulina pays tribute to J.S. Bach and emphasizes a pure C-major scale in a new way through partially played tone clusters. Since for J.S. Bach's culture C-major communicated innocence and simplicity, placing it in a set of 'A Collection of Piano Pieces for Children' makes sense.

The Drummer

The percussive sound of a drum opens the piece with the festive atmosphere. This happy and spontaneous piece is also written in C major which is strongly emphasized through the persistent repetition of the note C, and by featuring C-major arpeggios that spill all over different registers of the keyboard. The composer indicates a fast tempo for this piece, with a precise metronome marking: ♩=144. If played too fast, though, this piece would lose sense of the rhythmical precision of a march.

Forest Musicians

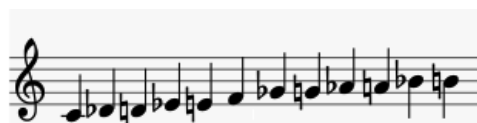
The last piece in the set features several devices that Gubaidulina already used in the previous miniatures, especially tone clusters and perfect fifths crossing registers. It is interesting how she brings all the characters from the first 13 miniatures together in this piece. She introduces new musical material with compositional devices from other pieces that certainly remind us of characters who have previously appeared in the set, such as a little tit, a woodpecker, a fisherman, a trumpeter and an echo.

While in other pieces she introduced two opposite scales, the 12-tone scale and diatonic scale, here she features whole-tone scale. The effect of this scale is that no single tone stands out. Perhaps it sends the message that all the characters that have been introduced throughout the set and mentioned in this piece have the same value and point of interest.

Another new device that Gubaidulina brings to this piece is a technique that is slightly modified from the silently depressed keys technique. In an asterisk below the score (measures 5–6), she asks the performer to change hands on the silently depressed A-flat minor chord. After tracing all previously featured silently depressed keys in the set, I realized that the pitches of the A-flat minor chord were the only ones missing in a full 12-tone collection. If one was to name Gubaidulina's own musical signature in the set, one could find it to be the technique of silently depressed keys. Below is a chart showing the distribution of silently depressed keys throughout the cycle:

Piece number	No.3	No.6	No.9	No.12	No.14
Featured silently	G-flat	D	G-flat	G, A, B,	A-flat
depressed keys keys	D-flat	A	B-flat	C, E, F	C-flat
	C		D-flat		E-flat

Now, if you were to look at the full twelve-tone scale from C4-C5, you would find all these tones



on the scale:

From a B-A-C-H motive in the Echo to the composer's own signature of silently-depressed twelve-tone scale fully fulfilled in the last piece of the set, the collection is not only the composer's reflection upon her own childhood, but a reflection upon musical styles, compositional techniques and their effects. The set is also a reflection of Gubaidulina's introspective examination of herself and her place as a composer in the lineage of music history.

Anatoly Alexandrov, *Echoes of the Theatre*

Anatoly Alexandrov (1888-1982) was a master of shorter pieces, but he also wrote a few chamber works, four operas, and two symphonies. As one of the longest living composers, he enjoyed various musical careers including concert pianist, composer, professor at the Moscow Conservatory, orchestra conductor and the head editor at the main Soviet radio station.

Alexandrov also served as director of the children's music department for the Union of Soviet Composers, writing music for children's films. For many years he also served as a head

conductor of the orchestra at the Chamber Theatre of Moscow. Even though he finished his formal musical education as a pianist, the laboratory for his composition experiments became theater, where he performed, composed, and conducted music for the classical and romantic comedies and dramas. While *Echoes of Theatre* op. 6 (1945) was composed in the last year of WWII, the cycle is filled with joy, hope, and youthful excitement. The pieces are lyrical and poetic, resembling romantic theatrical scenes. Composed for the piano, these pieces are challenging to a pianist technically and musically, and often resemble rich orchestral canvases. Technical difficulties include a call for a large hand span (up to a tenth), excellent coordination due to the frequent leaps and quick changes of character, and exquisite sense of phrasing. The programmatic nature of each piece, though, helps to understand how these technical requirements and musical challenges create vivid and lively characters. Each of the pieces is an echo of a theatrical pastoral scene: "Aria", "Galliarde and Pavana", "Chorale and Polka", "Waltz", "Dances in the Square and Siciliana", "Gavotte". The set mesmerizes with a wide variety of characters and invites both performers and listeners alike to create their own stories while participating in this musical journey.

A wide array of dance genres in the set suggests the festive setting of an idyllic play. "Aria", the first piece, is a beautiful work in a Romantic style that introduces four voices, which then expand to five. While the prolonged melodic phrases in the soprano voice is the most clearly accentuated, the other voices are no less expressive or individual. The movement resembles a stand-alone, concert-type of aria. This genre is a self-contained expressive piece with a beautiful, fully evolved accompaniment, showing off not just the singer, but the full capacity of the instrument. The second movement, "Galliarde and Pavana", are Renaissance dances that originated in Italy. While the "Galliarde" is characterized by a quicker pace, the

"Pavane" is a slow, stately dance. "Galliarde" appears to be an energetic, even athletic dance with leaps and jumps. It usually contains five steps in one measure. Its movement is quick, busy, and exciting. Frequent repetitions and switches of register bring a joyful and happy atmosphere. As oppose to the galliarde, a pavane is a processional couple dance. In the set, it is placed in between two sections of "Galliarde" at a calm pace. It truly becomes an isle of peace and rest in between the introduction and return of the vigorous "Galliarde". The "Chorale and Polka" is the next set of paired genre evocations. While the "Chorale" is in a slow tempo with a four-voice chordal structure, regular phrases, and bell-like effects, the "Polka" is almost a satire upon the Chorale's deliberate progression. In contrary to the somber "Chorale", the lively folk-like character of the "Polka" bubbles with rapid runs, turns, and accentuated ends of phrases. The next movement switches from the variety and complexity of previously movements to the single dance genre of the "Waltz." It is a charming, melodious piece with lots of repetition, dynamic changes, and tempo variations. One needs to be careful when performing the piece to not oversimplify it, making the repetitions monotonous; rather it should be charming and elegant. Perhaps, in the next pair of dances Alexandrov was thinking of a Renaissance Italian scene. As in the "Galliarde and Pavane", in the dances in "Squere and Siciliane", the first part of this pair has an upbeat character. It features intricate rhythms, while the second part, the "Siciliane", is more reflective and contemplative character piece. The last work of the set, "Gavotte", is a joyful piece with a triumphant end.

Echoes of the Theatre is truly a sensational picture album of memoirs from the theater. It is a breathtaking journey through the composer's vivid imagination.

