



Arizona State University

School of Music

GUEST ARTIST CONCERT SERIES

NIKITA KOSHKIN

COMPOSER AND GUITARIST

KATZIN CONCERT HALL
Wednesday, September 15, 1999 • 7:30 p.m.



PROGRAM

Prelude and Waltz: Homage to Segovia

Rain

Elves: Suite for Solo Guitar

- Gavotta
- Valse
- March
- Melody
- Galop

Three Stations on One Road

The Ballads: Suite for Solo Guitar

- Allegretto
- Moderato
- Con Moto
- Adagio Molto
- Moderato, Vivo

There will be a 10-minute intermission

The Prince's Toys: Suite for Guitar

- The Mischievous Prince
- The Mechanical Monkey
- The Doll with Blinking Eyes
- Playing Soldiers
- The Prince's Coach
- Grand Toys' Parade (Theme with variations)

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EVENTS HOTLINE
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Program Notes

Composer-performers who write primarily for their own instruments plow furrows narrow but deep. Paganini pushed back the technical limits of the violin, gaining for the instrument a new range of musical possibilities. Chopin's music unleashed the expressive potential of the piano to the great profit of later composers. The ambition of the Russian composer-guitarist Nikita Koshkin in writing music for his instrument has been twofold: to expand the vocabulary of effects on the guitar; and, more importantly, to develop means to incorporate these into musical expressions.

Born in Moscow in 1956, Koshkin recalls liking the music of Shostakovich and Stravinsky at age 4. His parents planned a diplomatic career for young Nikita, however, and until he was 14, rock was his only musical interest. That year, his grandfather gave him a guitar and a recording by Segovia, and his life was changed. Composing for and playing the guitar became his double passion, and he went on to study guitar with George Emanov at the Moscow College of Music, and with Alexander Frauchi at the Gnesin Institute (Russian Academy of Music), where he also studied composition with Victor Egorov. Koshkin's composing profile gained international stature in 1980, when Vladimir Mikulka premiered his suite for guitar, *The Prince's Toys*. Koshkin's music, which includes scores for guitar ensembles and works for guitar with other instruments and the voice, has since been performed by artists such as John Williams, the Assad Duo, and the Zagreb and Amsterdam Guitar Trios. Koshkin is also an active concertizer, with tours of Russia, Central and Western Europe, Great Britain and the United States to his credit. His first CD was made in Arizona through Soundset Recordings while he was in the United States in 1997 as a featured artist of the Guitar Foundation of America International Convention in southern California.

The composer calls his *Prelude and Waltz: Homage to Segovia* "a light remembrance" of the master. Written in the year of Segovia's death (1987), the two-movement form derives from early examples of paired movements, especially pavanne-galliard. The brooding prelude leads easily to the whimsical waltz by way of motivic relationship: the theme of the waltz mirrors the prelude's five-note motto.

An early example of Koshkin's desire to exploit "the impressionistic possibilities" of his instrument is *Rain*, composed in 1974. As with many Koshkin pieces, it is programmatic. The program here depicts a gentle rain that becomes a torrent, then a major storm, and then a few vestigial drops. Koshkin had in mind as vague models some of the water-oriented piano pieces of Debussy and Ravel, but his approach is wholly idiomatic to the guitar. Freely structured, written without barlines, *Rain* conjures the initial muttering of its subject matter by playing on a combination of closed and open strings, and goes on to press the guitar dynamically and texturally. "It was my first attempt to make a cinematic effect," the composer recalls.

The *Elves* was inspired by fairy-tales as were many of Koshkin's other early guitar works. According to the composer, "Five movements reflect different states of those mystical creatures who could be lovely and angry, friendly and frightening, funny and ugly. Merrily stumbling Gavotta opens the cycle. It is followed by easy flying Valse, clumsy March and extremely lyrical Melody. The final Galop, filled with a dark grotesque and ruthless rhythmical pulse, is what I imagine to be an Elves' party."

"From the very beginning," says Koshkin, "I felt that the guitar could express itself in many various styles while still being a classical instrument. That's why I like very much to turn from one style to another reaching diversity within my only touch of the instrument. *Three Stations On One Road* expresses my interest in jazz music on classical guitar. It is ballad-like with a fast middle section, typical jazzy octaves, wide chords and closed strings' rhythm. In recent years I have also collected many impressions from folk and popular music. My suite, *The Ballads*, appears as a reflection of all these impressions, supported by the experience of my youth when I was a rock

guitarist. Notwithstanding the popular style in which I've written on this occasion, I consider this work to be absolutely one of my very best."

Begun in 1974 and finished in 1980, *The Prince's Toys* had at one point contained 12 movements. Its genesis was a desire to achieve the integration of technical and coloristic effects with musical expression. To do that, Koshkin needed an aesthetic excuse, an artistic reason to include a very broad range of effects both standard and newly invented. Once more, he found his linchpin in a program. "The title actually came before the program," Koshkin says. The idea of a prince whose toys came alive and "fought back," playing with him in the same mischievous way he had played with them, flowed naturally from the title and suited Koshkin's purpose perfectly. Suggesting somewhat the singing and dancing toys of *Ravel's L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, the four toys of Koshkin's prince are actually more demonic for seeming more innocent. The movements are:

1. The Mischievous Prince. The title character is portrayed by a short, aggressive piece filled with parallel ninths and other stacked dissonances. Percussive, unpitched arpeggios on all six strings (on the bridge behind the saddle) punctuate the end.

2. The Mechanical Monkey. The slapping of strings and drumming of fingers on the guitar's body suggest the angular motions of a toy monkey who has an eerie agenda: revenge on the prince who has abused him.

3. The Doll with Blinking Eyes is an East Indian doll, the likeness of a beautiful young woman. "The most mystical of the six movements," according to the composer, The Doll contains several unique effects, including a sitar-like buzzing produced by pulling and holding the sixth string off to the side of the guitar. The Indian drum called the *tabla* is also imitated, by striking the bridge.

4. Playing Soldiers. Although translated as "Tin Soldiers" in the published music, this movement's original Russian title emphasizes the process of interaction with toy soldiers more than the material from which they're made. In the course of the movement, the toy soldiers become real. This is made musically palpable by what Koshkin calls "a developed effect." The movement begins with the sound of a toy drum and trumpet, but as the soldiers become real, the effect becomes "real as well," and a more sonorous drum-and-trumpet is conveyed. At one point in the development, the guitarist must play an extensive left-hand solo while the right hand crosses over the left in a percussive dialogue between thumping drums (hand near the bridge) and tinkling bells (the section of the strings between the tuners and nut, strummed).

5. The Prince's Coach. The blissful theme of the prince's escape is heard above the running pattern of the coach's wheels. At first, it seems the prince will make it, but something goes terribly wrong and the horses begin to gallop with such ferocity that they break away from the coach, leaving the prince stranded. Their galloping is depicted by the tapping of fingers on the side of the instrument.

6. The Grand Toys' Parade is "a suite within the suite," Koshkin says. A set of variations on a melancholy theme that represents the chastised prince, it also recalls subjects from the previous movements. The movement and the suite end with a long, thumbnail glissando; the prince, defeated, has been turned into one of the toys.

Kenneth LaFave
Frank Koonce