



Modern guitar music for children, as seen from our Russian counterparts

by Oleg Kiselev

T

he purpose of my article is to share the ideas with my American colleagues and cause friendly discussion on the pages of the magazine *GuitArt International*. While writing this article I used my twenty years of observation, having composed guitar music for children and worked in children's music school.

My basic pedagogical aim is not only the education of the outstanding professional musician, but, first of all, the formation of the child's desire to play music, which he will then carry throughout his life.

It is always pleasant for me to meet my former pupils who have become young adults and now work in factories, banks, hospitals, advertising agencies, at schools, etc., and often hear how if they have any spare time they will take a guitar into their hands. They recollect old pieces, study new ones, visit guitar concerts and send their children to study in music schools.

As a composer I am glad that they still keep the books with my pieces, play them, and listen to my CDs and tapes. Hence, my music, composed for them many years back, has played an important role in keeping up of their interest in the guitar.

The necessity of including modern pieces in educational children's repertoire.



We live in the XXI century, a century of computers and communication technologies. Now, more than ever, we are faced with the glut of cinema, TV, and the Internet, that aggressively imposes on children its numbing values and tastes. The aim of the enlightened guitar teacher is to instill in the pupil the love of real music, strengthening its cultural value, thereby creating a viable and much needed alternative to MTV and Hollywood. In this opposition, the need for modern guitar music is indeed great. Naturally, music of Carcassi, Carulli, Sor and other composers of "the golden age of guitar classical music" has huge value for the foundational education of the pupil. But frankly speaking, to only concentrate on works from this period of the guitar may ultimately seem boring and uninteresting to modern pupils. In order not to lose the interest of the pupil, it becomes necessary to also incorporate bright and exciting pieces from the modern repertoire.

What should modern guitar music for children be?

At first sight the answer to this question is quite simple – it should be beautiful and exciting. But what does the word 'beautiful' mean? I want to tell such a history. In one guitar magazine I read an enthusiastic response about the book for children where plays of ten authors from the different countries have been collected. With the help of my friend Vincenzo Pocci I received this book. Having gathered my pupils (25 people from the age 10 up 16), I played them all the pieces from this book. It was not difficult, as the pieces were short and not difficult. And to my surprise, no one showed any desire to learn any pieces from this book! I always keep to a rule in my teaching career to allow a young pupil to learn and perform only those pieces that he enjoys.

What is the reason of such a glaring contradiction? Is a pedagogic piece truly successful if it garners critical acclaim from the composer's colleagues and yet

the student shows no interest in learning the work? And the answer to this question is simple enough ... Unfortunately, there is a tendency now in modern music, although hugely successful in a large concert setting (symphonies, sonatas, concerti), but this grand design does not often translate well for children's music. Now many composers consider, if music is written not in an atonal style, with no set of the variable sizes 7/4, 10/16, with glaring dissonance, with deeply challenging techniques, it can not be referred to modern music! Probably, they are right. But children do not think so! I suppose the composer 'writing' for children should find a balance between classical consonance and modern dissonance. But he should not forget also about the brightest means of musical expressiveness - MELODIOUSNESS. Nevertheless, he composes music not for the critics, but for young guitarists! And the best praise to your work will be not in a laudatory article in a guitar magazine, but, rather in the eyes of your pupils, which will shine with pleasure from learning and playing it.

Musical figurativeness

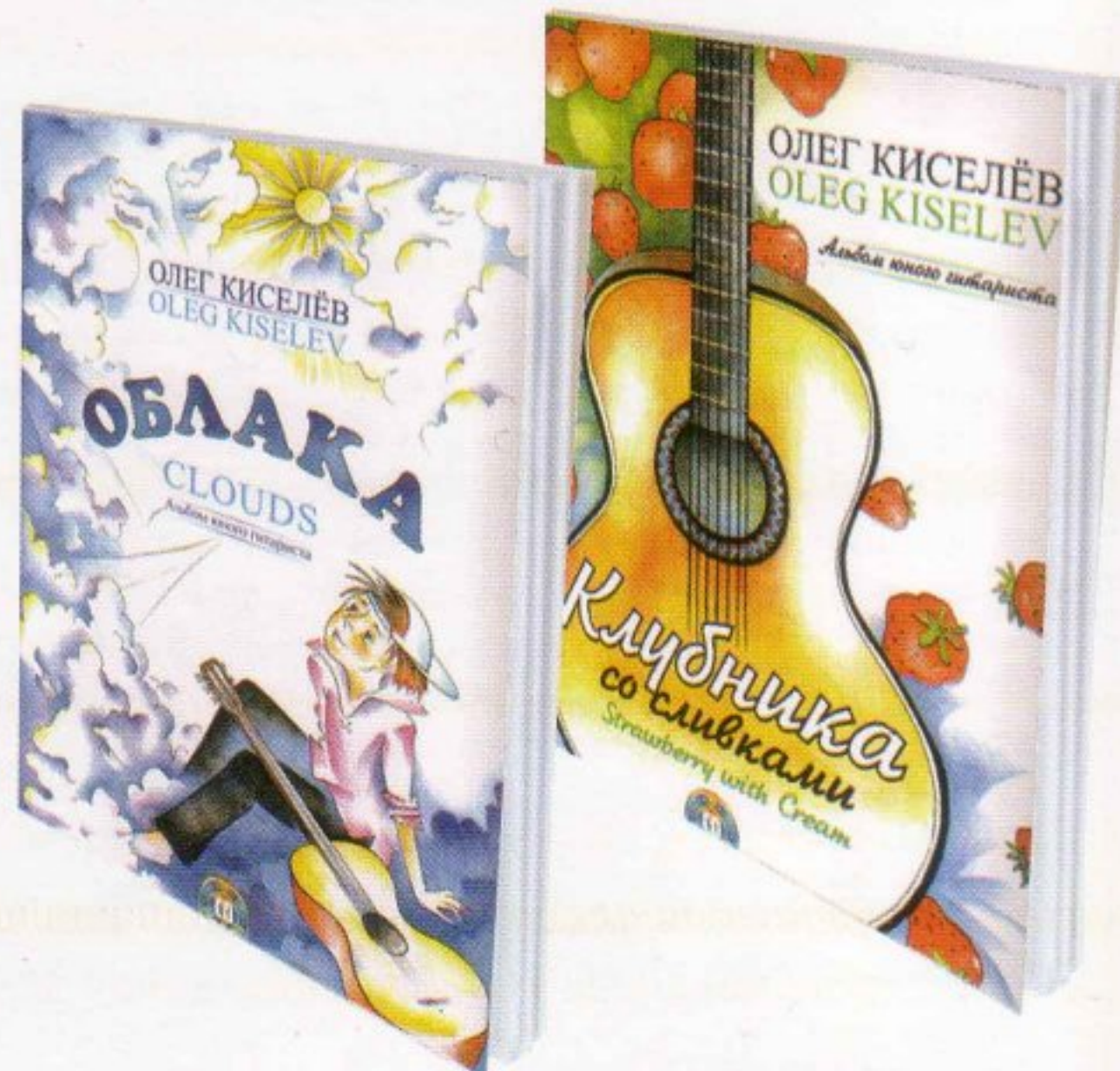
Bright figurativeness and vivid imagery in modern pieces has huge value for a child. Unfortunately, pieces of classical composers often do not have concrete titles, for example "Andante," "Prelude," or "Aria," do not necessarily provide a visual nudge to the imagination of the pupil. I always try to give the pieces bright titles – "Scorpion's dance," "A Birthday party without guests," "The Pupil, who is tired of playing scales," etc. I then try to ask the pupil to visualize the title in a musical setting. You may agree "A Birthday party without guests" can not be played lightly, or fast. Logically it should be sad and melodic. But on the contrary, "Scorpion's dance" can not drag. It can be only aggressive, rigid and radiating threat. Solving the problems of disclosing a musical image and creating a figurative musical solution, provides the pupil with the needed informa-

tion to create a valid musical expression.

Technical complexity

In comparison with the piano, the biggest problem of a guitar is not to overburden the young player with technical challenges that they may not be prepared. The advancement of technique should be gradual and well thought out. The introduction of new musical styles and techniques should encompass open strings and relatively simple chord progressions to encourage the pupil's natural sense of exploration without the cumbersome burden of overly difficult technical challenges. It occurred to me that the music is what is important! Additionally, what is difficult for one pupil, can be relatively achievable for another and quite easy for the next! Therefore concerning my composition, I implore potential performers and their teachers to not be afraid of simplifying my pieces (No, my copyrights will not be violated, or my ego bruised). If the pupil wants to perform my piece, but at present some chords are difficult for him, it can easily be replaced by another easier chord, or by removing a bass or treble note as needed. I think, here we must alter the piece for the benefit of the specific student, and it is quite allowable and should not offend the composer. In fact, this occurs among professional guitarist who often transpose of the music from the much larger voiced piano to the humble guitar. **Jazz, rock-and-roll, samba, bossa nova**

It is very important to give the pupil modern pieces composed in different musical styles, especially





Oleg Kiselev

Russian guitarist, composer and a teacher was born in 1964. He is a graduate student from the Chelyabinsk Musical College, where he studied with the well known Russian guitarist, composer and teacher Victor Kozlov. Oleg Kiselev has performed solo recitals in many cities in Russia, also he has participated in international festivals both in Poland, Serbia and Russia. He has composed 300 pieces for the guitar, and has recorded seven CDs and five MCs. Oleg Kiselev composes music in several different styles including jazz, latino, modern, romantic, pop. The significant area in his creative work is music for children and youth. At the present time he teaches guitar at school of arts in town called Asha. His music is published in Poland, Russia, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and USA. Reviews of Kiselev's music were printed in *Seicorde*(Italy) and *Classical Guitar*(Great Britain), *Guitart International*(USA), *Guitar review*(Russia) and *Guitarist* (Russia) magazines.

jazz pieces! My pupils enjoy playing them, as jazz music is full of optimism, humor, playfulness, and with all those qualities which so are inherent in children. The rhythmic feel of swing, the unexpected syncopations of samba, the infective dance feel of the bossa-nova, to the rebellious antics of rock-and-roll, all attract my pupils with extraordinary fervor and should be used as a foil and complement to the established classical music. In the days of socialism, jazz, as well as rock-and-roll, was under full interdiction in the USSR, and this great music was forbidden to be played for all audiences. In those days, the performance of jazz pieces at music schools by pupils was a rare and dangerous exception. This music was considered unworthy, low, and suitable only for restaurants. Thank God, there is now an arousing interest in new music to this classical genre of students in Russia now! It is very important to not give young guitarists not the transpositions of piano pieces of standard jazz compositions (which frequently lose their originality and are often technically difficult), but rath-

er, give them an opportunity to learn the jazz pieces composed for a guitar and in consideration of the pupils' abilities. Many of my students over the years have continued to play the guitar in part due to the introduction of other musical styles and not only classical music.

Children books design

In Russia, generally the publications for classical guitar are quite unprofitable. In Russia many musical publishing houses publish works with minimal expense. They design covers for adults and books for children very plainly, with no pictures or brightly colored covers. It is probably reasonable, from a business point of view, but I am convinced of the opposite! In Russia I publish my books with my own money in circulation of around 200 copies in a very modest polygraphic design. I usually sell these books after the concerts in different cities of Russia. They have always sold well. But several years ago a large Russian publishing house MPI released two of my books for children with pictures of professional artists, with extremely beautiful covers and compact discs. And now after my concerts, children usually buy these two books! The plainly designed books expectedly do not sell nearly as well. Therefore I want to implore publishers all over the world not to save money on the edition of books for children! Let these books be bright and beautiful! In this case pupils will take them in hand with pleasure and will play enjoy the music printed with great interest, if properly designed, musically and graphically. Eventually, this young child may well be a potential buyer of guitar editions for adults! Please, issue for young guitarists only beautiful books!

I thank the edition of magazine *GuitArt International* for an opportunity to express the opinion. I wish all guitarists – teachers in the USA success in the business of popularization of our favorite instrument – the guitar!

(Translated by Marina Shiryayeva)

ПРИХОДИТ СОН THE DREAM COMES

Олег КИСЕЛЁВ
Oleg KISELEV

Con *tenerzza* ♩ = 76

