



CHILDREN'S CORNER

MUSIC FOR GUITAR

DEBUSSY
GRANADOS
MOZART
SCHUBERT
SCHUMANN



JOHAN SMITH, GUITAR

1	Franz Schubert (1797–1828): Erlkönig, Op. 1, D. 328 ('Erlking') (1815)	4:22
	Claude Debussy (1862–1918): Children's Corner (1906–08)	18:56
2	I. Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum	3:07
3	II. Jimbo's Lullaby	3:36
4	III. Serenade for the Doll	2:46
5	IV. The Snow is Dancing	2:48
6	V. The Little Shepherd	2:54
7	VI. Golliwogg's Cakewalk	3:38
	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791):	
	Piano Sonata No. 16 in C major, K. 545 'Sonata facile' (1788)	10:28
8	I. Allegro	3:55
9	II. Andante	4:30
10	III. Rondo: Allegretto	1:59
	Robert Schumann (1810–1856): Kinderszenen, Op. 15 ('Scenes of Childhood') (1838)	18:58
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12	No. 2. Curiose Geschichte ('A Curious Story')	1:10
13	No. 3. Hasche-Mann ('Blind Man's Bluff')	0:43
14	No. 4. Bittendes Kind ('Pleading Child')	1:05
15	No. 5. Glückes genug ('Happiness')	1:18
16	No. 6. Wichtige Begebenheit ('An Important Event')	0:51
17	No. 7. Träumerei ('Dreaming')	2:46
18	No. 8. Am Camin ('At the Fireside')	0:54
19	No. 9. Ritter vom Steckenpferd ('Knight of the Hobbyhorse')	0:40
20	No. 10. Fast zu ernst ('Almost Too Serious')	1:41
21	No. 11. Fürchtenmachen ('Frightening')	2:01
22	No. 12. Kind im Einschlummern ('Child Falling Asleep')	1:52
23	No. 13. Der Dichter spricht ('The Poet Speaks')	2:01
	Enrique Granados (1867–1916):	
	Cuentos de la juventud, Op. 1, DLR IV:2 ('Tales of Youth') (pub. 1910)	18:17
24	No. 1. Dedicatoria ('Dedication')	1:01
25	No. 2. La mendiga ('The Beggar Woman')	2:44
26	No. 3. Canción de Mayo ('May Song')	2:05
27	No. 4. Cuento viejo ('Old Tale')	1:15
28	No. 5. Viniendo de la fuente ('Coming From the Fountain')	1:14
29	No. 6. ***	0:52
30	No. 7. Recuerdos de la infancia ('Remembrance of Childhood')	1:18
31	No. 8. El fantasma ('The Phantom')	2:35
32	No. 9. La huérfana ('The Orphan')	2:02
33	No. 10. Marcha ('March')	3:02

Children's Corner

Music for Guitar

Within this selection of thematically linked music celebrating childhood by major composers, Johan Smith has extended the guitar repertoire considerably and boldly. The music explored here is from the piano repertoire but the arranger has brought about the miracle of not only giving the pieces a new spiritual home, but often challenging the listener to affirm that they resonate on plucked strings in a totally natural and idiomatic manner. Johan Smith is a virtuosic performer but the emphasis throughout this recording is on sensibility and artistry, so much so that the technical challenges of the transcriptions are subordinated to the interpretative Romantic beauty and original inspiration of the works chosen. The choice of repertoire here is entirely coherent, one composition utterly comparable with others to a revelatory extent. The composers show their preoccupation to explore their memories of childhood from the context of adulthood. The results are inspiring, and very moving. The performances are deeply poetic and artistically ambitious. Once more the sheer versatility of the guitar as a concert instrument is demonstrated and proved.

Schubert's setting of *Erlkönig* ('Erlking' or 'Elf King'), written when the composer was 18, is based on a poem of 1782 by the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), the poem itself harking back to a Scandinavian folk tale. The text tells the horrific story of a father riding home holding his son when the boy is courted by the evil Erlking, who whispers and cajoles through the darkness unheard by the father. The Erlking promises that the boy will be able to play wonderful games and that his daughters will wait on him and he can dance with them. The father regards the boy's frightened utterances as illusions – a streak of mist, the wind stirring the dry leaves, an old willow tree gleaming in the moonlight ... Finally, the Erlking seizes the victim and when the father reaches home, his son is dead. The original composition for voice and piano presents the three voices of father, Erlking, and son, in clearly articulated levels of pitch and tone. In this transcription for guitar, the drama is communicated through the melodic line without words, the climax being played in harmonics.

Debussy's *Children's Corner*, subtitled *Little Suite for Piano*, written between 1906 and 1908, was dedicated to the composer's daughter Chouchou. The pieces in the suite have been described by one of Debussy's finest scholars, Edward Lockspeiser as 'exquisite miniatures of artistic finish and sensitive psychological insight'. The work was a great success, selling 20,000 copies in Debussy's lifetime.

The suite begins with *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum*, a mild parody of Clementi's pianistic exercises with its preponderance of arpeggio patterns in harp-like sequences. *Jimbo's Lullaby* refers to Chouchou's toys, among them a stuffed elephant called Jumbo (Debussy makes a mistake with the animal's name!). The score is marked *doux et un peu gauche* ('sweet and a little clumsy'), and the music recreates images of the child walking the elephant round the room, gradually increasing momentum until the ending, when some have ventured to explain that child and elephant fall asleep.

Debussy apparently began writing the suite with the third piece, *Serenade for the Doll* (originally entitled *Serenade of the Doll*). This work was composed to be included in a piano method by Octavie Carrier-Belleuse, published in 1910. For pianists (as well as for guitarists!) the piece is technically demanding, relying on elegantly staccato accents as the doll dances, lightly and graciously. *The Snow is Dancing* represents the falling snow as seen through the nursery window, evoked by contrasting note patterns supported by an equally staccato bass, reminiscent when played on guitar of Isaac Albéniz's *Leyenda*. The score is first marked *doux et estompé* ('sweet and blurred') and later *doux et triste* ('sweet and sad'). *The Little Shepherd* is akin in atmosphere to *La fille aux cheveux de lin* ('The Girl with the Flaxen Hair'), a favourite with guitarists from Segovia onwards. The present work evokes melodic pipes and, according to Lockspeiser, 'appears to awaken a childish wonder in unseen visions of nymphs and naiads'. Finally, *Golliwogg's Cakewalk* offers a rumbustious dance full of gusto and syncopation. The work has a subdued middle episode to be performed *avec une grande émotion*, before the dance returns.

Not many movements from Mozart's creative output are suitable for transcription to guitar, let alone entire sonatas. Johan Smith has chosen to extend the horizons with his transcription of the entirety of Mozart's *Sonata, K. 545*, one of the most popular works performed by both student pianists and recitalists. The *Andante* movement was entered in Mozart's catalogue of his works on 26 June 1788, with the notation *Eine kleine Klavier-Sonate für Anfänger* ('A Small Piano Sonata for Beginners'), and thus has sometimes been nicknamed 'Sonata facile' or 'Sonata semplice' ('Simple Sonata').

In the first movement, written in sonata form in C major, the work opens with the melody over an Alberti bass, familiar texture for pianists but by no means entirely convenient for the guitarist (though there are distinguished precedents for the style in works by Fernando Sor and Mauro Giuliani). The delightful scalic runs and fragments of arpeggios lead on to elegant modulations through various tonalities. The recapitulation begins in the key of F rather than the home key of C, which according to the eminent pianist Charles Rosen, was rare at the time. The present day listener may find this unsurprising but it shows that this sonata has its own innovative aspects, changing patterns and presenting what was historically unpredictable.

The central movement, *Andante*, in G major, is one of the jewels of the piano repertoire. The Mozart biographer Maynard Solomon comments on the 'tone of melancholy acceptance' in the *Andante*, a piece dated ten years to the day after Mozart was told his mother would not survive the night. The movement's development is in G minor, which Solomon indicates is 'indelibly associated in Mozart's music ...with the darker, tragic, passionate effects'.

Rondo, in the key of C major, is an ebullient dance with staccato thirds, brilliant scalic passages, and melody with Alberti bass. Once more there are intricate modulations through various keys.

As John Worthen relates in his book *Robert Schumann – Life and Death of a Musician* (Yale University Press, 2007), Schumann commented in March 1838 to his future wife, Clara, herself a virtuoso pianist, that he had been composing 'just as if I were wearing a little girl's dress with great winged sleeves. I wrote about 30 sweet little pieces, from which I've selected twelve and called them *Kinderszenen*. You will enjoy them, but you will naturally have to forget that you are a virtuoso.' The suite was published in 1839, and Clara wrote to Schumann that she was 'utterly enraptured' by the pieces that were 'so simple, so heart-warming, so very *you!*'

Of Foreign Lands and Peoples presents a melody evoking nostalgia and romantic longing. Its texture of a sweet theme over arpeggios is totally idiomatic to the guitar. *A Curious Story* is a lively dance, recalling a tale told at bedtime to a child – brief, to the point, and poetically memorable. *Blind Man's Bluff* offers recollections of a robust children's game. The rules of the game are straightforward. One player is blindfolded and is 'it'. The other players spin the blindfolded individual round a few times then move around the room avoiding being touched by the one who has been blindfolded. If anybody is caught they become 'it'.

Pleading Child is a poignant theme full of anguish. An ingenious use of chord progressions keeps this short work full of surprise with a moving harmonic element (Andrés Segovia first transcribed this piece in the 1930s, published by Schott in 1935.) In *Happiness* the mood is communicated not only through the effervescent melodic line but also by means of a lively inventive accompaniment in the bass. After the joy comes a statelier occasion, *An Important Event*, expressed through dignified chords and measured pace.

Dreaming (sometimes entitled *Reverie*) is one of Schumann's most well-known pieces. This was first transcribed for guitar in the 19th century by Francisco Tárrega, and performed in the early 20th century by Agustín Barrios Mangoré. Its sublime beauty imposes a singular responsibility on the performer to shade and shape each phrase into a meaningful unit. *At the Fireside* is an elegantly animated work creating an image of fervent conversation in front of the hearth rather than somnolent inactivity.

Knight of the Hobbyhorse communicates the wild ride on the horse through dramatic rhythms and sudden elements of surprise. For the guitar the introduction of a pizzicato bass line contrasted against the accompanying chords in the treble in the second section is a very expressive tonal colouring. *Almost Too Serious* conjures up images of a conversation between child and adult, at the same time both frank and yet never verging into solemnity.

Frightening was also arranged by Segovia in the 1935 publication. The composition creates a sense of creeping shadows and mysterious sounds in the night. Just as things seem to settle down a more sinister interruption breaks in with passages marked 'quicker' contrasting vividly with the calmer opening theme. With the ending, however, and the third repetition of the melody, a kind of less frightening normality is restored. *Child Falling Asleep* is enhanced in this transcription by the delicate use of bell-like harmonics. The gently undulating rhythms bring to mind a cradle song or lullaby

John Worthen points out that in *The Poet Speaks*, 'with its simple, hymn-like beginning and gentle questioning throughout', the poet in question speaks 'with the voice of the child grown-up'. The great pianist Alfred Cortot, giving a masterclass on this piece, commented that it should be 'conceived as a kind of intimate reverie, not just making a beautiful sound and expressive phrasing, you need also to create a sense of dreaming – the truth is you need to dream the piece rather than play it.' The arpeggios that follow were for Cortot a kind of questioning. After the quasi-cadenza single notes, the main theme returns where Cortot comments that the music should be conveyed 'not just through the notes but through some kind of inspiration drawn from its immortal spirit'. With the recapitulation of the opening theme, 'the sonorities should fade away, growing fainter and dimmer, and you are left simply in the presence of a dream which haunts you still.'

While Cortot brought to his interpretation an almost mystical sense of inspiration, it is clear from his words that *The Poet Speaks* stands apart to some extent from the other movements of the suite, providing a resounding final statement relating not only to one's memory of childhood, but also to the mature reflection of the adult looking back on the busy and varied infant years.

The piano works of Enrique Granados have found a welcome home in the guitar repertoire, various pieces such as *La maja de Goya* and *Spanish Dances* having been arranged by Miguel Llobet early in the 20th century. Later, John Williams performed the extraordinarily virtuosic *Valses poéticos*, which was later on also recorded by Julian Bream. Throughout the 20th century a multitude of guitar recitals included *Danza española No. 5*.

The date of the composition of *Tales of Youth* is not known. The ten pieces in the work were initially inspired by a melody that Granados's son, Eduardo, once sang. Subtitled *Collection of Easy Pieces for Piano*, the movements are generally compact, though to describe some of them pianistically as 'easy' could be misleading for younger players.

Dedication was written for Eduardo and is a truly poetic invocation of paternal affection, reminiscent in its arpeggio patterns of Schumann's *Of Foreign Lands and Peoples*. Its texture and Romantic impulse is a perfect item for any guitar concert. *The Beggar Woman* has a poignantly melancholic opening theme with its gently descending phrases and plaintive harmonies. Marked *Lento* at the outset, the opening mood is contrasted with lively episodes of vivacity where the beggar lady provides an entertaining dance after which the music returns to the initial mood. *May Song* is a joyous springtime celebration marked *apacible* ('calm, placid') with its luscious melodic line driven on by the urgings of an arpeggiated bass accompaniment. *Old Tale* recalls Catalan folk songs and traditional telling of ballads, a mixture of poetic recitation and rich melodic inspiration. *Coming From the Fountain* also has elements of folk song combining the thematic thread of *May Song* with its arpeggiated bass but adding a more intricately harmonised melodic line.

The eminent Granados biographer, Professor Walter Aaron Clark, commented on the sixth piece in the sequence: 'As he did in *Escenas románticas*, Granados writes three asterisks in place of a title perhaps suggesting a meaning so sublime it defies description. The use of three asterisks comes directly from *Nos. 21 and 30* of Schumann's *Album für die Jugend...* These charming little "Tales" do not reveal the composer at his most distinctive, but they demonstrate his profound rapport with the Romantic style.' This movement is marked *Lento con ternura* ('Slow with tenderness'). The guitar's capability for incorporating harmonic effects enhance this work in transcription as does lingering vibrato on significant melodic stresses.

Remembrance of Childhood is an exquisite atmospheric poem expressing both the joy of childhood and the element of sadness of adult retrospection. Here Granados demonstrates his harmonic genius coupled with his ability to write superb melodies. The gently falling thematic lines are expressive of both contentment and a touch of sorrow. *The Phantom* makes its identity clear from the opening. Marked *Allegro energico*, the piece can be compared with Schumann's *Frightening* for spooky sensations and a sense of being intimidated by the dark unknown.

Walter Aaron Clark observes that the penultimate movement, *The Orphan*, is 'of poignant interest' as the extant manuscript bears a dedication: 'To the memory of my father'. Marked *Poco lento y de una interpretación sencillísima* ('Quite slow with a very straightforward interpretation'), this goes to show that the composer knew the work carried its own emotive charge with no exaggeration required in tempo or phrasing.

Granados ends optimistically and energetically with *March* marked *Allegretto (humorístico)*. Within this landscape are images of toy soldiers forever marching in memory with bugles, drums, and flags.

Johan Smith



Photo: Miss Fioue

The winner of numerous international competitions, including the 2019 Guitar Foundation of America contest, and named as 'Classical Guitar Revelation 2017' by *Guitare Classique* magazine, Johan Smith has been invited to perform as a soloist at renowned festivals and completed international concerts tours in Canada, Japan and the United States, where he made his debut at Carnegie Hall in New York. Born in 1990 in Geneva, Smith began studying the guitar with Marie-Claire Pignolo, going on to graduate with two Master degrees from the University of Music Lausanne (HEMU) with the highest marks, where he studied solo performance and musical pedagogy with Dagoberto Linhares. In addition to his activity as a guitar teacher in Switzerland, he also founded the extreme metal band Stortregn, with whom he has released six albums and toured the world since 2005. Johan Smith plays on Savarez strings.

www.johansmith.net

Multi-award-winning guitarist Johan Smith has considerably extended his instrument's repertoire with this selection of transcriptions celebrating childhood in a variety of ways. These popular piano works – Schubert's *Erlkönig*, Granados's atmospheric *Tales of Youth*, Mozart's elegant *Sonata facile*, Schumann's *Scenes from Childhood* and the exquisitely sensitive and insightful miniatures of Debussy's *Children's Corner* – are presented in a totally natural and idiomatic manner within the guitar's distinctly expressive soundworld.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Music for Guitar

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|--------------|---|--------------|
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Johan Smith, Guitar

All works arranged for guitar by Johan Smith (b. 1990)

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

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