



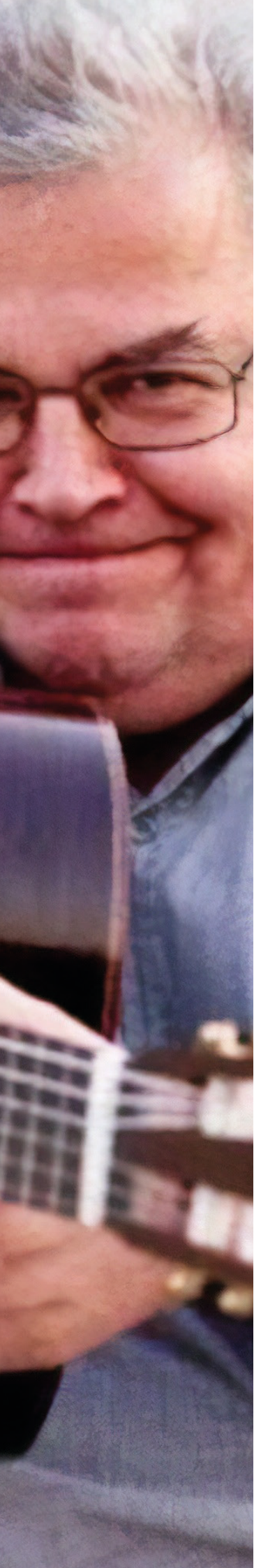
REPERTOIRE

**NIKITA KOSHKIN**

**USHER WALTZ**



WATCH THE LESSON  
AT [TONEBASE.CO](https://tonebase.co)



*“USHER BECOMES NORMAL FOR JUST A MOMENT BEFORE GOING COMPLETELY INSANE. I WAS THINKING ABOUT THIS WHILE WRITING THIS PIECE.”*

## **LESSON DESCRIPTION**

It isn't often that the composer of a piece can offer a lesson on their own work, but for this lesson, Nikita Koshkin teaches one of his most famous pieces, "Usher Waltz". He begins by referencing the literary inspiration for the piece (an Edgar Allen Poe novel) and describing the cultural interplay between American romanticism and Russian concert tradition that results.

This piece is not a normal waltz, but one tainted with a bit of insanity. This is accomplished with tempo, harmonics, and the lack of any classical structure. Different moments within the piece relate to different plot points, and influence the interpretation. Finally, the conclusion of the piece, modified by Koshkin since its first performance, represents the final decline of a man's mind and the horror that the observer is left with. We hope you enjoy the very personal and profound remarks Koshkin has to make about his world-renowned piece!





# ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR



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.

## OUTLINE

1. Inspiration
2. Unusual Waltz
3. Technique
4. Visualization
5. Ending

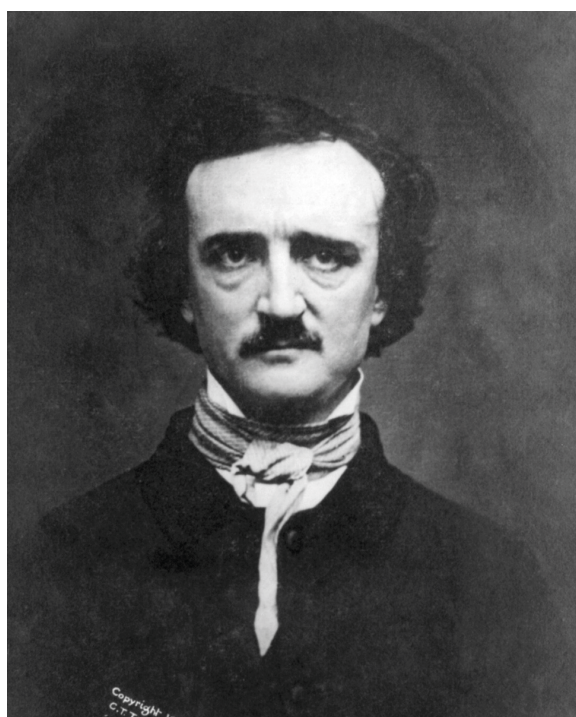


# INSPIRATION



“Usher Waltz”, by Nikita Koshkin, is one of his most famous pieces, performed today around the world. This piece was composed in 1984, one day before his daughter was born. It represents a meeting of two cultures for Koshkin. It was named for the novel *The Fall of the House of Usher*, written by the romantic American writer Edgar Allen Poe. However, it’s written in the style of a concert waltz, a long standing Russian tradition.

Koshkin first read *Fall of the House of Usher* as a young teenager. There was a point in the story when a character improvises a waltz on the guitar. Koshkin considered this a strange addition, since, at that time, the guitar was not popular in the Soviet Union. He remembered this moment, and came back to it years later after studying guitar and composition.



After looking back through the novel, he decided to write a piece that would bring this one moment from Poe’s story to life. Six months later, the piece was finally completed.

# UNUSUAL WALTZ



A common mistake among guitarists is to play this piece just like a normal waltz. Koshkin wanted to make this piece unusual from the very beginning. This is why he writes a fast tempo and “Allegro agitato” after the short introduction.



The introduction contains phrases that use harmonics- one on the treble strings, and one on the basses. Play the harmonics with the thumb and stop the string with the index finger to avoid noise.

The melody played on the harmonics here creates a motif that repeats across the piece. The main theme appears next. Be sure to play the glissando so that it is audible.

The musical score consists of two staves. The first staff is marked **Lento** and is in 3/4 time. It begins with a bass line of two chords. The treble line starts with a rest, followed by a sequence of notes: a half note G4 (marked 8va), a quarter note A4 (marked 4), a quarter note B4 (marked 3), and a quarter note C5 (marked 1). This is followed by a glissando (marked 8va) and a half note D5 (marked 2), and another half note E5 (marked 1). The staff ends with a *rit.* marking and two quarter notes: D5 (marked 2) and C5 (marked 1). The second staff is marked **Allegro agitato** with a tempo of  $\text{♩.} = \text{ca. } 66$ . It features a bass line with chords and a treble line with a rhythmic melody. The treble line starts with a quarter note G4 (marked 8va), followed by eighth notes A4, B4, and C5. This is followed by a quarter note D5 (marked I), a quarter note E5 (marked I), and a quarter note F5 (marked I). The staff ends with a quarter note G5 (marked I).

While this piece does slow down toward the end of phrases, as a typical Austrian waltz might, this piece also goes faster than a normal waltz. It immediately brings a tension that continues to grow throughout the piece.

This piece doesn't have an ABA structure, or any sort of classical structure, but continues to develop gradually. This models Usher's development during Poe's novel; he begins just a bit crazy, but by the end of the story, he has gone completely insane.

## TECHNIQUE



A musical score for guitar, consisting of two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 2/8 time signature. It starts with a first finger barre (labeled 'I') on the first string. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The accompaniment is a simple harmonic pattern. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'p.' (piano) and 'rit.' (ritardando). The tempo marking 'a tempo' appears later in the piece. The second staff continues the accompaniment with similar harmonic patterns.

When the piece modulates to C Major, play a crescendo across the phrase by playing the accompaniment a bit louder than the first note in the measure.

A musical score for guitar showing six measures. The first measure has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. Above the first measure is a 'V' with a downward arrow pointing to a chord diagram. The second measure has a 'VI' with a downward arrow. The third measure has a 'V' with a downward arrow. The fourth measure has a 'V' with a downward arrow. The fifth measure has a 'VI' with a downward arrow. The sixth measure has a 'III' with a downward arrow. Each measure contains a melody of eighth notes and a harmonic accompaniment of eighth notes. A circled '6' is located below the first measure.

Where big chords fall on the downbeat, be sure to stop the strings so the next two beats only contain one note.



# VISUALIZATION

The next theme, containing many octave leaps around the note E-flat, is personified with visual imagery by Koshkin. He imagines a bird seeking to get out of its cage, trying again and again, but only going in circles and never making any progress.

At the climax of the piece, play the Bartok pizzicato as if Usher has gone mad and is trying to break the strings of the instrument! Of course, be careful not to actually crush the strings on your guitar.

To play the pizzicato, since the tempo is very quick, it creates a better feeling of stability to use two fingers, rather than only the back of the thumb.



# ENDING

Towards the next section, Koshkin wanted a reprise of the main theme, but the piece was already ending. Instead, he decided to remind the listener of the main theme with a melody in harmonics. Before going completely crazy, Usher becomes sane for just a moment before he completely descends into insanity. These harmonics describe this brief "calm before the storm".

Koshkin's first idea for finishing the piece was to end it piano. Only after playing it in concerts for several years did he decide to end it with an accelerando. Play these final notes marcato, and keep the minor second interval clear by balancing the volume of each of the strings. The final few notes create a feeling of horror at what has just taken place. Be careful that, while this music represents insanity, it is still within musical borders and is done tastefully.

This concludes this lesson on Usher Waltz! If you have more questions for Koshkin, or would like to learn more of his repertoire, don't hesitate to search the tonebase video archive, or get in touch with him directly. Good luck practicing!





# RESOURCES



## **Nikita Koshkin's Lesson on The Fall of Birds**

Want to see more lessons just like this one? In this lesson, Koshkin breaks down one of his earlier pieces, "The Fall of Birds".

## **Celil Refik Kaya's Lesson on Vals Op. 8 No. 3**

Dive deeper into another branch of the evolution of the waltz style with this piece by Agustin Barrios, inspired by many elements of the European waltz.



# NOTES



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