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The Little Man and the Masses

The Politics of Sofia Gubaidulina's *Concerto for Bassoon and Low Strings*

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In Sofia Gubaidulina's *Concerto for Bassoon and Low Strings*, the composer translates the Russian literary theme of the little man and the unjust society into the context of an instrumental concerto. Ordinary and oppressed, this type of character functions as a contrast to and victim of an unjust system. Here, orchestra and soloist are transformed into oppressor and oppressed: the bassoon is the little man and the strings are an angry mob. Gubaidulina's choice of instrumentation, overarching form, and use of extended technique all further the development of this narrative. In telling this story, Gubaidulina joins the company of many other artists, writers and dramatists who have used the little man as a means of exploring the situation of humankind under oppressive political systems. Gubaidulina stirs up her listeners' feelings as they get to know and care about the little man through expressive extended techniques and formal innovations that tell his story. But the little man does not triumph. The concerto finishes with the soloist dead as the audience is confronted with one composer's portrait of societal injustice in the twentieth century.