

***Meditation on the Bach Chorale “Vor deinem Thron tret ich hiermit”*** (1993) is also very carefully constructed—a mediation of the astonishingly complex mathematical symbolism interred into the Bach chorale prelude dictated by the dying, blind, composer as his last composition—“Before thy throne I present myself...”. Gubaidulina’s is no less melodramatic, with fragments of the chorale tune arranged in the meditation like “epigraphs”—“to come into contact with this person who lived a long time ago.” Perhaps preferring to call the piece a contemplation rather than a “match-lighting mystical meditation” séance, Gubaidulina draws the dramatic developments of the piece magically, and with flawless logic from the much-loved and -studied baroque masterpiece.

The Italian term “*ravvedimento*” is behind ***Repentance***’s (2008) English title, which only indirectly informs us of the content and nature of the composition. *Ravvedimento* is the title of a 2007 composition by Gubaidulina for cello and guitar quartet, which the composer adapted for cello, three guitars and double bass. *Ravvedimento* was composed for cellist Ivan Monighetti, who premiered it, together with the guitar ensemble “quasi fantasia” in Tranekaer, Denmark. The title, according to Gubaidulina, means about the same as regret—regret because the much-occupied composer, busy with new works, had to postpone the project for so long before she could finally finish it.

***Witty Waltzing in the Style of Johann Strauss*** (1989), is written “after” Johann Strauss’ *Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald* (Tales from the Vienna Woods) op. 325, and is an arrangement of the original version for soprano and octet, composed in 1987.

Having played, conducted and thought for a year or more about Sofia’s ***Impromptu*** (1997) for flute and violin solo with strings—written for the Schubert 200<sup>th</sup>-birthday celebrations—I cannot decide, as I often cannot when playing Schubert’s music either, if what I am dealing with at any moment is light or dark; sometimes things are definitely breezy, other times weighed down with a ton of depression-laden bricks, but then the question remains: what was the moment where the transition occurred from one state to another? In *Impromptu*, the music is always getting stuck on one thing or another. Different emotions jump-cut and pile in on each other, often without much warning at all—yet I’m sure you’ll agree the whole feels like it has a unity of purpose; when things end on the uneasy, pulsing, slightly ominous string chords, it is with a feeling of organic arrival that this is finally what the piece is really all about. But “how?” leaves me still thinking, and thinking..

**Sofia Gubaidulina** was born in 1931 in Chistopol in the former U.S.S.R. Tatar Republic. She finished her studies at the Conservatory of Kasan in 1954 and then studied with Nikolai Pejko—an assistant of Dmitri Shostakovich—until 1959 at the Moscow Conservatory. Following that, she completed post-graduate studies with Vissarion Schebalin.

Sofia Gubaidulina has been a freelance composer since 1963. In 1975 she founded the group Astraea with fellow composers V. Artyomov and V. Suslin, which improvised on Russian, Caucasian, mid- and eastern Asian folk and ritual instruments, which has greatly influenced her work. Since the beginning of the 1980s, her works have garnered a large international following, and today she is considered, alongside Schnittke, Denisov and Silvestrov, a leading composer of the post-Soviet Russian generation. Aside from that, she is now also considered one of the world’s greatest living composers. The recipient of many awards from across the globe, her work is documented in an impressive number of CD and DVD recordings.

Typical of Gubaidulina’s works is the nearly complete absence of absolute music, with her work containing, almost always, something that transcends its being absorbed in its own abstract musical constructs. This “transcendental” idea might be a poetic text hidden beneath the music or between the lines, a ritual, or some instrumental “narrative”. A delightful paradox follows: in a way all this is captured *in* the music (some occasional theatrical embellishments aside), only to draw our attention *away* from the internal machinations of the music’s very clever and thought-out construction.

In her own words, “the goal is to achieve the sort of relationship to traditional and new composition techniques in which the composer masters all means at her or his disposal—new and traditional—but in a way that she or he does not lend more attention to one or the other. There are those composers who consciously build their works, but I count myself among those who ‘cultivate’ their works. This means that the entire perception of my world forms the roots of a tree, and from there the piece grows branches and leaves. One can call it new, but they are just leaves, and from this perspective, they are still traditional, old. The greatest influences on my work have been Dmitri Shostakovich and Anton Webern. Although these influences cannot be seen or heard in my music, even so these two composers taught me the most important lesson: to be myself.”

—Mark Menzies

## SOFIA GUBAIDULINA

### PROGRAM 3: OUT OF MANY ORDERS – RADICAL DEPARTURES AND OTHER WITTY REPENTANCES

MAY 16, 2011 | 8:30 PM

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California Institute of the Arts

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# SOFIA GUBAIDULINA

## PROGRAM 3: OUT OF MANY ORDERS – RADICAL DEPARTURES AND OTHER WITTY REPENTANCES

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Monday, May 16, 2011, 8:30pm

### PROGRAM

#### ***Impromptu in A<sup>b</sup> Op. 90, No. 4 (D899)***

Mark Menzies, piano

**Franz Schubert**

#### ***Quasi Hoquetus (1984)***

Archibald Carey, bassoon; Mark Menzies, viola; Emi Tamura, piano

#### ***Meditation on the Bach Chorale “Vor deinem Thron tret ich hiermit” (1993)***

Formalist Quartet: Mark Menzies, Andrew Tholl, violins, Andrew McIntosh, viola, Ashley Walters, cello; Ivan Johnson, bass; Richard Valitutto, harpsichord

### intermission

#### ***“Vor deinem Thron tret ich hiermit” (BWV 668)***

Formalist Quartet; Richard Valitutto, harpsichord

**J. S. Bach**

#### ***Repentance (2008)***

Derek Stein, cello; Ivan Johnson, bass; Stuart Fox, Max Kutner, Charles (Chaz) Underriner, guitars

#### ***Witty Waltzing in the Style of Johann Strauss (1989)***

Formalist Quartet; Ivan Johnson, bass; Vera Lukomsky, piano

#### ***Impromptu (1996)***

Sarah Hodges, flute, Lorenz Gamma, violin

CalArts string players conducted by Mark Menzies: Mona Tian, Nic Salas, Georgi Dimitrov, Andy Studer, Diana Arterian, Youlee Cho, violin 1; Andrew Tholl, Bianca McClure, Henry Webster, Lauren Baba, Sara Schilling, violin 2; Alessandra Barrett, Kristín Haraldsdóttir, Heather Lockie, Andrew McIntosh, viola; Derek Stein, Nat Swanson, Aaron Salinas, cello; Ivan Johnson, Carter Wallace, bass

Sofia Gubaidulina’s presence at these concerts has been funded by a generous grant from the Trust for Mutual Understanding.

#### **In Radical Order: Soul’s Journey**

Sofia Gubaidulina in Los Angeles

One of the living greats, and understandably surrounded by much mystique, composer Sofia Gubaidulina makes a rare U.S. visit on the collaborative invitation of CalArts and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The five programs CalArts presents this week which begin this visit present a kaleidoscopic view of a career that has brought astonishing and moving additions to the world’s musical culture.

Illuminated from within with an original (radical) form of spiritual intensity, Gubaidulina’s start was in the context of the Soviet regimes of the last century that were bleakly hostile to creative originality, let alone anything with “spiritual” aspirations, as are implied or explicit within all of her music. As all of that changed, and Sofia’s music and unique artistic contribution have gently, but undeniably asserted themselves, so have her opportunities to focus the intensity of this inner light in abundance: now in her 79th year, compositions of the last decade or two reveal, with ever greater vitality, a creative spark and expressive mastery...

...well, that’s how I thought of these series of events last year when the planning began in earnest to welcome Sofia Gubaidulina to Los Angeles. Now that we are in the middle of the preparations of the chosen repertoire in the weeks prior to the performances of these programs, what comes to mind is a phrase Sofia wrote about *Dancer on a Tightrope*: “...dancing on a tightrope is also a metaphor... : life as risk, and art as flight into another existence.”

So, in answer, I think I can presume to honestly sum up our community’s response to this truth about artmaking: “We sincerely hope the risk we feel we take playing your glorious music, Sofia, will take us all into those other existences you have already hinted to us in our rehearsals. Nothing you’ve written is an easy piece, or a creation of glib effects, and it is the reaching beyond the normal—and the exhilaration of that dancing—that has already vitalized us in a most special way, even before you have arrived to hear our rehearsals. We sincerely hope, Sofia, from the depths of our hearts, that the result we present to you, and to the audience which shares this with you, contains an inkling of what you had in mind!”

#### **Out of Many Orders—Radical Departures and Other Witty Repentances**

The idea behind this evening’s program is to show the abundant ways in which Sofia Gubaidulina reveals a light, brief, charming, rambunctious, and/or humorous side to her compositional style; the program is also a collection of pieces that in some way refer to another composer’s work, or, in the case of *Repentance* in particular, to a previous composition by Sofia herself.

So much “heavy”-meaning pieces are the ones usually trotted out in performances of Gubaidulina’s music!—I suspect, partly because that is the assumption of what all her output is concerned with. But, having said that, I could not resist constructing the program order to have its own “heavy”-meaning attached to itself: the Schubert *impromptu* is played at the very beginning—as if, by the end, when we play Gubaidulina’s *Impromptu*, the memory of the Schubert piano piece, and its characteristic arpeggio idea, has become an obsession as much as a remembrance. Meanwhile, we perform the meditation on the Bach chorale prelude *before* playing the Bach chorale prelude, thereby “crossing” the references, the order, and the relationships they speak of (or is it to?). Similarly, the two cousin-like pieces using voice “cross over” the intermission. Breaking the symmetry—in truth pure symmetry is almost always a little boring, as the ancient Greeks discovered with the Fibonacci-related “golden proportion”—*Quasi Hoquetus* and *Repentance* depart into a very different direction from each other and the program as a whole, doing this via very different means in each case.

***Quasi Hoquetus*** (1984) is a very dramatically conceived composition for the trio of viola, bassoon and piano: it is part of a line of works that brilliantly utilize the resources of the bassoon in particular. Hocketing, a medieval device, means that a melody is broken up between two or more voices, each in themselves making sense on their own, as well as together; the way they persistently alternate is a feature of the trick. In Gubaidulina’s composition, the idea of alternation infuses things on multiple levels; despite the flamboyancy of the gestures, the music is in fact very carefully crafted, “alternating” ways in which to transform the Fibonacci series into notes and rhythms and form.