Bach, Revisited

Sofia Gubaidulina + Bach

Ensemble Signal
Brad Lubman, conductor

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Friday, May 8, 8:00 p.m.
We kicked off April with a musical tour-de-force pairing Helmut Lachenmann and J.S. Bach. We challenged Ensemble Signal to perform repertoire that bridges the centuries. The soloists Lauren Radnofsky and Ari Streisfeld took the challenge to its most extreme; the result was stunning.

For the final concert of this season’s Composer Portraits series we celebrated Anna Clyne. Clyne is a dynamic composer who has been on my wish list (and many others, I’m sure) for years. The works on the program spanned a decade, a fitting showcase of her riveting compositions.

Tonight, we’ll close the Bach, Revisited series with Sofia Gubaidulina + Bach. The pairing is a natural fit: Gubaidulina has expressed a devotion to Bach, and the music of both blends compositional rigor and emotional transcendence. It’s been a pleasure collaborating with Ensemble Signal for the series this spring.

I’m delighted that our doors will stay open into June for our Pop-Up Concerts series. On June 2, the American Contemporary Music Ensemble will present works by fast-rising star Timo Andres, followed on June 3 by the long-awaited Pop-Up featuring piano trios by John Zorn.

It’s been an incredible 2014-15 season at Miller Theatre! Whether you joined us at the sold-out opening night with eight blackbird in September, a new work premiere during Composer Portraits, or a free Pop-Up concert, it has been a great pleasure sharing incredible music with you.

Of course, I can’t wait for the 2015-16 season! Just this week we announced next year’s line-up, which includes seven Composer Portraits, a multi-media Early Music performance, and Bach’s complete cello suites. You can find the full details online at www.millertheatre.com, and I hope we’ll see you here next fall.

Melissa Smey
Executive Director
**Bach, Revisited**  
Friday, May 8, 8:00 p.m.

**Sofia Gubaidulina + Bach**  
Ensemble Signal

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*Chaconne* (1965)  
Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931)  
Daniel Pesca, piano

*Chaconne* in A minor, after BWV 1004 in D minor for solo violin  
J. S. Bach (1685-1750)  
*Arranged for harpsichord by Lars Ulrik Mortensen*  
Kristian Bezuidenhout, harpsichord

*Ricercar à 6 from The Musical Offering, BWV 1079*  
Bach  
*Arranged for strings by Torsten Johann*

INTERMISSION

*Meditation on the Bach Chorale: Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit* (1993)  
Gubaidulina

*Triple Concerto in A minor, BWV 1044*  
Bach  
I. Allegro  
II. Adagio ma non tanto e dolce  
III. Alla breve

Kristian Bezuidenhout, harpsichord; Kelli Kathman, flute  
Courtney Orlando, violin

This program runs approximately two hours, including intermission.

Major support for Bach, Revisited is provided by  
the National Endowment for the Arts and the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

*Ricercar à 6 arrangement for strings by Torsten Johann,  
kindly made available by the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra.*

*Please note that photography and the use of recording devices are not permitted. Remember to turn off all cellular phones and pagers before tonight’s performance begins. Miller Theatre is ADA accessible. Large print programs are available upon request. For more information or to arrange accommodations, please call 212-854-7799.*
About the Program

Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931)

Chaconne

Gubaidulina composed this piece, one of the earliest in her catalogue, in 1962, when she was still a postgraduate student at the Moscow Conservatory. She wrote it for Marina Mdivani, who took fourth prize at the Tchaikovsky Competition that year, and who gave the first performance, though not until March 1966. Mdivani, according to the composer, “had a powerful chord-playing technique as well as a lively temperament at her disposal,” and those qualities are reflected in the music.

In keeping with Baroque tradition – soon to be exemplified in this concert – the work is based on an eight-bar bass moving slowly and with gravity, though Gubaidulina makes this a bass in duple time rather than the orthodox triple. Strongly chromatic, the music arrives a little unsteadily back at the B minor from which it had started out, but the thematic outline remains clear through three variations. Then the right hand begins quietly insisting on F sharp and leading the music astray, if still within fields of the Baroque: the piece becomes a toccata and, later, a fugue (with a direct salute to Bach, humorously affectionate). When the bass theme returns it is at first disguised by the right hand, which heads into more obsession with F sharp, now skipping up and down in octaves. Finally comes a full reprise of the theme before, as the right hand keeps repeating chords of B minor, the left hand eventually agrees to settle on the keynote at the bottom of the instrument. Early as the piece is, it makes a powerful effect and projects typical Gubaidulian matters of determination and conflict, exhilaration and exhaustion.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

arr. Lars Ulrik Mortensen (b. 1955)

Chaconne in A minor, after BWV 1004 in D minor for solo violin

Bach may still have been fresh from school, and in his first job, as a violinist at the ducal court in Weimar, when he set about writing a set of six solo pieces for violin, three each of sonatas and partitas, possibly for himself to perform. No doubt he fiddled with the music over the years, before making a fair copy in 1720, when he was at Cöthen.
The fourth piece in the set is a partita in D minor, whose finale enters in the rhythm of a sarabande: slow, heavy, triple. However, this is a dance also of another kind, on a repeating four-bar theme that descends from D to A, ready to make a rising cadence back to D: the inexorably circling, purposefully driving bass of the chaconne. Sixty-four times it comes, on through a middle section in the major (variations 34-52), all the time supporting counterpoint that implies up to seven simultaneous lines, until finally the voices spiral into the keynote.

Tonight’s arrangement is by the Danish harpsichordist Lars Ulrik Mortensen. Brahms, who also made a transcription, for piano left hand, had this to say: “If I were to imagine that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind.”

J. S. Bach
arr. Torsten Johann

*Ricercar à 6 from The Musical Offering, BWV 1079*

Undoubtedly the most fecund encounter ever between monarch and musician came on May 7, 1747, when Frederick the Great entertained Bach at his court in Potsdam. The young king presented the aging composer with a theme, and asked him to improvise a fugue, which Bach duly did. Back home in Leipzig, Bach returned to the matter, and produced a whole volume, including canons, a trio sonata, and two fugues, for which he used the term “ricercar,” one in three parts and one in six. This collection he published as *Das musikalische Opfer* (The Musical Offering), with a dedication to the man who had prompted it.

The six-part ricercar, in C minor, has the second, third, and fourth voices each entering when the immediately preceding voice has got to the end of the royal theme, producing an effect of variation form. Then, with more of a gap, come the fifth and sixth voices to complete the colloquy, which continues through motivic reminiscences and full statements of the theme, to end with it returning in the bass.

Not unlike the violin chaconne in this respect, the six-part ricercar has been a great source of interest to later musicians. Bach may have envisioned it as a keyboard piece (Frederick at Potsdam had several examples of the then new piano), but it has been arranged countless times, not least by Webern, whose orchestration, made for the 250th anniversary of Bach’s birth, became the starting point for Gubaidulina’s violin concerto *Offertorium* (1980). This evening we hear an arrangement for strings by Torsten Johann, kindly made available by the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra.
Sofia Gubaidulina

**Meditation on the Bach Chorale: “Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit”**

Gubaidulina’s more recent conversations with Bach have included a St John Passion for the 250th anniversary of the earlier composer’s death, in 2000, and this composition of 1993 for the Bach Society of Bremen. The piece plays for twelve minutes or so. As in *Offertorium*, Gubaidulina chose music with late-Bach associations – in this case, the chorale prelude “Vor deinen Thron tret’ ich hiermit” (Herewith I come before your throne), which the composer’s son Carl Philipp Emanuel added as a kind of appendix when he published his father’s *Art of Fugue*. Also important to Gubaidulina was evidence that Bach had composed sometimes with significant numbers, which he would derive from names by counting where their letters came in the alphabet; for example, “BACH” (2–1–3–8) yields by summation the number 14. To Bach’s numbers, for his own name and that of Jesus, she added 48, for “SOFIA.”

The resulting numbers govern the lengths of sections and subsections, in what is a new prelude on the same chorale, scored for harpsichord and solo string quintet. A sense of the uncanny is summoned at once, with imposing harpsichord entries, string tremolando, and eventually a sustained tritone, before the first line of the chorale is intoned by the double bass. From this point on, much of the music refers to motivic elements in the chorale, in continuing atmospheres of strangeness, with the chorale melody occasionally coming fully into focus. An early phase of somewhat Bartókian string polyphony, for instance, provides a foil for the chorale in violin harmonics with pizzicato viola. Later, the double bass has another solo, tremolando and with sliding bow, from which it moves toward an implacable ostinato drawn from the chorale. Finally, the whole chorale bursts in on full strings, sounding in this setting like an old Russian hymn. The harpsichord, however, has the last word, closing with a sequence of chords whose top notes spell out B–A–C–H.

J. S. Bach

**Triple Concerto in A minor, BWV 1044**

Most of Bach’s concertos with one or more solo keyboard instruments are believed to date from the time, between 1729 and 1741, when he was in charge of regular concerts at Zimmermann’s coffee house in Leipzig. Among these dozen or so compositions, the A minor concerto stands out in having two additional soloists, on flute and violin, thereby reproducing the scoring of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, which was certainly completed by March 24, 1721, when Bach inscribed his dedication to the lucky margrave. If the A minor concerto dates from around a decade later, one might imagine the composer playing it with his two eldest sons, Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel.
The first movement is based on an agitated theme in sixteenth notes varied by triplets and dotted rhythms. Elements of the theme are treated in dialogue by the solo flute and violin, but the keyboard comes to assert itself as the dominant solo instrument, with passages where it is unaccompanied. One thing it cannot do, of course, is sustain notes, and this difference from the flute and violin is exploited in widening divergences of speed, to the point where the keyboard is careering in thirty-seconds against whole notes from the other soloists. There is another, cadenza-like stretch of thirty-second notes from the keyboard against a staccato quarter-note pulse from everyone else near the end.

Only the soloists take part in the slow movement, which opens with an eight-measure duet for flute and keyboard, with pizzicato violin accompaniment, followed by a variation for violin and keyboard with flute accompanying. The key is C major, but the music is soon moving away from this easeful tonality, and that process continues through the continuation, in which the material is developed – first, as before, with flute and keyboard to the fore, then violin and keyboard.

Aspects of the first two movements are expressed differently in the finale: harmonic darkening, beautiful textures of keyboard with pizzicato strings, duetting flute and violin, and contrasts of speed, with the keyboard in triplet eighth notes against the others’ spacious quarter notes, often heard in chiming descent. There is an explicit cadenza this time for the keyboard soloist (with the invitation to extend it), after which the music maintains its seriousness to the end. Clearly, coffee-house patrons in mid-eighteenth-century Leipzig did not expect just to be entertained.

Program notes by Paul Griffiths
About the Artists

Harpischordist Kristian Bezuidenhout was born in South Africa in 1979. He is a frequent guest artist with the world’s leading ensembles, including The Freiburger Barockorchester, Chicago Symphony, and Collegium Vocale Gent, in many instances as a guest director. He divides his time between concerto, recital, and chamber music engagements, appearing in early music festivals across Europe; the festivals of Salzburg, Edinburg, Schleswig Holstein, Tanglewood, Luzern, and Mostly Mozart Lincoln Center, and at concert halls including the Berlin and Köln Philharmonie, Suntory Hall, Symphony Hall, Wigmore Hall, and Carnegie Hall. Recent recordings include the complete keyboard music of Mozart (prizes include Diapason D’or, a Caecilia Prize, and Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik); Mendelssohn piano concertos with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra; and Schumann Dichterliebe with Mark Padmore (both won Edison Awards).

Flutist Kelli Kathman is active as a soloist, chamber, and orchestral musician. Best known for her interpretations of music of our day, she has collaborated with ensembles such as Signal, Alarm Will Sound, eighth blackbird, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Wordless Music Orchestra, and the International Contemporary Ensemble. Recent Festival appearances include the Holland Festival, Tanglewood Festival, Chamber Music Northwest, and the NY Electroacoustic Music Festival. She has recorded for Nonesuch, Naxos, Mode, Cantaloupe, and New Amsterdam Records, and worked with composers including Steve Reich, John Adams, Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, and others. Kelli holds degrees from The Eastman School of Music and Yale University and currently teaches at Sarah Lawrence College. She has performed with Signal since its beginnings in 2009.

Daniel Pesca has performed at venues including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Interlochen Center for the Arts, the Library of Congress, and the Chicago Cultural Center. Daniel has performed as a featured soloist with the Orchestra of the League of Composers, the Eastman BroadBand, the Buffalo Philharmonic, and the Eastman Wind Ensemble, and appeared with Chicago’s Dal Niente, the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, and the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble. His playing is featured on recordings from Block M Records and Urtext Classics, including a performance of Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez’s piano concerto, Diaries, written for Daniel. His latest recording will appear on Centaur Records in 2015.
Heralded by *The New York Times* as a violinist of “tireless energy and bright tone,” **Courtney Orlando** specializes in the performance of contemporary and crossover music. She is a founding member of the acclaimed new music ensemble Alarm Will Sound, which has premiered works by and collaborated with some of the foremost composers of our time, including John Adams, Steve Reich, Meredith Monk, Michael Gordon, and David Lang. Performances with AWS include those at Carnegie Hall, the Lincoln Center Festival, Amsterdam’s Holland Festival, and a tour of Moscow and St. Petersburg. She is also a member of Ensemble Signal. Courtney serves on the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory. Prior to her appointment at Peabody, she received her doctorate from and taught at the Eastman School of Music.

**Brad Lubman**, conductor/composer, is founding Co-Artistic Director and Music Director of Ensemble Signal. Lubman has led major orchestras including the DSO Berlin, RSO Stuttgart, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the National Symphony. He has worked with some of the most important ensembles for contemporary music, including Ensemble Modern, London Sinfonietta, Musik Fabrik, and Steve Reich and Musicians. Lubman has conducted at new-music festivals across Europe, including those in Lucerne, Salzburg, Berlin, Paris, and Oslo, and has conducted numerous world premieres, including Steve Reich’s *Three Tales*, *Daniel Variations*, and *Radio Rewrite*, Helmut Lachenmann’s *Concertini*, and works by Philip Glass, Charles Wuorinen, John Zorn, and Hilda Paredes. His own music has been performed in the USA and Europe, and can be heard on his CD, *Insomniac*, on Tzadik. Lubman is on faculty at the Eastman School of Music and the Bang on a Can Summer Institute.

**Ensemble Signal**, described by the *New York Times* as “one of the most vital groups of its kind,” is a New York-based ensemble. Since its debut in 2008, the Ensemble has performed over 100 concerts and has given the New York, world, or U.S. premieres of over 20 works. Signal was founded by Co-Artistic/Executive Director Lauren Radnofsky and Co-Artistic Director/Conductor Brad Lubman. A “new music dream team” (TONY), Signal regularly performs with Lubman and features a supergroup of independent artists from the modern music scene. Signal has performed at Lincoln Center Festival, BIG EARS Festival, Carnegie Hall, Ojai Music Festival, Miller Theatre, Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Bang on a Can Marathon.

**Tonight’s Performers**

- Kristian Bezuidenhout, *harpsichord*
- Kelli Kathman, *flute*
- Daniel Pesca, *piano & harpsichord*
- Courtney Orlando, *violin*
- Lauren Cauley, *violin*
- Will Knuth, *violin*
- Isabel Hagen, *viola*
- Lauren Radnofsky, *cello*
- Tristan Karseten-Krause, *bass*
About Miller Theatre

**Miller Theatre at Columbia University** is the leading presenter of new music in New York City and one of the most vital forces nationwide for innovative programming. In partnership with Columbia University School of the Arts, Miller is dedicated to producing and presenting unique events, with a focus on contemporary and early music, jazz, and multimedia. Founded in 1988, Miller has helped launch the careers of myriad composers and ensembles, serving as an incubator for emerging artists and a champion of those not yet well known in the U.S. A four-time recipient of the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming, Miller continues to meet the high expectations set forth by its founders—to present innovative programs, support new work, and connect creative artists with adventurous audiences.

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as of January 20, 2015
Upcoming Events

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doors at 5:30 p.m., music at 6:00 p.m.
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American Contemporary Music Ensemble

Wednesday, June 3
doors at 5:30 p.m., music at 6:00 p.m.
POP-UP CONCERTS
Trios by Zorn

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