

Composer Portraits

Sofia Gubaidulina

International Contemporary Ensemble

Christian Knapp, *conductor*

Rebekah Heller, *solo bassoon*

Saturday, February 9, 8:00 p.m.



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Trio for violin, viola, and cello (1989)

Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931)

Concordanza (1971)

for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, percussion, violin, viola, cello, and bass

INTERMISSION

Meditation on the Bach Chorale "Vor deinen Thron tret' ich hiermit" (1993)

for harpsichord and string quartet

Concerto for bassoon and low strings (1975)

Rebekah Heller, *bassoon*



This program runs approximately one hour and 45 minutes, including intermission.

Major support for Composer Portraits is provided by
the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

Composer Portraits is presented with the friendly support of  ernst von siemens
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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 wheelchair accessible. Large print programs are available upon request. For more information or to arrange accommodations, please call 212-854-7799.

About the Program

Introduction

Sophia — or *sofia*, to follow the usual transliteration from the Russian form — is the Greek word for “wisdom.” As wisdom personified, *Sophia* has a place in many schemes of mystical thought, a spirit not only of supreme awareness but also of challenge and anguish. *Sophia* is wisdom effulgent; she is also wisdom hidden, wisdom in chains, wisdom separated.

Sofia Asgatovna Gubaidulina was well named. Intense in her gaze and always alert in her posture, she has the look of one who can trespass beyond the mundane: a wise woman. At the same time, she fits into the Russian tradition of the holy simpleton, whose earthly folly is heavenly wisdom. Female shaman and blessed fool, she is an extraordinary figure to have arrived in a time of cynicism, lethargy, irresponsibility, and confusion, but all the more vital for that. Almost unknown outside Russia until she was into her fifties (and not much known inside), she has become in the last thirty years one of the most deeply appreciated artists of our time. She does not offer easy solutions, or calm, or the vision of a better past. She is at war with the present, but on behalf of the future. She is at war with herself, casting off artistic decorum, throwing doubt into the wild mix that almost any work of hers will contain.

The mix comes from within. She gained a dual heritage from her parents, Russian and Tatar, who were themselves heirs to different cultures: Orthodox and Muslim (though her father was not religious), central and peripheral, western and eastern. She was born, on October 24, 1931, in Chistopol, an industrial town on the banks of a great reservoir on the Volga, right at the center of Tatarstan, the northernmost reach of ancient Islam. In 1949 she entered the conservatory in the regional capital of Kazan, a city with churches and mosques, a prestigious university (where Lenin was a student), museums, and an opera house. The nineteenth-century Russian socialist Alexander Herzen wrote that: “The significance of Kazan is very great: it is a place where two worlds meet. It has two origins, the West and the East, and you can see them at every crossroads; here they have lived together in amity as a result of continuous interaction, and begun to create something quite original.”



What Herzen saw in the city, Gubaidulina was finding in herself. This was the bleak time of Stalin's last years, but light shines more clearly in the dark, and Gubaidulina had found that light in music. She transferred in 1954 to Moscow, to study at first with Nikolay Peyko, who himself had studied with Myaskovsky and was pre-eminently a symphonist. From 1959 she studied in the Moscow Conservatory's composition master class with Vissarion Shebalin, also a Myaskovsky pupil and a composer of symphonies (as well as string quartets and a *Taming of the Shrew* opera). By the time she finished her studies, in 1963, she was into her thirties, and for a while her progress remained slow. Only a few works, such as her imposing Chaconne for piano (1962), remain in her catalog from before the late 1960s; some of those early compositions indicate her awareness of serialism and of new instrumental techniques coming from the West. Such interests — and her whole artistic positioning — earned her criticism at the conservatory. Shostakovich, though, had encouraged her to keep to her “mistaken path.” Meanwhile, she supported herself the conventional way, writing film scores.

She entered her stride as a composer with pieces including *Night in Memphis* (1968), a cantata on texts from ancient Egypt set in translation for mezzo-soprano, men's choir, and a mixed instrumental ensemble, and *Musical Toys* (1969), a book of children's piano pieces. *Concordanza* had its premiere at the Prague Spring Festival in 1971, but generally she remained little known outside Moscow and Leningrad. That may have been partly by choice, as she enjoyed working with musician friends, among them two fellow composers, Viktor Suslin and Vyacheslav Artyomov, with whom in 1975 she formed the group *Astraea*, to improvise on folk and ritual instruments from Russia, the Caucasus, central Asia, and further east.

Unlike such contemporaries as Alfred Schnittke, Edison Denisov, and Andrey Volkonsky, she was unknown in the West until the end of the 1970s, when two major works had western premieres: her *First Quartet* in Cologne and *Hour of the Soul* in Paris, the latter a setting of poems by Marina Tsvetayeva for mezzo-soprano and large orchestra without strings. It was, however, Gidon Kremer's espousal of her violin concerto *Offertorium* that brought her to the forefront. Kremer gave the first performance in Vienna in 1981 and played the work around Europe and North America. Its success enabled the composer to make her first visit to the West in 1985, and in 1992 she moved to the outskirts of Hamburg, while maintaining an apartment in Moscow.

Her output, nearly all of which is available on CD or YouTube, includes a pair of oratorios after St. John's gospel, several smaller choral pieces, orchestral works, and four string quartets at the head of a large body of chamber music. Most of the top awards available to composers have come her way, including the Praemium Imperiale of Tokyo, the Sonning Prize, and the Polar Music Prize, but honors and age have not kept her from becoming ever more wisely foolish, more foolishly wise.

Trio for violin, viola, and cello (1989)

Having written two string quartets in 1987 (Nos. 2 and 3), Gubaidulina added this three-movement trio the following year, dedicating it to the memory of Boris Pasternak. The commission came from Radio France, but the first performance was given by members of the Moscow String Quartet, who brought the piece to New York in 2001, for an evening celebrating the composer's 70th birthday.

Together at the start, bouncing the note B around, the three instruments progressively separate through the three movements. In the first, they agree on everything — when to move, and where — through a course that includes insistence on dark chords along with dialog and a final section of gathering intensity, projected as if by voices in prayer.

The central slow movement has violin and cello conversing in short phrases, pizzicato throughout, while the viola cuts the high air with harmonics, like a soul in flight. It descends to normal tone only in the closing measures.

In the finale, for the most part, the instruments follow separate paths, which from time to time they exchange. One possibility is a bobbing within a narrow range — the viola's option to begin with, then the violin's, and so on. At the end of an episode of upward glissandos, which they all execute, the violin comes up with a five-note motif that gradually comes to dominate the music: a little wave — up two steps, down a step, up a bigger step. Ultimately, this draws the instruments together, and draws them high. They end, though, in their different states of aloneness.



Concordanza (1971)

Concord, agreement, harmony. These are the meanings of the Italian word Gubaidulina chose as title for her composition of 1971, which on one level is a struggle between concordant elements — not necessarily straightforward concords, but musical ideas that are flowing, homogeneous — and others that are discordant, disruptive. The piece is scored for ten soloists, and there are many ways in which it plays out contrasts of smoothness and irregularity — or of irregularity within smoothness, and vice versa — through its course of twelve minutes. But perhaps the lesson is that these diverse magical moments — the solos, the quasi-fugue for woodwinds, the beautiful slow movement with horn and bassoon over extreme strings and cymbals, the march, and more — are all parts of a greater unison, whose nature the composer was to go on discovering.

Meditation on the Bach Chorale “Vor deinen Thron tret’ ich hiermit” (1993)

Offertorium, based on Bach’s *Musical Offering*, evidently opened Gubaidulina to further Bachian commissions, including, as well as a St. John Passion for the 250th anniversary of Bach’s death in 2000, 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 tremolandos, 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.

Concerto for bassoon and low strings (1975)

Gubaidulina has written several concertos, most of them at the request of a particular soloist or institution, and so it was here, with her first. Valery Popov, the pre-eminent Russian bassoonist, heard her *Concordanza* at its enthusiastically received Moscow premiere on January 15, 1974 (it had to be repeated), and asked her to write something for him. She attended his concerts and his classes at the Moscow Conservatory, and became entranced by his playing. “Gradually,” she has recalled, “I began to penetrate into the essence of the instrument itself, to understand it like some character in a play. It was then that the idea came to me to surround the ‘personality’ of the bassoon with low-register strings: double basses and cellos. The interactions between the soloist and the surrounding instruments are complex, contradictory, as in a dramatic scene full of action. The concerto includes moments of reconciliation and hostility, tragedy, and loneliness.”

Composed in 1975, the work has five movements, of which the first is much the longest, playing for about ten minutes. Here the bassoon enters alone, very much in the register of its opening solo in *The Rite of Spring*, but soon going way down to the bottom of its range. Then one of its melodic invitations finds an echo in the strings, laid out in seven parts (a favorite number of the composer’s): four of cellos and three of basses. The process of an image being answered by its echo, or its shadow (if a shadow can seem to be made of light), continues a while. Before long, the shadows are preceding the images, not following them, and taking on a life of their own. The dialog becomes more frenetic, then subsides, and something like the initial state resumes, until the bassoon settles on a fanfare, arpeggiating a G Major second-inversion triad. This curious feature may have come about because Gubaidulina knew Popov had originally been a trumpet player.

The short second movement, slow and low, introduces multiphonics on the solo instrument (chords produced by special fingerings). The third picks up from the fanfaring at



the end of the first, but before long a double bass takes over, and the movement continues without the work's ostensible soloist. Repeating glissandos convey a sense of lament.

Returning in the brief fourth movement, the bassoon presents a cadenza in quickly changing characters: swinging, comic, desperate, laughing. It settles finally on a chant-like phrase that encourages the strings to participate.

As the finale gets going, the bassoon's "swinging" persona seems to have won through, but the chant reappears, followed by other memories, setting up a dramatic end.

Program notes by Paul Griffiths

About the Artists

Christian Knapp is known for his dynamic stage presence and energy on the podium. He has performed throughout the world, conducting the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, New World Symphony, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, Western Australia Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chicago Civic Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Mexico City Philharmonic, Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, and the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra, among others. This season he will lead five performances of Handel's *Messiah* with the Milwaukee Symphony. He has collaborated with such renowned artists as Mstislav Rostropovich, Itzhak Perlman, Alexander Toradze, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Garrick Ohlsson, Vinson Cole, and Pepe Romero. In 2005 Knapp conducted the world premiere of Paul Dresher's opera *The Tyrant* with the Seattle Chamber Players. He served as the Associate Conductor of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra (SSO) from 2004 to 2006, and has continued to conduct performances and special concerts, including a collaboration with the Mark Morris Dance Company in 2009-10. He was Associate Conductor of Broomhill Opera in London from 2000 to 2003 and

has conducted operas including *Turn of the Screw*, *The Rake's Progress*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Carmen*, *Der Sibleersee*, and *Il tritico*. Knapp recently conducted *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Elektra* at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre at the invitation of its artistic and general director Valery Gerгиеv. Knapp received bachelor's degrees in piano performance from the New England Conservatory and in philosophy from Tufts University. He studied conducting at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena under Yuri Temirkanov and Myung-Whun Chung, and earned a diploma in conducting from the St. Petersburg State Conservatory in Russia, where he studied with Ilya Musin. He has assisted Michael Tilson Thomas at the London Symphony Orchestra and Leonid Korchmar at the Kirov Opera. A passionate proponent of new music, Knapp has led groups including the Perspectives New Music Ensemble in London and the Seattle Chamber Players, conducting works by John Adams, Julian Anderson, Kaija Saariaho, Pascal Dusapin, and Gerard Grisey. He has previously appeared with ICE conducting the U.S. premiere of *Zona* by Magnus Lindberg at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival in 2006 and a Composer Portrait of Philippe Hurel at Miller Theatre in 2007.

Praised for her “flair” and “deftly illuminated” performances by the *New York Times*, bassoonist **Rebekah Heller** is a uniquely dynamic chamber, orchestral, and solo musician. Equally comfortable playing established classical works and the newest of new music, Rebekah is a fiercely passionate advocate for the bassoon. An “impressive solo bassoonist” (*The New Yorker*), she is tirelessly committed to collaborating with composers to expand the modern solo and chamber music repertoire for the instrument. As a member of the renowned International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), Rebekah has played at some of the world’s most prestigious music festivals, including the Mostly Mozart Festival, the Lincoln Center Festival, the Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music, and The Helsinki Musica Nova Festival. She has worked closely with world-renowned composers and conductors, such as John Adams, Matthias Pintscher, Dai Fujikura, Ludovic Morlot, Kaija Saariaho, and many more. Before moving to New York, Rebekah completed a one-year appointment as Principal Bassoonist of the Jacksonville Symphony, and has also served as Principal Bassoonist with the Atlanta Opera Orchestra, and the Utah Festival Opera. From 2005-2008, Rebekah was a member of the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, Florida. During her time there, she worked with some of today’s most innovative and electrifying musical

minds, including Michael Tilson Thomas, Robert Spano, Marin Alsop, Oliver Knussen, Yo-Yo Ma, and Christian Tetzlaff. Rebekah received her Master of Music degree from the University of Texas at Austin. Like many of her ICE colleagues, she attended Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music for her undergraduate studies, where she earned degrees in both Music and English Literature. Besides being a passionate performer, Rebekah is also a dedicated teacher, and has served on the faculties of the University of North Florida, Florida International University, and the Vermont Youth Orchestra’s Reveille camp. Rebekah’s teachers and musical mentors include John Clouser, Kristin Wolfe Jensen, George Sakakeeny, Michel Debost and Janet Polk. Born in upstate New York, Rebekah currently lives in Brooklyn.

The International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), described by the *New York Times* as “one of the most accomplished and adventurous groups in new music,” is dedicated to reshaping the way music is created and experienced. With a modular makeup of 33 leading instrumentalists performing in forces ranging from solos to large ensembles, ICE functions as performer, presenter, and educator, advancing the music of our time by developing innovative new works and new strategies for audience engagement. ICE redefines concert music as it brings together new work and new listeners in the 21st century. Since its founding in 2001, ICE has premiered over 500 compositions — the majority of these new works by emerging composers — in venues ranging from alternative spaces to concert halls around the world. The ensemble received the American Music Center’s Trailblazer Award in 2010 for its contributions to the field, and received the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming in 2005 and 2010. ICE is Ensemble-in-Residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago through 2013. The ICE musicians also serve as Artists-in-Residence at the Mostly Mozart Festival of Lincoln Center through 2013, curating and performing chamber music programs that juxtapose new and old music. ICE has released acclaimed albums on the Nonesuch, Kairos, Bridge, Naxos, Tzadik, New Focus, and New Am-

sterdam labels, with several forthcoming releases on Mode Records. Recent and upcoming highlights include headline performances at the Lincoln Center Festival (New York), Musica Nova Helsinki (Finland), Wien Modern (Austria), Acht Brücken Music for Cologne (Germany), La Cité de la Musique (Paris), and tours of Japan, Brazil, and France. ICE has worked closely with conductors Ludovic Morlot, Matthias Pintscher, John Adams, and Susanna Mälkki. With leading support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ICE launched ICElab in early 2011. This new program places teams of ICE musicians in close collaboration with six emerging composers each year to develop works that push the boundaries of musical exploration. ICElab projects will be featured in more than one hundred performances from 2011–2014 and documented online through DigitICE, a new online venue. ICE’s commitment to build a diverse, engaged audience for the music of our time has inspired The Listening Room, a new educational initiative for public schools without in-house arts curricula. Using team-based composition and graphic notation, ICE musicians lead students in the creation of new musical works, nurturing collaborative creative skills and building an appreciation for musical experimentation. ICE made their Miller Theatre debut in 2002 and has returned for multiple performances nearly every season since. Read more at www.iceorg.org.



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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 in dance, contemporary and early music, jazz, opera, and performance. Founded in 1988 with funding from John Goelet, Brooke Astor, and the Kathryn Bache Miller Fund, Miller Theatre has built a reputation for attracting new and diverse audiences to the performing arts and expanding public knowledge of contemporary music.

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Stefon Harris, *vibraphone*

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POP-UP CONCERTS

It's Complicated

Ensemble Signal

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