

In 1988, I was invited to Leningrad to play my First Concerto for Piano and Orchestra with Vladimir Spivakov and the Moscow Virtuosi. It was not long before the Berlin Wall collapsed and communism in the Soviet Union was coming to an end. It was on the occasion of the Third Contemporary Music Festival and that year Luciano Berio, John Cage, and Luigi Nono were there. In short, there was an international atmosphere that foreshadowed the great historical and cultural change that was taking place. The Festival's motto was: "Music for humanism, peace, and friendship among nations".

It was then that I met Sofia Gubaidulina, and I remember the highly interesting meetings in the House of Composers, in addition to concerts at the Bolshoi Hall of the Philharmonie. There, I found that the distance between the positions of many composers such as Vyacheslav Artemov and Tikhon Krennikov, and between Boris Tchaikovsky and Boris Tishenko, was sometimes enormous. These composers came together and then found themselves in contact with the vast panorama of Western music that was experiencing an avant-garde moment.

In fact, since then what has emerged is how composers like Schnittke and Gubaidulina then went on to make their profound marks in the years that followed, for the greatness of their work, with results that were expressively shared across a number of different cultures, making them major players on the international scene.

Above all, Sofia Gubaidulina, with her Tartar origins, wrote a number of compositions that today seem emblematic for this synthesis of different cultures. On the one hand, she constructed a formalist thinking of great grammatical and syntactical significance, and on the other, she experimented with sounds using processes that pushed toward noise, free from preconceptions of performance ritual, building a new world of sound. Above these two directions, her music consistently reveals a deep spirituality in the parts that are not directly identified with a religious liturgy.

They seem to be contradictory aspects, but that is not the case. In reality, everything moves into a vein that often evokes rhythms and arrangements from the folk tradition, with the presence of elements that we could also find in previous generations of Russian composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Dimitri Shostakovich.

The first CD of this double album contains a series of compositions in which percussion is the protagonist. I was very surprised to see how Gubaidulina dealt with them, layering a complex fabric of up to seven different sets and how she then achieved unprecedented results, daring to put these sound sources together with other instruments like the organ. But this union is also the other theme of the CD, which, apart from two short piano pieces, has an original chamber music dimension, a mix of sounds that is the result of all these different elements that I described above. It is truly a new music that strikes us for the clarity of its syntactic thought and a continuous elegance of writing that has a very profound communicative value, written by a composer who will remain in the history of these decades as someone who lead the evolution of music research, the author of some true masterpieces.

Biographie

Sofia Gubaidulina completed her education at the Conservatory of Kazan in 1954 and continued her compositional studies in Moscow with Nikolai Peiko and Vissarion Shebalin until 1963. Since then Gubaidulina has been a freelance composer. After her compositional activity was subject to constant repression in the Soviet Union, she moved to Germany in 1992 and since then has lived near Hamburg. Gidon Kremer's commitment to her violin concerto 'Offertorium' in the 1980s helped her to become rapidly known in the West. She is a member of the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts and the order 'Pour le mérite', and was awarded the Paemium Imperiale (1998), the Polar Music Prize (2002) and the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale (2013).

In Sofia Gubaidulina's music both her Russian and Asian roots are perceptible. Composing is a religious action for the devoutly Christian composer. Since the 1980s, numerical relationships have played an important role for Gubaidulina; with their help, she structures rhythms and formal processes. She feels closely related to Johann Sebastian Bach in her efforts towards combining intellectuality and emotionality. She designates the dilogy 'St. John Passion' and 'St. John Easter' as her opus summum, in which she counterpoints the texts of the Evangelists with text passages of the Apocalypse in a bold theological approach.