



Theme & Variations

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Monthly column about the world of such music that people usually call *classical*. Subjects of abundant subjectivity and, at times, little free of controversy. Those that all musicians talk and discuss about, but never come to firm conclusions. Those that allow the enthusiastic public to satisfy its curiosity and, by the way, to build communicational bridges and viaducts between the stage and the audience. And so that no one dares to take the themes less seriously, the variations will be commented and discussed exclusively with some of the best musicians on the planet.

(A)tonality

Composers have never had an easy life in this intricate world of the so-called *classical* music. Creating is a gift within the reach of many, but History of Music only recognizes merit to some, to ones more than to others, to many only belatedly. And who knows, how many composers from the past and the present are yet to be discovered and valued, making the subject even more exciting and, at times, bordering on a certain mystification in this almost infinite search for genius.

Nowadays everything is more tangible, qualifiable and quantifiable, there are few secrets to unravel or that are not unveilable around the corner. Whoever decides to live as a composer, faces the dilemma of originality more than ever, as if it were an inalienable condition of creativity. Either we want to hear something completely new, or we wish we could understand what we hear, or both. As if this were possible... or maybe it is?

To exchange some ideas –certainly scarce in an immense sea of

FEATURED GUEST

Sofia Gubaidulina



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Sofia Gubaidulina is one of the greatest composers, today and ever. Born in the former Soviet Union, the modernity of her music faced, from a very early age, serious obstacles in the regime but also important incentives from personalities such as Dmitri Shostakovich. Adored by the main festivals, orchestras and interpreters all over the world, Gubaidulina holds dozens of international awards and distinctions. She turned 90 a few days ago and lives in Germany.

notions, concepts and perspectives— about creativity and musical composition, I have the privilege of talking to one of the most important personalities in the world of music of the present and of all times: the Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina. Born nine decades ago in Chistopol, in the region of Tatarstan, her music is largely characterized by the combination of avant-garde elements with tonal music itself. To my question whether this characteristic is an intentional and considered decision, or rather a natural impulse of her personal creative process, Gubaidulina answers categorically that it is not a conscious choice. «It's a necessity: the need to live in the space given to me by my destiny. I think the avant-garde elements that are actively used in the 20th and 21st centuries are the result of a natural process of life and of the sound space itself. There is a natural search to expand the limits of this space and to take advantage of the opportunities that open up to penetrate the secrets of the sound matter.»

In a musical panorama that for decades has adopted atonality as an almost essential requirement in the search for originality, Gubaidulina considers the tonal system «a great obstacle», which, however, «has also given fertile conditions to the art of music». The tonality «combines in itself two opposing aspirations of the sound fabric» guaranteeing, on the one hand, the «plurality and variety of forms» and, on the other, «limiting this aspiration with the cyclical and eternal return to the regime of perfect fourths and fifths». «Unfortunately, over time, every system goes through a process of hardening, ossification, petrification and fossilization. And that is exactly where we are in relation to tonality.»

On an alleged dispute between tonality and atonality, Gubaidulina de-dramatizes because they represent «two opposing aspirations», it's true, but equivalent to the most ambiguous aspirations of human nature: «the infinite and the final and complete state». Deep down, «all we know for sure is that the sound we hear is based on something stable and unchanging, and that it represents a certain amount of fluctuations in a certain unit of time». Everything else is intuition and inspiration supported by this unchanging and eternal foundation. «Eternal but with due resignation, since one day the Angel will announce the end of time.»

Gubaidulina confesses that she has always felt the «approach of a turning point» and that she feels it now, more than ever, because «that moment is mercilessly approaching». But she also emphasizes that it is in critical and difficult moments that it becomes «especially important to maintain a foothold». For this reason and despite the obvious recourse to atonality, she considers «necessary to preserve the value of the fundamental tone of the harmonic series which reveals in itself both the force of expansion and the force of attraction». Music and life, as always, inseparable.

When I try to explore and comprehend a music work, I first try to understand if it is a reflection of what the composer is or was, or if, moreover, it is a sign of what the composer would like to be or have been. The examples and cases of the vicissitudes of the musical creative process over time are vast, multiform and varied. Sofia Gubaidulina herself

suffered, for example, the creative asphyxia fomented by the political pressure of the Soviet Union in the 60s and 70s: «it significantly harmed my activity and my own development as a composer». On the other hand, was it possible for our beloved Mozarts and Schuberts or is it possible in today's music industry to preserve independence and creative integrity, avoiding the temptation to compose something that meets the pretensions and expectations of those who commission the work or the audience that will listen to it? Gubaidulina stresses the importance of preserving that independence and creative integrity, but recognizes that, in her case and despite always having some fear about how her new compositions might be received by the public or the critics, this fear «has no relevant impact» in her personal creative process. «For me, without any doubt, the most important thing is the attitude of those who transmit my music.»