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GUBAIDULINA, MISUNDERSTOOD

Abstract: Since the early 1980s Sofia Gubaidulina has received numerous accolades, and her music has been performed and recorded worldwide. However, the critics' reaction to her works has often been resoundingly negative. In particular, Western critics have been baffled by Gubaidulina's penchant for long durations, the employment of seemingly literal musical symbolism verging on the kitch and, last but not least, the composer's religious fervour. Starting from the reviews of two ambitious events that served as introductions of Gubaidulina's music to British audiences, I will discuss the main objections directed towards her oeuvre and demonstrate that Gubaidulina's idiosyncratic compositional method has been misunderstood by British critics.

Keywords: Gubaidulina, BBC, Tsvetaeva, Offertorium, religious music

Born in 1931 in Chistopol, in the Autonomous Tatar Republic, and educated in Kazan and Moscow, the remarkable contemporary composer Sofia Asgatovna Gubaidulina belongs to the generation that stepped onto the Soviet creative scene in the early 1960s. This “generation of the sixties” (Rus.: *шестидесятники*) grew up under the influence of the public denunciation of Stalin's crimes and his cult of personality. The works of the generation of the sixties were characterised by a quest for truth, rebellion against the establishment, maverick creative curiosity and, most importantly, an urge to end the isolation and get to know the world on the other side of the “Iron Curtain”. As a woman in a male-dominated profession, a practicing believer in the atheistic Soviet Union, a person of mixed Tatar-Russian background in a largely xenophobic society and a member of non-conformist, partisan artistic groups in a state-controlled culture, Gubaidulina spent several decades fighting oppression, stigmatisation and exclusion. The fact that she was banned from travelling to the West to attend

premieres of her works until 1984 is just one example of the harassment that she was subjected to (Kurtz 2007: 177). In spite of being treated as a “black sheep” due to her biological, cultural, racial, confessional and political “otherness” – or perhaps because of it – Gubaidulina created a distinctive personal style. The fact that she was an “outsider” and thus off the official Soviet radar for a long time meant that she could dodge the prescribed rules and favoured solutions, and write music in accordance with her “inner need” (Kandinsky 1977: 19).

Gubaidulina is commonly regarded as one third of the leading triumvirate of the so-called “Moscow avant-garde” (Hakobian 1997: 284) together with Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998) and Edison Denisov (1929–1996). However, her labelling as an “avant-gardist” had less to do with her music than with her personal circumstances. Since she was neither a member of the Communist Party nor associated with the official clique (led by Tikhon Khrennikov, the long-standing President of the Union of Soviet Composers, and his associates Rodion Shchedrin, Karen Khachaturian, Andrei Eshpai, and others) she was grouped together with the so-called “unofficial” composers – a group of young and curious artists who “smuggled” long-maligned Western avant-garde techniques into Soviet music (Hakobian 1997; Schmelz 2004, 2008). Apart from Gubaidulina, Denisov and Schnittke, other composers who were considered “avant-gardists” or “non-conformists” were Andrei Volkonskii (1933–2008), Nikolai Karetnikov (1930–1994), Arvo Pärt (1935–), Alemdar Karamanov (1935–), Valentin Sil’vestrov (1937–) and many others. The fact that they were pushed into “unofficial” status and excluded from the official system of commissions, performances and promotion (as governed by the Union of Soviet Composers) and that their music could only be heard in small, alternative venues, contributed to their separation from the establishment and strengthened their avant-gardist aura.

Since early 1980s Gubaidulina has gradually achieved recognition in the West, mostly due to the immense success of her violin concerto *Offertorium*, championed by Gidon Kremer. In the past three decades she has received numerous prestigious commissions, become a member of the German and Swedish Academies of Arts, received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Chicago and Yale, and won numerous international prizes.

Her music has been released on Deutsche Gramophon, Phillips, Sony Classical and other prestigious labels. But while Gubaidulina's music has won approval of listeners worldwide, more often than not, reviews of her works have been resoundingly negative. The critics are baffled by Gubaidulina's penchant for (over)long durations, blatant dualisms, the employment of seemingly literal musical symbolism verging on the kitsch and, last but not least, the composer's religious fervour. Using as a starting point reviews of the two ambitious events that took place in 2006 and 2007, which served as introductions of Gubaidulina's music to British audiences, I will address the main objections directed towards her oeuvre. Then, I will analyse three of Gubaidulina's major works written before the dissolution of Soviet Union and demonstrate how these works responded to the cultural challenges of that time and place. I will argue that Gubaidulina's idiosyncratic compositional aesthetics, which merges populist with avant-garde and devotional with political, has been misunderstood by British critics and that her works cannot be appreciated without taking into consideration the context from which they originated.

THE IURODIVAIA

The mini festival titled *Dancers on a Tightrope – Beyond Shostakovich*, which took place between 13 and 15 October 2006 in the Southbank Centre in London, showcased the music of Gubaidulina among her other prominent (post-)Soviet peers – the Russians Galina Ustvolskaia and Alfred Schnittke, the Ukrainian Valentin Sil'vestrov, the Georgian Giia Kancheli and the Estonian Arvo Pärt – as well as their common “ancestor”, Dmitrii Shostakovich. While on this occasion Gubaidulina's works were not reviewed individually, the critics pointed to the overall impression of “sameness”¹ and “mawkishness”² of the music of Shostakovich's musical “offspring”.

¹ “However, one prevailing feeling left with us is that most of the powerfully expressive works chosen to represent them are better heard standing alone or in mixed programmes” (Woolf 2006).

² “Yet, if *Dancers on a Tightrope* has proved anything, it is that blanket programming of these composers does them no favours. Heard in isolation, several of these pieces might have seemed a powerfully personal statement of despair. In relentless succession, they began to seem merely mawkish” (Jeal 2006).

Only a few months later, in January 2007, The BBC Composer Weekend subtitled *A Journey of the Soul* was organised as a retrospective of Gubaidulina's entire career; most importantly, it was the first significant exposure of British audiences to her orchestral music. It was also the first time that this long-running annual series has spotlighted a female composer; while the press release issued by the BBC stated that she was chosen on the basis of being "one of the world's most original, respected and emotionally powerful musical voices" and "the most important Russian composer since Shostakovich" (BBC 2006), a critic for *The Independent* has pointed out that the decision to feature Gubaidulina was also "a loud riposte to those offended by the absence of female composers from last year's Proms" (Picard 2007). The event comprised three days (12–14 January) of concerts, talks, showings of films dedicated to her music, etc. The BBC Singers, BBC Symphony Chorus, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Kremerata Baltica and London Symphony Orchestra, with a host of renowned soloists and conductors, performed a selection of Gubaidulina's works, focusing on the composer's post-Soviet period; approximately half of the works were either British or European premieres.³

While the event received substantial coverage in the press, the reviews were overwhelmingly negative; in particular, the composer's recent works fared poorly compared to the music from her Soviet period. Richard Whitehouse with the *Classical Source* noted that "Gubaidulina's predilection for an expansive orchestral line-up crosses over into indulgence" and concluded that "for all its evident individuality, Gubaidulina's music is best heard in small and strategically programmed doses" (Whitehouse 2007). The *Guardian's* Tim Ashley's quip that "the more one listens to Sofia Gubaidulina's music, the less one likes it" is based on his observation that the illumination of extremes of despair and elation constitutes "her sole mode of perception and expression" and that the outcome of this is a "sermonising rant rather than visionary spirituality" (Ashley 2007). The *Observer's* Anthony Holden also complained about Gubaidulina's "hectoring religiosity" which results

³ The following works were performed: the Triptych *Nadeyka* dedicated to the composer's late daughter; *The Lyre of Orpheus*, *The Deceitful Face of Hope and Despair*, *A Feast During the Plague*; *The Canticle of the Sun: Fairytale Poem*; *Offertorium*; *Pro et Contra*; *The Light of the End*; *Under the Sign of Scorpio*; and *Alleluia*.

in music that is “highly derivative and reeking of incense”, and concluded that Gubaidulina is “a gifted woman dancing almost wilfully to her own tune, contentedly out of step with the modern world” (Holden 2007). The Telegraph’s Ivan Hewett bluntly compared the composer’s religious music to “hot air” and equated Gubaidulina’s compositional technique with “arranging rather obvious symbols of spiritual states such as conflict, gloom and transcendence into fetchingly melodramatic patterns,” thus concluding that “[a]ll Gubaidulina had achieved with her bullying symbolism was to crush the spiritual impulse that music always has, when given the freedom to be itself” (Hewett 2007). Equally harsh is The Independent’s critic Anna Picard, who objected to Gubaidulina’s didacticism and lack of humour, and asserted that “[a]fter decades of producing music for films, Gubaidulina has mastered affective instrumentation, conveying misery in knots of dyspeptic brass, and bliss in vertiginous planes of trilling strings and shimmering bells. But her *Weltanschauung* is unremittingly dour” (Picard 2007).

As we can see, the critics’ distaste for Gubaidulina’s music was mostly provoked by her employment of bombast musical symbolism and the unreservedly bleak outlook on life. The main issue may actually be that, while the composer has resided in Germany since 1992, she has stayed true to the method established during her Soviet years. By disregarding the change of political and personal circumstances in favour of perpetuating her trademark creative ideology, Gubaidulina has not done any favours to her earlier works, because her entire oeuvre has started to look schematic and repetitive. Thus, I will now attempt to restore the original context of her landmark works and by doing so to question some of the critics’ harsher assessments.

HOUR OF THE SOUL

One of Gubaidulina’s most dramatic works is *Hour of the Soul*, based on the poetry of the remarkable Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva. This work can be said to belong to the genre of the concerto because of its prominent part for a solo percussionist; however, the inclusion of a mezzo-soprano part

towards the end brings it closer to cantata.⁴ By choosing the poetry of the tragic Tsvetaeva, who was persecuted by the Soviet state and who committed suicide in 1941, Gubaidulina chose to speak about all oppressed artists, all outsiders, all victims of the regime. She has said: “I feel a very special connection to Marina Tsvetaeva. Marina ended her own life (in suicide) in the small town Elabuga, very close to Chistopol, my place of birth. [...] Her fate was extremely tragic: she was destroyed by the vulgarity of Soviet ideology, the aggressiveness of the Soviet system” (Lukomsky 1998b: 30–31). Gubaidulina has chosen the second of the three songs that form Tsvetaeva’s cycle, written in August 1923:

In the inmost hour of the soul,
 In the inmost one – of the night...
 (The gigantic stride of the soul,
 Of the soul in the night)

That hour, soul, reign
 Over the worlds you desire.
 To rule is the lot of the soul:
 Soul, reign.

Cover the lips with rust; snow lightly
 Upon the lashes...
 (The Atlantic sigh of the soul,
 Of the soul in the night...)

That hour, soul, darken
 The eyes in which you will rise
 Like a Vega...make bitter
 The sweetest fruit, soul.

Make bitter: darken:
 Grow: reign.⁵

⁴ The first version for large wind orchestra and mezzo-soprano was completed in 1974; however, Gubaidulina had no chance of having it performed. Therefore, she rewrote the piece for a solo percussionist, mezzo-soprano and large orchestra (1976) and dedicated it to the exceptional percussion player Mark Pekarskii, who managed to obtain a permission to perform the piece. This second version was again revised in 1986 and published by Sikorski; it is now considered the definitive version of the piece.

⁵ Translated by Nina Kossman (Tsvetaeva 1989: 107).

These lyrics only appear in the Coda, in a haunting section for mezzo-soprano, as a summary of the triumph of the free spirit over adversity. The rest of the piece unfolds as an instrumental drama, in which Tsvetaeva's soul is tormented by the world around her.

Hour of the Soul belongs to the period when Gubaidulina was still searching her own individual compositional voice. During the 1950s and 1960s the composers of her generation slowly gained access to previously forbidden scores – ranging from pre-war modernism, post-war Western avant-garde to their country's own suppressed modernist past – and they started trying out the entire avant-gardist spectrum of expressive means, including serialism, pointillism, aleatoricism and sonorism. Being isolated from the West and forced to study these techniques illegally and autodidactically, they used them quite idiosyncratically, even – as Andrei Volkonskii has admitted – “incorrectly” (Schmelz 2005: 171). Moreover, they were keen to explore the expressive and associative possibilities of these new compositional devices and their potential to convey meaning and transmit political, philosophical and ethical messages.

Although Gubaidulina was open to experimentation and willing to try out different compositional devices, she resented the appeal of novelty *per se*. In many interviews Gubaidulina has voiced opposition to stigmatising her art as “avant-garde” and stated her reservations about the very concept of constant innovation in music (Lukomsky 1998a: 8–10; Kurtz 2007: 69). She has refused to ascribe to avant-garde techniques any kind of supremacy (moral, spiritual, technical, intellectual) over more traditional artistic means: in her view, all compositional methods are equally valid. After formulating the spiritual or philosophical idea, which always forms the core of her work, Gubaidulina selects the material suitable to transmit it; hence she freely combines tonality, modality, chromaticism, micro-tonality, improvisation, serial procedures and sonorism.

The fact that a majority of unofficial composers, including Gubaidulina, earned a living by writing music for film and theatre enabled them to experiment and gain proficiency in writing music saturated with symbolism and capable of illustrating the most diverse phenomena. Some of her peers such as Alfred Schnittke and Arvo Pärt promoted the so-called polystylistic method,

based on the often crude and violent clashes of various styles; the incongruence of stylistic collisions served to increase their mimetic potential (Medić 2008, 2010). While Gubaidulina was not particularly interested in polystylism and usually only used quotations as “epigraphs”, in *Hour of the Soul* she confronted two different styles to represent two opposing protagonists – Marina and the Soviet state. The result is a polystylistic drama akin to Schnittke’s Symphony No. 1, in which destructive forces are represented by trivial musical genres. Schnittke’s immensely influential, polystylistic Symphony No. 1 was premiered in 1974 in Gorky and performed once again in Talinn in 1975, before being blacklisted. Gubaidulina attended both performances and was deeply impressed with the Symphony. When asked whether she was inspired to use the popular songs in a way similar to Schnittke’s, Gubaidulina confirmed that she was and added: “At that time I had no idea or expectation that polystylism would become so fashionable, I just decided to try it – in just this one episode” (Polin 1988: 19).

In *Hour of the Soul*, Marina’s “irrationality and mysticism” are represented by aleatoric music for percussion instruments, while her musical antagonists are Soviet popular and patriotic songs; in the composer’s words, they represent the “vulgarity and the aggressiveness of the common crowd as bred by the Soviet system” (Lukomsky 1998b: 31). Gubaidulina has explained that she chose percussion instruments to represent Tsvetaeva not only because the poet allegedly had a personal preference for percussion, but also because she found the “mystical” and “rebellious” quality of percussion suitable to represent the mystical and protesting soul of Marina. Most importantly, Gubaidulina opted for percussion because, in her view, Tsvetaeva had a dominant masculine side (Polin 1989: 19). In order to emphasise Tsvetaeva’s masculinity and repressed femininity, Gubaidulina has instructed that the mezzo-soprano should be hidden amongst the orchestra throughout the piece, and only make herself visible in the Coda. At the same time, the male percussion player is required to travel in a circle around the orchestra: in the beginning of the piece, he is standing at the right-hand corner of the stage near the timpani; then he moves towards other percussion instruments (cymbals, bells, tom-tom, piano). [EXAMPLE 1]

Example 2. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Hour of the Soul* – the polystylistic episode,

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Critics such as Hewett were unhappy with this episode, stating that “the lame little swing-jazz phrases tossed into the *Hour of the Soul*” were ineffective and banal; Hewett interpreted this episode as the composer’s intention to demonstrate how “banality intrudes into the spiritual quest” (Hewett 2007). However, the composer’s actual intention was to represent “a terrible destructive force”; she has explained: “When the percussionist begins his solo, I feel in the sounds of the tom-tom his indignation and protest. It is Tsvetaeva’s protest against the vulgarity and aggressiveness of the people, of the entire society. Vulgarity and aggressiveness are the murderers that killed the poet” (Lukomsky 1998b: 31).

While in reality Tsvetaeva’s life ended tragically, in Gubaidulina’s piece the poet’s soul overcomes the polystylistic chaos and triumphs over adversity, thus countering the critics’ observation that Gubaidulina’s works are gloomy and pessimistic. The solo percussionist completes the full circle and finds himself in front of the orchestra, standing next to the female singer and playing a Chinese instrument, the *chang*, while the verses that proclaim Tsvetaeva’s spiritual independence are given to the singer. The poet’s feminine and masculine side, the Yin and Yang, the Animus and Anima, are showcased together, rounding off Tsvetaeva’s musical portrayal.

OFFERTORIUM

Gubaidulina’s first work to gain international fame was *Offertorium*, the violin concerto written for Gidon Kremer and premiered in Vienna in 1981.⁶

⁶ The concerto was revised twice, and the final 1986 version is the one that is usually performed today.

Since then, it has become one of the most popular contemporary concertos, on account of the astounding virtuosity of the violin part and brilliant orchestration, which can be said to continue a Russian tradition dating as far back as Tchaikovsky and The Five. Arguably Gubaidulina's most celebrated work, *Offertorium* is a triumph of dramatic intensity and spiritual power. Although the work does not contain quotations or paraphrases of religious music, its title is a reference to a part of the Proper of the Mass, sung just after the Credo, while the priest is preparing the bread and wine and offering them upon the altar. Gubaidulina was inspired by the notions of sacrifice and offering: "The musician's sacrifice of himself in self-surrender to the tone [...] The sacrificial offering of Christ's crucifixion... God's offering as He created the world..." (Kurtz 2007: 149) When she told her partner, musicologist and conductor Piotr Meshchaninov about the central idea of "offering" for her violin concerto, he suggested that she use the "royal theme" of Frederick the Great, immortalised by Johann Sebastian Bach's *Musical Offering* BWV 1079 (Kurtz 2007: 149). Gubaidulina agreed, and built the concerto on the basis of "sacrificing" and "resurrecting" this theme.

Gubaidulina's religiosity was not a wholly personal phenomenon but part of a broader trend in Soviet art since late 1960s, distinguished by attempts at reconnecting with a supposedly lost religious past and reviving the spiritual side of art. The spiritual quest was quite urgent in a society in which atheism rooted in dialectical materialism was the official doctrine and whose citizens had been more or less deprived of religious comfort for many decades. Religion (in the broadest sense of the word) offered an intellectual and moral stimulus to artists, who had long since lost belief in the viability of the communist system (Medić 2010). Although she is a member of Russian Orthodox Church, Gubaidulina's religious outlook is not based strictly on Christian teachings and doctrines; instead, it has incorporated elements of numerous religious, mystical and spiritual systems, resulting in an idiosyncratic pantheistic synthesis. Her compositions are distinguished by typically long durations, infused with frequent rests, which might seem uneventful and tiresome to Western listeners. However, the tranquil course of her works has its roots in oriental musical practices, which are characterised by a gradual yet constant improvisatory transformation of the material. Granddaughter of a

Muslim mullah, Gubaidulina has transferred her memory of Muslim worship, with its alternation of the melismatic reading of parts from Koran with periods of meditative silence, to her works (Kurtz 2007: 60) – even to those (such as *Introitus* and *Offertorium*) explicitly based on Christian themes.

The majority of Gubaidulina's works are organised according to the principle of basic oppositions, such as horizontal/vertical, chromaticism/diatonicism, dissonance/consonance, staccato/legato, movement/stasis, etc. These musical polarities were codified in Gubaidulina's chamber and orchestral works from the 1970s onwards, including *Concordanza* for ensemble (1971), *Rumore e silenzio* for harpsichord and percussion (1974), *Introitus* for piano and chamber orchestra (1978), *In croce* for cello and organ (1979), *Seven Words* for cello, bayan and string orchestra (1982), etc. She regards these antitheses as the oppositions of the ordinary (earthly) and spiritual (transcendental) phenomena respectively (Hakobian 1997: 287). Gubaidulina does not think in categories of style; she regards musical matter as a unified sonic substance in the broadest of terms, and when choosing her material she is concerned above all with its symbolism (Lukomsky 1998a, 1998b, 1999). Although this is not to say that Gubaidulina is unconcerned with maintaining musical integrity, an understanding of her symbolism is crucial for a complete insight into her creative objectives.

Gubaidulina has singled out the mysticism of Nikolai Berdiaev as the most decisive influence; in particular, she was attracted to his thoughts on artistic creation. According to Berdiaev, God created man in his own image, hence man is a "theurge", a divinely inspired creature who participates in the endless creative process. Of course, Berdiaev equates "man" with male; nevertheless, Gubaidulina has recognised the connection between his teachings and her own understanding of the creative process (Lukomsky 1999: 30). Moreover, Gubaidulina has described musical material as a living being, as a "child" that needs nurturing and care, in order to grow and develop. For example: "Musical material is a living organism. It has a history, an evolution of its own [...] We do not invent it; it is like soil, like nature, like a child – it asks for, it wants, it needs something..." (Hakobian 1997: 287). A faithful disciple of Berdiaev, Gubaidulina sees herself as a life-giving

goddess, the creator of the world, the “Mother” who gives birth to musical material, nurtures it and allows it to develop its full potential. In her artistic consciousness music and religion merged into a single, spiritually-infused creative experience. She has said: “Art is the re-*ligio* (connection) to God in our fragmented, quotidian life” (Kurtz 2007: 96), and “I am convinced that serious art can be distinguished from the ephemeral by its connection to God... any convincing form of worship is a path to His Throne. Music is a form of worship” (Polin 1994: 16).

Offertorium is distinguished by the clarity of its construction; the simple formal design is in perfect accordance with Gubaidulina’s spiritual idea. The concerto unfolds in a single movement; it consists of three sections and a brief Coda:

Section I (Exposition), beginning – Fig. 57; the main theme is stated and then “sacrificed”
Section II (Cadence), Figs. 57–60; an elaborate soliloquy for the soloist
Section III (Reverse Recapitulation), Figs. 60–134; the main theme is gradually rebuilt
Coda, Fig. 134 – end; the theme is stated in its entirety, but retrograde.

At the beginning of the first section, the theme from *Musical Offering* is stated in Anton Webern’s “pointillistic” orchestration⁷ – thus Gubaidulina pays homage to the two composers who have inspired her the most (Beyer 2000: 51). The theme is quoted in its entirety, except for the final note, D; instead, it finishes with the minor second E-F, and this semitone becomes the entry point for the soloist at Fig. 1. [EXAMPLE 3]

Example 3. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Offertorium* – the main theme

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⁷ Webern orchestrated *Fuga (Ricercata) a 6 voci* (Fugue No. 2) from Bach’s *Musical Offering* in 1934–5.

The theme is then repeated nine times, but each time it is shortened from both ends – i.e. it is “sacrificed”:

Beginning – the entire theme minus the final D; begins with D and ends with E

Var. 1 / Fig. 8 – the theme has lost D (at the beginning) and E (at the end); it begins with F, ends with F

Var. 2 / Fig. 17+3 – the theme has lost F and F; begins with A, ends with G

Var. 3 / Fig. 25 – the theme has lost A and G; begins with B flat, ends with D

Var. 4 / Fig. 38+1 – the theme has lost B flat and G; begins with C#, ends with A

Var. 5 / Fig. 43+2 – the theme has lost C# and A, (but B and C# are also omitted); begins with A, ends with D

Var. 6 / Fig. 53+1 – the theme has lost A and B; begins with A flat, ends with C# (D flat)

Var. 7 / Fig. 54 – the theme has lost A flat and D (but not C#); begins with G, ends with C# (D flat)⁸

Var. 8 / Fig. 55 – the theme has lost G and C#; begins with G flat, ends with E flat

Var. 9 / Fig. 55+6 – the theme has lost G flat and E flat; the only remaining notes are F and E

Var. 10 / Fig. 56 – the theme has lost F; the only remaining note is the central E

The first six statements of the theme are separated by lengthy “dialogues” between the soloist and the orchestra, built from the same thematic material. However, from Variation 6, as the theme becomes very short, it is repeated five times in close succession. The final two notes remaining are E and F, which recall the first entry of the soloist at Fig. 1.

At Fig. 57, the *fff* of the orchestra, and the soloist’s dramatic leaps, depict the moment of Crucifixion and anticipate a remarkably tragic solo cadence which, in composer’s own words, symbolises Christ’s suffering at the Cross. I would argue that the exact moment of Christ’s death is represented just before Fig. 60, as the soloist reaches a static F# and remains on that note until the end of Fig. 60 (a total of 17 bars). [EXAMPLE 4]

⁸ I do not know if this is a printing error in the score or the composer’s own decision to substitute D with D flat (C#).

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system includes staves for Flute (FL), Clarinet (Cl), Bassoon (Fag), Trumpet (Tr-ni), Tuba, 2 Arpes, Piano, and Violin solo. The second system includes staves for Flute (Fl), Clarinet (Cl), Bassoon (Fag), Cor Anglais (Cor.), Trumpet (Tr-ni), Tuba, Horn I (Horn. I), Horn III (Horn. III), 2 Arpes, Piano, and Violin solo. The score contains various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, and *sf*. Performance instructions like "con Ped." and "sempre" are also present. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 120$ and $\text{♩} = 80$.

Example 4. Sofia Gubaidulina, *Offertorium* – the main theme

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This figure also announces the beginning of the third section, in which the theme is gradually rebuilt – “resurrected” – in a process reversing that seen in Section I. While the resurrection does not unfold as systematically as the sacrifice, the segments of the theme are still clearly heard in various instrumental groups, separated by sonoristic passages. From Fig. 115, the theme can be heard in the solo violin accompanied by low strings, in a mournful chorale resembling Russian Orthodox Church music. In the third

section, fragments of the theme can be heard both in normal and retrograde movement: for example, at Figs. 124–125, the segment from the 11th to 17th note (F to D) can be heard in forward motion in the piano and harps, while at the same time the solo violin plays the ascending chromatic movement reminiscent of the second half of the theme, but in retrograde motion. The final statement at Fig. 134 (which announces the beginning of the short Coda) is the only appearance of the complete theme; however, it is in retrograde. In Gubaidulina's words, this is the moment of Transfiguration: "The theme has returned, but nobody can recognise it" (Lukomsky 1998a: 27).

In her review of the Gubaidulina weekend, Anna Picard asserted that "*Pro et contra*, the *Nadeyka Triptych*, *The Light of the End*, and even *Offertorium* all promote the same message: that this world is one of torment and travail, and the next is one of bliss. [...] But Gubaidulina says it in musical flash-cards, alternating three-minute sections of apocalyptic terror with three-minute sections of radiance, and a dash of glissandi – often in contrary motion – to distract the listener as she switches from one to the other" (Picard 2007). However, as we have seen, *Offertorium* is not based on random employment of these musical images, but on a clearly stated and consistently executed constructive principle. Furthermore, Gubaidulina did not attempt blatantly to illustrate the events described in the Gospels, but only to evoke Christ's final moments and to remind the listeners of his sacrifice; the composer's message is not the promise of eternal bliss after death, but quite the opposite, the overcoming of death. A more moderate critic, Tim Ashley, reads *Offertorium* as "a massive theology lesson that weaves together the musical iconography of different Christian traditions in a broadly ecumenical manner" (Ashley 2002). However, the concerto could be read not only through religious imagery, but also as a parable of any suffering and oppressed individual, forced to sacrifice his or her identity to the collective; the fact that Gubaidulina's protagonist manages to rise from the ashes and rebuild himself/herself is a testimony of her faith in the individual's inner strength. Gerard McBurney also points to the essentially optimistic, darkness-to-light trajectory of *Offertorium* (McBurney 2005); instead of indulging in self-loathing or predicting doomsday, Gubaidulina offers hope and solace. For Soviet citizens living under tyranny, this message was particularly poignant.

STIMMEN... VERSTUMMEN...

Written in 1986, *Stimmen... verstummen...* [Voices... silenced...] was Gubaidulina's first major symphonic work and a perfect embodiment both of her aesthetics of "poverty" (McBurney 2005) characterised by an ability to generate enormous energy from the most elementary sound substance, and of her penchant for blunt dualisms. The entire twelve-movement symphony is built out of several diminutive motifs: a D major triad represents the sphere of the "divine", while the "earthly" sphere of martyrdom and suffering is represented by chromatic movement and glissando. The work's basic outline is very simple: it consists of twelve movements in which these two spheres alternate; hence, the form is that of double variations. Another prominent duality is that of sound and silence, as indicated by the very title of the work, which originated from the final verse in Gubaidulina's 1983 work *Perception*, the text of which is based on her correspondence with the poet Francisco Tanzer.

The odd movements (1, 3, 5, 7) are almost completely static and impenetrable: the celestial perfection, the cosmic harmony depicted by the "twinkling" of the D major chord in high registers of strings and winds, does not require any modification or development. However, these "heavenly" movements become progressively shorter and culminate in silence: in the ninth movement, Gubaidulina prescribes a silent "solo" for the conductor. On the other hand, the even movements (2, 4, 6, 8) are progressively longer and more ominous; the silence of the ninth movement is an outcome of the apocalyptic predicament presented in the longest and the most dramatic eighth movement. After the ninth movement, the situation is reversed: the even movements are now associated with the celestial major chords and the odd eleventh movement with chromaticism.

This unusual disposition of movements is based on proportions related to the "Golden section" and the Fibonacci row, both of which are among Gubaidulina's favourite devices for organising rhythmic and metric proportions of a piece. Gubaidulina assigns a symbolic/mystical significance to the Golden section and to the Fibonacci sequence (in which every number is the sum of the previous two: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, etc.). She believes that the rhythms based on the Fibonacci row reflect the deepest laws of the life (Kholopova and

Restagno 1996: 111–112). The “silent” ninth movement coincides with the point of the Golden section of the whole. Also, the progressively decreasing number of quavers in the “heavenly” movements corresponds with the numbers of the Fibonacci series. Gubaidulina has said: “The Ninth movement is a ‘rest’: it is a solo for the conductor. It is as if music had come to ‘zero’: in the first movement there was 55 quarters [*sic*], in the third – 34, in the fifth – 21, in the seventh – 13, and, finally, in the ninth – zero” (Lukomsky 1999: 30). However, I have actually counted 55 dotted quavers of the D major chord in the third movement, 34 in the fifth, and 21 in the seventh. It is not known to me whether the composer was misquoted, or she made a mistake. Either way, these numbers still correspond to the Fibonacci sequence.

While the conductor “performs” the rhythm of the silence in the ninth movement, the constantly changing metre comprises bars that contain the number of crotchets related to the Fibonacci row: $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, $\frac{8}{4}$, $\frac{13}{4}$. Near the end of his solo the conductor is instructed to make progressively wider movements with his hands, to correspond to the following time units: 1-2 -1; 1-2-3-2-1; and finally 1-2-3-5-8-13-8-5-3-2-1. Gubaidulina structures time according to the Fibonacci series in an attempt to reinstate the cosmic balance, destroyed in the previous movements. However, the reinstatement is not embodied by a D major chord; at the beginning of the tenth movement the organ and violins play a G major chord in high register. According to the composer, the G major triad symbolizes “eternal light” which begins to shine after the catastrophe in the cleared lucid space (Lukomsky 1999: 31).

The “earthly” movements, on the other hand, are characterised by a disjointed linear movement: chromatic, micropolyphonic canons and menacing glissandos. The brief “tonal” centres are interspersed with rising and falling chromatic scales, as if Gubaidulina is hinting at the possibility of the existence of “heaven on Earth”, but then quickly denying it. In the eighth movement, the “apocalypse” is depicted by aleatoric passages, chromatic lines clashing with one another, harsh polytonal chords, and from Fig. 70 diatonic and pentatonic passages in organ part. The movement ends with the glissandos with which the second movement had begun. The final confrontation of the two spheres takes place in the twelfth movement. The “earthly” sphere

dominates the movement, but the “heavenly” D major chord makes a return at Fig. 29 and concludes the symphony; thus, the outcome of the confrontation between good and evil is left ambiguous, though potentially optimistic. One could argue that the composer’s message is that the two spheres are destined to coexist, sometimes crossing paths, with the earthly realm of human activity occasionally trying to emulate celestial perfection, and occasionally trying to disturb the cosmic order; but the divine sphere remains unaffected.

However, the work can also be read entirely differently, as a political metaphor for oppression and the brutal “silencing” of the voices of Soviet citizens. Written at the dawn of *perestroika*, the symphony reflects on the gloomiest days of terror, but also shows that the Soviets have managed to survive and to have their voices heard again. While the composer herself has never hinted at this as being her hidden intention, the very title as well as the dramaturgy of the work readily lends itself to such an interpretation and refutes Ivan Hewett’s claim that the main problem with Gubaidulina’s music is that “idea and effect are locked into a pre-set pattern by the composer” and that the listeners are “deprived of any freedom to interpret what we heard” (Hewett 2002).

As we have seen, despite Gubaidulina’s readiness to provide mystical “programmes” for her works, the actual symbolism is never entirely literal and banal; and the harsh criticism directed towards her works was a consequence of the British critics’ unwillingness to view these works in the appropriate context and to understand her messages. In the closed and paranoid system where all cultural values were redefined and all art expected to contribute towards building the new socialist society, Gubaidulina courageously wrote music inspired by her religious and moral convictions and voiced her protest against persecution of creative artists. The three works analysed above can be read as religious parables, but they also provide a commentary on life under tyranny and problematize the relationship between the individual and the system. In all three works, the forces of good are battered and bruised but not entirely defeated; there is hope amidst despair. And the resurrection with which *Offertorium* ends signifies that, while it is impossible to recreate something in its original form, it is possible to revive its main features and to transform them into a new creation. This could well be a summary of Gubaidulina’s mission as a creative human being.

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Ивана Медић

НЕСХВАЋЕНА ГУБАЈДУЛИНА

(Резиме)

Од средине осамдесетих година прошлог века стваралаштво савремене руске композиторке Софије Губајдулине (1931–) доспело је у жижу интересовања на Западу, првенствено захваљујући изузетном успеху њеног виолинског концерта *Оферторијум* у ненадмашном извођењу Гидона Кремера. У последње три деценије Губајдулина је освојила много значајних награда, постала је чланица немачке и шведске Академије наука и уметности, амерички универзитети Јејл и Чикаго су јој доделили почасне докторате, а њена музика је извођена са великим успехом широм света. Међутим, западноевропски критичари често веома негативно реагују на њену музику. Нарочито им сметају Губајдулинина употреба наизглед баналних музичких симбола на ивици кича, као и композиторкин религиозни занос.

Полазећи од критика објављених у британској штампи поводом два фестивала одржана 2006. и 2007. године, којима је Губајдулинин опус представљен британској публици, разматрам основне замерке упућене њеном стваралаштву. Након тога, анализирам три Губајдулидине композиције настале пре распада Совјетског Савеза (*Час душе*, *Оферторијум* и *Гласови... утихнули*) да бих показала на који су начин ова дела одговорила на социјалне и културне изазове тог доба. Мој аргумент је да су британски критичари погрешно протумачили Губајдулинину

естетику, у којој се прожимају популистичко са авангардним и религиозно са политичким, јер нису узели у обзир контекст у којем су ова дела настала. Међутим, указујем и на чињеницу да је Губајдулина донекле крива за негативну рецепцију њених скорашњих остварења, јер је остала доследна свом композиторском методу искристалисаном у Совјетском Савезу, упркос томе што се контекст у потпуности променио (а она сама се од 1992. године настанила у Немачкој). Мој циљ је да „рестаурирам“ контекст у којем су настала њена најзначајнија остварења, те да им на тај начин вратим кредибилитет и да оспорим неке од престојих критичарских оцена.