



Schnittke [Schnitke], Alfred (Garriyevich)

(b Engel's, 24 Nov. 1934; d Hamburg, 3 Aug. 1998).

Russian composer. Born a Russian citizen into a German-Jewish family, he acknowledged all three strands of his cultural heritage in his music. From 1946 to 1948 his family lived in Vienna, where he took his first music lessons, an induction into the great Austro-German musical tradition. In 1953 he entered the Moscow Conservatory, where he studied composition with Yevgeny Golubev; during his student days Shostakovich and Mahler were his chief influences. During the Khrushchev thaw, however, the scores of Schoenberg and Stravinsky became available, and Schnittke made a careful study of serial technique. Although his graduation work was a rather traditional monumental oratorio, *Nagasaki* (1958), it was nevertheless criticized as too modernist by the Union of Composers.

Schnittke could still have retrenched to become an officially sanctioned Soviet composer, but his pivotal meeting with Nono in 1963 and his ensuing study of the Western avant-garde led him to turn his back on any prospects of a secure career. While seeking his own musical idiom in a series of chamber works during the 1960s, he earned a living as a composer of film music. Because of the fluency in many styles required for film scores, he changed his approach to 'serious' composition, as he explained in his essay 'Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music' (1971). His advocacy of 'polystylism' was soon demonstrated in a major work, his *First Symphony* (1972), which includes pastiches of Bach and of Soviet march music and quotations from Beethoven, Chopin, and Grieg, and also calls for jazz improvisation in one section and collective free improvisation in another, all set in a musical environment of tense drama. Official uncertainty over the boundaries of permissible musical practices led first to the sanctioning of rehearsals for a planned Moscow premiere, which was cancelled at the last moment and transferred (with a considerable loss of prestige) to Gor'kiy (now Nizhniy Novgorod).

In spite of such handicaps Schnittke's fame gradually spread, and from the early 1980s his name became established in the West. His polystylism was never reduced to a formula: the *Concerto Grosso no. 1* (1977), in which dense serialist textures are mixed with the B–A–C–H motif and a heady tango tune, is much less diffuse and theatrical than the *First Symphony*. The *Piano Quintet* (1976) differed from both these in blending the quoted or pastiche music seamlessly into the musical structure. Some of his works are imbued with a strong sense of history, for example his *Third Symphony* (1981), which evokes the German symphonic tradition, from Bach to Kagel, placing the author himself at the end. The religious *Fourth Symphony* (1984) syncretizes Gregorian and Orthodox chants, Lutheran chorales, and Jewish cantillation.

In 1985 Schnittke suffered a stroke, but his productivity continued unabated: he completed several important stage works, among them the ballet *Peer Gynt* (1986) and the operas *Zhizn's idiotom* ('Life with an Idiot', 1992), *Gesualdo* (1995), and *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* (1995), all of which were first performed outside Russia. Works of this period are especially tense, reflecting the composer's struggle with death and his Christian outlook. His second stroke, in 1998, was fatal.

Gubaidulina, Sofia (Asgatovna)

(b Chistopol', Tatarstan, 24 Oct. 1931).

Russian composer. Born to a Russian-Tatar family, she studied the piano at the Kazan' Conservatory, then composition at the Moscow Conservatory with Nikolay Peyko and Shebalin. In the early 1960s she enthusiastically absorbed the music of the European avant-garde, and at the end of the decade she worked in the Moscow experimental electronic music studio with Schnittke and Denisov. Although Gubaidulina was a member of the Composers' Union, her works were often treated with suspicion or even suppressed. She achieved international fame with her violin concerto *Offertorium* (1981, revised 1982 and 1986), and in 1991 emigrated to Germany.

Most of Gubaidulina's compositions attempt to convey a religious or moral message, and her texts are drawn from many different cultures: *Noch' v Memfise* ('Night in Memphis', 1968) is based on ancient Egyptian poetry, *Rubayyat* (1969) on texts by Khakani, Hāfīz, and Omar Khayyām; *Chas dushi* ('Hour of the Soul', 1974) sets the poetry of Marina Tsvetayeva, and there is a *Posvyashcheniye T. S. Eliotu* ('Homage to T. S. Eliot', 1987). In her untexted works, a message is conveyed no less expressively through musical symbolism or elements of instrumental theatre (where individual instruments behave like different characters in a drama), as in *In croce* for cello and organ (1979) or *Sem' slov na kreste* ('Seven Last Words on the Cross') for bayan, cello, and string orchestra (1982). She often uses numerical symmetries as the basis of her musical structures: *Quasi hocketus* for viola, bassoon, and piano (1984) and the symphony *Stimmen ... Verstummen ...* ('I hear ... silence ...', 1986), for example, are based on the Fibonacci series. She also creates unusual instrumental combinations; *In Erwartung* (1994), for example, is for six percussionists, bayan, and saxophone quartet. Among her later works are *Music for Flute, Strings, and Percussion* (1994), *The Canticle of the Sun of St Francis of Assisi* (1997), for cello, chamber choir, and orchestra, *Johannes-Passion* (2000), and a second violin concerto, *In tempus praesens* (2007).

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