

Sofia Gubaidulina - Pro et Contra, Concordanza, Fairytale Poem (1994)



01. *Pro et Contra* (1989) – I 02. *Pro et Contra* (1989) – II 03. *Pro et Contra* (1989) – III 04. *Concordanza* (1971) for Chamber Ensemble 05. *Fairytale Poem Maerchenbild* (1971)
Hannover Radio Symphony Orchestra Johannes Kalitzke, Bernhard Klee – conductor

This CPO disc contains three pieces by Russian-Tatar composer Sofia Gubaidulina. This first was written in the late 1980s, when the composer had finally found recognition abroad and had reached the height of her talent. The second two, however, are early works from 1971. The Radio-Philharmonie Hannover des NDR performs, led by Johannes Kalitzke in the first two pieces and Bernhard Klee in the third.

Gubaidulina's "Pro et contra" for large orchestra (1989) does not, as the title suggest, feature strongly clashing moods or tempos. Instead, the piece consists of subtly contrasting groups of instrumental sonorities. For example, bass drums and tam-tums contrast with bells, celestra, harpsichord, and harp. Overt tonalism contrasts with minor seconds and chromaticism. The melodic material, and indeed the entire development and spiritual significance of the work, is based on the Russian Orthodox "Hallelujah" chant. Portions of the music vie for or against the chant, creating a chronicle of initial religious doubt and final certainty. Indeed, the material is continued in Gubaidulina's later piece "Alleluia" for choir, boy soprano, and orchestra (1990) and the oratio "Lauda" (1991), and all together they form the trilogy "Prayer for the Age of Aquarius". There is so much to like about "Pro et contra", its vast dimensions, the hammering tones of its final confession of faith, the skillful orchestration, but you'll need a good stereo system to really get it. At first I thought the piece was a failure, feeling that the second movement dragged on and on with excessive silence, but that was only because you can't hear its low basses on lesser equipment. Now, I'm hooked. What makes this version stand apart from the BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Tadaaki Otaka recording on BIS is Kalitzke's considerably faster pace, leading to a total time of 33'50 (I: 8'44, II: 17'53, III: 7'13) compared to Otaka's 39'59 (I: 9'49, II: 20'54, III: 9'01). I have mixed feelings about this. On one hand, the form as a whole is more readably visible here, but there's less of a religious sentiment than in

the brooding meditations of Otaka.

"Concordanza" (1971) is one of Gubaidulina's first overt avant-garde efforts. It uses such novel techniques as atonality, though (like in "Pro et contra") in the typically Russian fashion as something to be seen as antagonistic, and whispers from the performers. The title refers to an attempt to make harmony--legato, tonality, the smooth flow of sound--out of discord, namely staccato from the winds, pizzicato, the murmuring of the players, and (a jab at Soviet aesthetic values?) march rhythms. The writing is clearly skilled, but the piece is for me, somewhat juvenile. Gubaidulina really came of age in the late 1970s. The same can be said about "Fairytale Poem (Maerchenpoem)" for symphony orchestra (1971), the shortest work here. Originally written for a children's radio play called "The Little Chalk", the piece lacks the specifically Orthodox Christian focus of her finest work.

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