

CLASSICAL

Sofia Gubaidulina
Offertorium
Gidon Kremer
Charles Dutoit
Boston Symphony Orchestra
DG 427 336-2

Sofia Gubaidulina is a Soviet Tatar composer whose music has only recently begun to get some serious play in the West. This album of her work seems to have come about mainly through the efforts of violinist Gidon Kremer, whose earlier partisanship of Arvo Part played such a large part in extending that composer's renown outside the Soviet Union.

Offertorium, completed in 1980 and subtitled Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, is based on the famous theme by Frederick the Great used by J. S. Bach in The Musical Offering. Stated almost in its entirety at the outset, the royal tune is slowly consumed through a set of brilliant variations, which nibble away two more notes of the theme with each passing of the plate. Then Gubaidulina works the process in reverse, darkly reconstituting the theme back-to-front, as in a mirror. Some overtly churchy cadences at the midpoint offer an obvious clue to the composer's religious preoccupations, which may also be read in her quasi-sacramental ingestion of Bach's hallowed theme.

The neatly analytic plan of the work is realized with great technical mastery and considerable freedom. Gubaidulina has obviously bent an attentive ear to the progressive stratagems of Webern and Schoenberg, the florid ornamentation of Berio and Bussotti, and the sombre rhetoric of Shostakovich. But the dominant voice of Offertorium is her own, and it is a voice full of passionate curiosity about

the basic occult matter of music.

Hommage a T. S. Eliot (1987) is a chamber work for octet and soprano, inspired by a reading of Eliot's Four Quartets. The piece contains some superb instrumental miniatures, performed by Kremer's touring Lockenhaus group. The vocal settings of Eliot's verse (sung by Christine Whittlesey) are less assured, and lack the idiomatic authority of Gubaidulina's orchestral writing.

Lothar Klein
Musics Ancient and Modern
Toronto Consort

Lo Mar (unnumbered)

This album contains a pair of extended collages based on medieval models, upon which Klein has discharged a battery of modern compositional techniques. His method, however, is not assaultive or satiric, but restrained, and free of the detached acerbic tone discernible in some of the backward-looking works of Stravinsky. Both Musica Antiqua, for orchestra and medieval consort, and the orchestral work The Masque of Orianna are works of open homage, and displays of craft comparable to that of some of Ezra Pound's intentionally antique verses.

That said, the works wear a curiously bland and impersonal quality. Klein's success at blurring the line between the substance of the past and the operations of the present seems to bleed the vitality out of his presentation, and to make him appear at moments merely an arranger of old music that needs no such interventions to be effective. His Canadiana Ballet Suite is less problematic: based on nineteenth-century dance forms, it is pops music of the best sort.

Robert Everett-Green

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