

BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Contemporary Music

The BBVA Foundation distinguishes Sofia Gubaidulina for the spiritual, transformative quality of her music, which has reached out successfully to wider audiences

- The Russian composer, the jury points out, has pursued her own voice and followed her conscience, conserving her artistic integrity even through the experience of being blacklisted by the Soviet regime
- Gubaidulina has melded the influence of Bach with currents of the European avant-garde to forge a musical style that exhibits a broad color and sound palette and a skilled use of silence

Madrid, February 14, 2017.- The BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Contemporary Music category goes, in this ninth edition, to composer Sofia Gubaidulina. The jury in its citation singles out the “outstanding musical and personal qualities” of the Russian composer, whose works demonstrate “the exceptional range and quality of her music, which builds on a diversity of traditions in individual and innovative ways, using a range of instruments that sometimes draw on folk music and improvisation.” The citation also highlights the “spiritual quality” imbuing Gubaidulina’s work, together with “the transformative dimension of her music, ensuring it a broad dissemination beyond conventional audiences for contemporary music.”

Sofia Gubaidulina was born in Chistopol, in the Tatar Republic of the Soviet Union, in 1931. Her passion for music, as she relates in an interview shortly after hearing of the award, arose “spontaneously, when I was a child. In a real sense it was not me who chose music but music that expressed itself in me.” After studying piano at the conservatory of Kazan, on the banks of the Volga river, she moved to Moscow to take composition classes with maestros like Nikolai Peiko – Shostakovich’s assistant – and Vissarion Shebalin.

In 1975 she got together with colleagues Viktor Suslin and Vyacheslav Artyomov to form the ‘Astreia’ ensemble, devoted to exploring the folk music of Central

Asia, some of whose instruments she would employ in her compositions. At the same time Gubaidulina's work was rapidly absorbing the schools and currents of the European avant-garde, crystallizing in a musical style that manages with rare perfection to balance tradition and modernity. She first garnered international attention in the 1980s, thanks especially to the determined advocacy of musicians like violinist Gidon Kremer, the dedicatee of her masterly violin concerto *Offertorium* (1980, revised in 1986), the work that would carry its author's name beyond the borders of the Soviet Union and lay the foundations of her worldwide repute. *Offertorium* is based on the "royal theme" provided by Frederick the Great for *The Musical Offering* by Johann Sebastian Bach, the composer, Gubaidulina acknowledges, who has had the deepest, most lasting influence on her work.

On more than one occasion, the strong spiritual and religious temperament informing Gubaidulina's oeuvre caused friction with the Soviet authorities, to the extent that in 1979 she was added to the blacklist of composers seen as suspect by the regime. However, she was not without influential supporters, among them the great Dmitri Shostakovich – who encouraged her to "continue on your own incorrect path" – as well as illustrious composers of her own generation such as Alfred Schnittke or Edison Denisov, and instrumentalists like Yuri Bashmet, Mstislav Rostropovich, Vladimir Tonkha, Friedrich Lips or Kremer himself.

In 1985, she left the USSR for the first time and found immediate acceptance. In the United States also, a country she first visited in 1987 and which would prove a rich seam of commissions and premieres: *Pro et Contra*, by the Louisville Orchestra (1989); *String Quartet No. 4*, by the Kronos Quartet (New York, 1994); *Dancer on a Tightrope*, by Robert Mann and Ursula Oppens (Washington, 1994); *Viola Concerto*, by Yuri Bashmet with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (1997); *Two Paths (A Dedication to Marty and Martha)*, by the New York Philharmonic (1999); or *Light of the End*, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra (2003). At the same time, she was enjoying similar success in Europe, with commissions in Berlin, Stuttgart, Hamburg...

Gubaidulina remained in Russia until 1992, then moved to a small town outside Hamburg in Germany, where she has lived ever since.

Sofia Gubaidulina's catalogue is extraordinarily broad-ranging, encompassing almost every musical genre with one notable exception: the opera. "I wrote operas in my youth," she admits, "but withdrew them from my catalogue, because they were very early works. I gave up on the genre when I realized that opera involves too many external, material elements, and it is the inner life that interests me most." Despite her musical spirituality, the Tatar composer remained aloof from the "holy minimalism" made fashionable by some of her contemporaries in the closing decades of the 20th century. Her style, in this respect, has never ceased to draw experimental inspiration from the European vanguards of the 1960s and 1970s, with a special affinity for the figure of Italian composer Luigi Nono, while another explicit influence is the music of Anton Webern. Her fascination for the work of Renaissance authors like Lasso,

Ockhegem or Palestrina adds yet another layer to a musical idiom of rare meditative quality and great intensity and power, "which exhibits a broad sound and color palette, as well as a skilled use of silence," in the words of some jury members. For Gubaidulina, music is of itself a spiritual phenomenon, a vehicle that pursues unity with God in an artistic process where ideas are conveyed through a series of musical symbols. Some of her major works also evince an interest for ancient principles of proportion, like Fibonacci numbers or the golden section.

Considered one of the greatest composers writing today, Sofia Gubaidulina is regularly approached with commissions from the world's leading soloists, ensembles and orchestras, and her works have been premiered by names of the stature of Simon Rattle, Anne Sophie Mutter, Gustavo Dudamel, Kent Nagano or the Kronos Quartet. Her recorded output is similarly vast, and she has never stopped writing since her debut work (*Phacelia*, 1956), produced 60 years ago. On February 23, the Boston Symphony Orchestra under principal conductor Andris Nelsons will offer the world premiere of her recently composed Triple Concerto for violin, violoncello, bayan and orchestra.

As the Frontiers of Knowledge jury remarks in its citation, "Sofia Gubaidulina is an outstanding example of a composer who has pursued her own distinctive voice and followed her conscience despite extremely difficult political circumstances. Her achievement is one of uncompromising courage and perseverance. And it is these qualities of individual strength and artistic integrity that are expressed through her music."

About the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards

The BBVA Foundation has as its core objectives the promotion of scientific knowledge, the transmission to society of scientific and technological culture, and the recognition of talent and excellence across a broad spectrum of disciplines, from science to the arts and humanities.

The **BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards** were established in 2008 to recognize outstanding contributions in a range of scientific, technological and artistic areas, along with knowledge-based responses to the central challenges of our times. The areas covered by the Frontiers Awards are congruent with the knowledge map of the 21st century, in terms of the disciplines they address and their assertion of the value of cross-disciplinary interaction.

Their **eight categories** include classical areas like Basic Sciences and Biomedicine, and other, more recent areas characteristic of our time, ranging from Information and Communication Technologies, Ecology and Conservation Biology, Climate Change and Economics, Finance and Management to Development Cooperation and the innovative artistic realm that is Contemporary Music.

The BBVA Foundation is aided in the organization of the awards by the **Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)**, the country's premier public research agency. As well as designating each jury chair, the CSIC is responsible for appointing the technical evaluation committees that undertake an initial assessment of the candidates put forward by numerous institutions across the world, and draw up a reasoned shortlist for the consideration of the juries.

Contemporary Music jury and technical committee

The jury in this category was chaired by **Nicholas Cook**, Professor of Music at the University of Cambridge (United Kingdom), with **Christina Scheppelmann**, Artistic Director General of the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, acting as secretary. Remaining members were **Claire Chase**, flutist and founder of International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) (United States); **Cristóbal Halffter**, composer and member of the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Madrid (Spain); **Tom Huizenga**, music producer and reporter for NPR Music (United States); **Sir Nicholas Kenyon**, Managing Director of the Barbican Centre in London (United Kingdom); **Colin Matthews**, Music Director of the Britten-Pears Foundation (United Kingdom); and **Pwyll ap Siôn**, Professor in Music at the School of Music of Bangor University (United Kingdom).

The **CSIC technical committee** was coordinated by **Ana Guerrero**, the Council's Deputy Vice President for Scientific and Technical Areas, and formed by: **María Gembero**, Tenured Researcher at the Milá y Fontanals Institution (IMF); **Tess Knighton**, ICREA Research Professor at the Milá y Fontanals Institution (IMF); and **Antonio Ezquerro**, Research Scientist at the Milá y Fontanals Institution (IMF).

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING AWARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

Economics, Finance and Management	Tuesday, February 21, 2017
Development Cooperation	Tuesday, February 28, 2017

Previous awardee in this category

The **Contemporary Music** award in last year's edition went to Greek composer **Georges Aperghis** for opening up a unique path in the territory of musical theater employing new scenic devices whereby everything becomes music, and making contemporary music part and parcel of the theatrical experience.

Five of the 79 winners in earlier editions of the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards have gone on to win the Nobel Prize. Shinya Yamanaka, the 2010 Biomedicine laureate, won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2012; **Robert J. Lefkowitz**, awardee in the same Frontiers category in 2009, won the Chemistry Nobel in 2012. In Economics, Finance and Management, three Frontiers laureates

were later honored with the Nobel: **Lars Peter Hansen**, winner of the Frontiers Award in 2010 and the Nobel Prize in 2013; **Jean Tirole**, Frontiers laureate in 2008 and Nobel laureate in 2014; and **Angus Deaton**, 2011 Frontiers laureate and Nobel laureate in 2015.

Fundación **BBVA**

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