

The Composers

Sofia Gubaidulina

(Born in 1931 in Chistopol, Tatar Republic of the USSR)

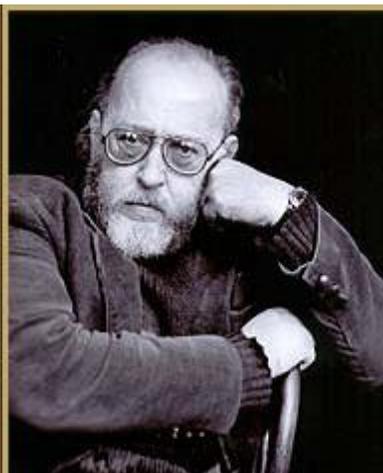
A leading member of the post-Shostakovich avant-garde movement in Russia, **Sofia Gubaidulina** is undoubtedly one of the most prominent composers of our time. After attending the Kazan Conservatory as a composer and pianist, Gubaidulina studied composition with Nikolai Peiko and Vissarion Shebalin at the Moscow Conservatory from 1954 to 1959. For the next fifteen years, she primarily supported herself as a film composer. In 1975, Gubaidulina became a founding member of the “Astreia” ensemble, a group that improvised on rare Russian, Caucasian, and Central Asian folk instruments. Her works often include techniques of sound production that carry listeners beyond the Western tradition.



Gubaidulina gained prominence in the West through Gidon Kremer’s presentation of her violin concerto *Offertorium* in the 1980s, later receiving a major commission from the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart to write the *Johannes-Passion* for the “Passion 2000” project in honor of Johann Sebastian Bach. In 2007, she became the first woman to be featured on BBC’s annual “composer weekend” in London. The greatest artists of our time have presented her work, including Anne-Sophie Mutter, Yuri Bashmet, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the Kronos Quartet. For the past twenty years, Gubaidulina has lived in Hamburg, Germany, where she still resides today. She was awarded an honorary doctorate at Yale in 2009.

Nikolai Sidelnikov

(Born in 1930 in Tver; died in 1992 in Moscow)



Nikolai Sidelnikov studied with Yevgeni Iosifovich Messner and Yuri Shaporin at the Moscow Conservatory, graduating in 1957. The following year, he began to serve as Aram Khachaturyan’s and Yuri Shaporin’s assistant and joined the composition faculty in 1961, holding this position for the rest of his life. Sidelnikov’s pedagogical talent and brilliant personality attracted students of the highest caliber, including Vladimir Martynov, Eduard Artemyev, and Ivan Sokolov. In 1971, *Russian Fairytales*, a concert for 12 instrumentalists, brought him international acclaim at the UNESCO Composers’ Tribune in Paris. Introducing Sidelnikov in the United States, Mstislav Rostropovich commissioned and performed *Duels* (a chamber symphony for cello, double bass, two pianos, and percussion) in Manhattan’s Merkin Hall in 1990. Many of Sidelnikov’s works remained unpublished in Russia, however.

Sidelnikov’s first oratorio, *Lifted Shield*, points to the composer’s preference for large-scale ensembles and elaborate forms with an unfolding narrative. His symphonic works embrace a wide variety of literary influences, spanning from proletariat poetry in *Song about the Red Banner* (for choir, soloists, speaker, full orchestra) to Lermontov’s Romantic poetry in *Rebellious World of the Poet* (for baritone and chamber orchestra). Such musical cosmopolitanism appears in his vocal compositions as well, which include *Sacred*

Conversations (a 13-movement cycle for two sopranos, dramatic tenor, and piano, setting Khlebnikov's Futurist poetry), *Romancero on Love and Death* (a work for mixed choir and instrumental episodes written for piano, electric guitar, and percussion, setting Federico García Lorca's poetry), and *Xi Chuan Elegies* (two vocal cycles, setting Du Fu's poetry). Sidelnikov's programmatic ambitions carried over to his solo instrumental works as well. In the last year of his life, the composer created an eighty-minute 'Novel-Symphony' for solo piano, presenting the ancient Greek myth of Teseus in five frescoes.

Sergei Slonimsky

(Born in 1932, Leningrad)

Sergei Slonimsky came from an established family of Leningrad intelligentsia. At the age of 11, he began to take lessons with the renowned composer Vissarion Shebalin, continuing his studies in Moscow's Musical College with Boris Arapov. In 1950, he entered the Leningrad Conservatory, studying composition with Orest Yevlahov and piano with Vladimir Nielsen. Since 1967, he has served on the composition faculty of the Leningrad Conservatory.

In 1988, Slonimsky received the title of People's Artist of the Russian USSR, the most prestigious musical award given in Soviet Russia. However, early in his career, Slonimsky was heavily criticized for his compositions, including his *First Symphony*, the *Voice out of the Choir* cantata, and his opera *Master and Margarita*. In fact, the opera was banned after its first performance in 1972 and revived only in 2012.



Slonimsky has collaborated with the leading musicians of his generation, such as Mstislav Rostropovich, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, and Valery Gergiev. Nowadays, his ballets are regularly premiered at the Mariinsky and Bolshoi Theatres, the Big Hall of the Saint Petersburg Philharmonia, and the Saint-Petersburg State Chapel. Today, Sergei Slonimsky is one of the most respected living composers in Russia.

Galina Ustvolskaya

(Born in 1919 in Petrograd; died in 2006 in Saint Petersburg)



Galina Ustvolskaya studied composition with Dmitri Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatory between 1939 and 1947 during which she developed a close artistic and personal relationship with him. Dmitri Dmitriyevich proclaimed that her music would achieve world fame. In one of his letters to her, Shostakovich stated, "It's not *you* who are under my *influence*, it's *me* who is under yours." Later in life, Ustvolskaya came to publicly scorn Shostakovich's music and personality.

Ustvolskaya's first compositions were a considerable success and were performed by leading musicians and at the most prestigious concert halls of the city. But already by the 1950s her name had begun to disappear from the concert bills; premieres of her music became increasingly rare, and many of her works were published decades after their composition. Ustvolskaya started to become more and more isolated, since she did not want to participate in social and political life, and her music was too far from the Soviet ideals. And although there were occasional performances of her works (about once a year), the state-owned record

label "Melodiya" was releasing some of her records, and Leningrad's musical critics praised her talent, the author herself was dissatisfied with the level of performance available at the time.

Ustvol'skaya renounced from most of her works of her earlier period. Instead, she preferred to write music "for the desk drawer," but to express freely her artistic individuality. She lived in poverty making her living by teaching in the Leningrad Music College (equivalent to a high-school specialized in music.) Her music was rarely performed. Finally good fortune came to her: in late 1980-s the director of German publishing house Sikorski, Jürgen Köchel, and Dutch musicologist Elmer Schönberger, came to Leningrad and heard her music, by which they were enormously impressed. Köchel bought the publication rights on her works, and Schönberger organized a series of concerts of her music in Europe: (1995, 1996, 2005, 2011 in Amsterdam, 1998 in Vienna, 1999 in Bern, 2001 in Warsaw.) Conductor, composer, and pianist Reinbert de Leeuw became another important propagandist of her music. Since then, her music has been widely performed in Europe; however, in Russia it was still largely ignored. Nevertheless, Ustvol'skaya rejected all proposals for emigration.

Prepared by Agata Sorotokin and Liliya Ugay



Our special gratitude to:

Mark Bauer
Boris Berman
Melvin Chen
Duncan Coke
Cyrus Duff
Michael Friedmann
Thomas Gould
Dilya Khaliulina
Hannah Lash
Natalia Platonova

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