



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

19:20  
140th season

Rafael Payare, conductor  
Baiba Skride, violin

Saturday, February 15, 2020 at 8:00PM  
Sunday, February 16, 2020, at 3:00PM

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**SOFIA GUBAIDULINA**

(b. 1931)

*Offertorium* (1980)

Baiba Skride, violin

INTERMISSION

**BRUCKNER**

(1824–1896)

**Symphony No. 7 in E major** (1881)

Allegro moderato

Adagio: Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam

Scherzo: Sehr schnell

Finale: Bewegt, doch nicht schnell

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The 2019/2020 Classical Series is presented by **The Steward Family Foundation** and **World Wide Technology**.

Rafael Payare is the **Edna W. Sternberg Guest Conductor**.

Baiba Skride is the **Ann and Paul Lux Guest Artist**.

The concert of Saturday, February 15, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from **Norman and Susan Gilbert**.

Pre-Concert Conversations are sponsored by **Washington University Physicians**.

# PROGRAM NOTES

By Tom May

## Music as Religious Experience

Religious faith is inextricable from the visions of both composers of this program. Sofia Gubaidulina's body of work represents an ongoing spiritual-musical odyssey, where the sounds an instrument can make and the technical challenges a musician faces are connected to philosophical and even mystical ideas. The distinction between staccato (short) and legato (long) tones, for example, prompts Gubaidulina to reflect on the promise of faith as redemption from everyday reality. In a kind of credo, she states: "I understand 'religion' in the literal meaning of the word as 're-ligio,' that is to say, the restoration of connections, the restoration of the binding-together, or 'legato,' of life."

Her violin concerto *Offertorium*, which paved the way to Gubaidulina's international recognition, illustrates this way of thinking about music. The piece makes a "sacrificial offering" of a theme taken from the music of J.S. Bach. The result movingly combines a remarkably original and modern sensibility with echoes of music's timeless ritual significance.

A reserved, deeply pious man from a small village, Anton Bruckner came off as an eccentric in the competitive environment of 19th-century Vienna, a city teeming with colossal egomaniacs. Bruckner's Catholic faith—which he practiced in part by keeping obsessive records of how many times he recited certain prayers—provided solace in the face of persistent rejection of his musical projects, which cut against the grain of established opinion.

Not unlike Gubaidulina, Bruckner endured marginalization for following his own artistic path. But his Seventh Symphony proved to be a game-changer with the public, paving the way toward more widespread appreciation of his unique symphonic genius.



### **SOFIA GUBAIDULINA**

**Born** October 24, 1931, Tschistopol, Russia

## *Offertorium*

### **Sacrifice and Rebirth in a Violin Concerto: Gubaidulina's *Offertorium***

For Sofia Gubaidulina, the raw physicality of musical facts—pulses, breaths, tunings—provides the material through which the transcendence of the spirit can be conveyed. Style and substance are integrated in her music. Its striking originality echoes the ancient purpose of music as a sacred function. Dmitri Shostakovich gave the young Gubaidulina advice that has guided her throughout her long,

extraordinary career: “Don’t be afraid to be yourself. My wish for you is that you should continue on your own, *incorrect* path.”

Before she moved to Moscow to study, Gubaidulina came of age in the great crossroads city of Kazan on the Volga River in the Tatar Republic, then a part of the Soviet Union. Her background blends Eastern and Western ethnicities: Tatar heritage on her father’s side, Russian on her mother’s. Gubaidulina became part of the wave of Russian diaspora composers after the collapse of the Soviet Union, settling near Hamburg in 1992, which remains her home.

Although she grew up in the atheist culture of Soviet Communism, Gubaidulina converted to the Russian Orthodox Church as an adult. Her faith might be seen as another facet of unwavering independence from State-prescribed behavior, along with her musical independence. It’s not surprising, then, that Gubaidulina shows a strong gravitation toward the legacy of Bach, whose music was similarly grounded in his faith. Despite the ultimate optimism of both composers’ belief systems, a profound sense of humanity’s fallen condition resonates through the music of Gubaidulina and Bach alike.

Gubaidulina’s view of the human condition involves acknowledging a state of pain and suffering that keeps us searching for harmony and redemption—for a way of being “recomposed.” This concept lies at the heart of *Offertorium*, Gubaidulina’s first concerto for violin. It was inspired by the religious symbolism she associates with the act of performance. “An instrument is a living being,” the composer has noted. “All the echoes of our subconscious are invested in it. When a finger touches a string or a bow touches the bridge, a transformation occurs; a spiritual force is transformed into sound.”

It was an encounter with the pioneering Latvian violinist Gidon Kremer, whose style of “self-surrender to the tone” Gubaidulina admired, that prompted the idea of writing *Offertorium*. In the late 1970s, the two chanced to share a cab ride, and the violinist asked the composer to write a concerto for him. Kremer subsequently became one of Gubaidulina’s principal champions, winning her international attention after many years as a marginalized artist in the Soviet Union. The score of *Offertorium* initially had to be smuggled out to the West for its premiere in Vienna in 1981.

*Offertorium* contains multiple layers. The title immediately alludes to Christian liturgy, when the Eucharistic bread and wine are brought to the altar. At the same time, it also refers to *The Musical Offering*, the complex instrumental collection that Bach, near the end of his life, created using a theme provided by the Prussian King Frederick the Great. The same musical theme provides the central material for Gubaidulina’s concerto. The theme plays the role of “sacrificial victim,” dramatizing a purely musical Passion story as it is “offered” up in the course of the concerto, only to be resurrected and transformed into something astonishingly new.

### Listening guide

*Offertorium* is designed as a single, vast movement in which three sections are joined seamlessly together. Stated at the outset is the “King’s theme,” the theme invented by Frederic the Great—except that it is missing its final note. At precisely this point, the solo violin enters, fixating on the unfinished cadence. Gubaidulina then offers the theme by methodically paring it down, shearing away one note from either end as the theme cycles through a series of variations.

The successive shrinking of the theme continues until only one note is left. Along with these transformations, Gubaidulina focuses great attention on orchestral timbre. Changes in the coloration and density of the sound become just as important to the musical development.

A fantasia filled with cadenza-like passages for the violin unfolds at the center of the concerto. The theme, now deconstructed, or sacrificed, lurks as ghostly presence. Eventually, a process of rebirth begins that reverses what happened in the first part. Building outward from the middle, note by note, harps and piano present a new theme. It is the original “King’s theme,” but now played in reverse. Music reminiscent of a Russian Orthodox hymn provides the backdrop. In the final gesture, the solo violin comes to rest on a soaring high D—fulfilling the atonement Gubaidulina has enacted in *Offertorium*.

**First performance:** May 30, 1981, in Vienna, Austria, Leif Segerstam conducting the ORF Symphony Orchestra, with Gidon Kremer as soloist

**First SLSO performance:** This weekend’s concerts

**Scoring:** solo violin, 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, 5 bongos, chimes, crotales, glockenspiel, marimba, snare drum, 3 suspended cymbals, tam tam, temple blocks, 5 tom toms, triangle, vibraphone, whip, 3 wood blocks, xylophone, 2 harps, piano, celesta, strings

**Performance time:** Approximately 40 minutes

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## ANTON BRUCKNER

**Born** September 4, 1824, Ansfelden, Austria

**Died** October 11, 1896, Vienna, Austria

## Symphony No. 7 in E major

### A Dream and an Elegy: Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony

While Gubaidulina often works with elaborate theoretical frameworks, sometimes with complex numerical calculations, to structure her compositions, she also relies heavily on her creative intuition. Intuition played a particularly important role in the genesis of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony, composed between 1881 and 1883. Anton Bruckner recalled to the conductor Hans Richter, one of his major advocates, that the Symphony’s luminous opening theme had occurred to him in a dream about his mentor from long ago, Ignaz Dorn.

A violinist, conductor, and composer, it was Dorn who encouraged Bruckner to compose symphonies and delve into the music of Richard Wagner, which he felt was the music of the future, and who quickly became a musical idol for Bruckner. In the dream, Dorn was playing a theme for him on the viola and advised the composer: “This melody will bring you success.” And so, according to Bruckner’s account: “I immediately woke up, lit a candle, and wrote it down.”

The prediction proved accurate. The Seventh Symphony marked a turning point in the reception of Bruckner's music. For the most part, his adopted city, Vienna, had been indifferent to his symphonies; some of his premieres there were even humiliating failures. First unveiled in Leipzig, the Seventh was subsequently introduced to Munich, and there garnered an enthusiastic response that signaled a dramatic turnaround in Bruckner's international reputation.

Yet another important intuition relates to the Seventh Symphony, a dark counterpart to the dream story of liberating creativity, centering around the intuition of impending death. In 1882, while attending the premiere in Bayreuth of Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*, Bruckner met his beloved Wagner for the last time. He recalled the latter's final words to him: "Be calm, Bruckner. Goodnight!!!"

While finishing the Seventh's elegiac Adagio, Bruckner learned the news of Wagner's death. The fact only confirmed what he had already felt. "One day I came home and felt very sad," he later wrote. "The thought had crossed my mind that before long the Master would die, and then the C-sharp minor theme of the Adagio came to me."

Mere weeks after completing his Sixth Symphony, without even having heard that vastly different composition in performance, Bruckner started composing the Seventh. Bruckner's outlook in the Seventh Symphony suggests a newfound sense of confidence, as demonstrated by the score's richly varied orchestration.

Like *Offertorium*, the Seventh is abundant in knowing musical references. Their presence adds weight to one interpretation of the Seventh overall as an elegy for Wagner. Allusions to the *Ring* cycle extend to the orchestration: for the first time in his symphonies, Bruckner uses the mellow sonority of the so-called Wagner tuba (an innovation by that composer) to enrich the brass section. Another tack comes from Beethoven's Third Symphony, "*Eroica*." If the Adagio corresponds to the Funeral March of Beethoven's *Eroica*, the entire span of the Seventh might be interpreted as celebrating a heroic life, the famous project of Beethoven's Third.

Two more thematic groups follow. Bruckner explores these ideas from various angles, revealing new facets, as in the mighty darkening when the main theme is inverted and transposed to the minor. The coda reverberates with prolonged ecstasy.

### Listening guide

Vast and spacious, the theme sounds as if it has always existed. Its aura is indeed dream-like, serenely beckoning the listener to cross a threshold into a different dimension.

The first movement, an enormous structure in itself, transforms the secular idiom we normally associate with the concert hall into a language that feels sacred. Against a brushing of strings, the Seventh begins with the theme imparted by Bruckner's dream.

The theme spans a wide arc yet has a curiously airy lightness. Instead of building it piece by piece, Bruckner presents the theme whole and serene. It unfolds into a sense of enormous scale. Two more thematic groups follow before the main theme is developed and considered from a variety of angles, eventually returning to the home key in the coda.

Following the model of the Adagio of Beethoven's Ninth with its structure of alternating variations, Bruckner contrasts the solemn, chorale-like opening with a

lyrically flowing theme first played by the strings. At the climax of the movement, the opening music returns, transfigured into the blazing C major of Siegfried's Funeral March from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. In the last pages—the music Bruckner wrote after actually learning of Wagner's death—funereal grief resolves into calm acceptance.

The first two movements are built on a similarly monumental scale. Recalling the effect of the movement that follows the Funeral March in the *Eroica*, the Scherzo here pulses with life-giving energy. These are Bruckner's elemental forces at their most playful. Though the music is in A minor, the effect is exuberant. The leisurely Trio at the center suggests a trip back home to the country. The finale, too, is relatively compact, yet it provides a satisfying sense of fulfillment by opening with an idea that mirrors the contours of the dream theme. That identity is radiantly affirmed in the final moments, when the first movement theme blazes forth one final time.

**First performance:** December 30, 1884, in Leipzig, Germany, Arthur Nikisch conducting the Gewandhaus Orchestra

**First SLSO performance:** December 1, 1939, Vladimir Golschmann conducting

**Most recent SLSO performance:** November 19, 2011, David Robertson conducting

**Scoring:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 4 Wagner tubas, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle, strings

**Performance time:** Approximately 1 hour and 4 minutes

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*Notes by Thomas May*

*Thomas May is a freelance writer, critic, educator, and translator whose work has been published internationally. He contributes to the programs of the Lucerne Festival as well as to The New York Times and Musical America.*



## **RAFAEL PAYARE**

Edna W. Sternberg Guest Conductor

The 2019/2020 season will mark Rafael Payare's inaugural season as Music Director of San Diego Symphony. His profound musicianship, technical brilliance and charismatic presence on the podium has elevated him as one of the most sought-after conductors. He was Principal Conductor and Music Director of the Ulster Orchestra from 2014–2019 with whom he appeared twice at the BBC Proms in 2016 and 2019. The Orchestra recently named him Conductor Laureate in recognition of his vast artistic contribution to the Orchestra and City of Belfast during his five year tenure.

During the 14/15 season he made his acclaimed debut with the Vienna Philharmonic conducting concerts at the Vienna Musikverein and Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris, and returned in June 2018 to conduct them at the Vienna Konzerthaus, along with a Baltic tour with mezzo-soprano Elina Garanca. Other highlights have included engagements with the London Symphony Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Staatskapelle Dresden and Deutsche Symphonie Orchester Berlin.

The current season will see return visits to the Munich Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, NHK Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal, and NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester. He also makes his debuts with Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchester and Boston Symphony Orchestra. In 2017 he was named Honorary Conductor of Sinfonietta Cracovia and conducted part of their 25th anniversary concerts in September 2019. Soloists with whom he has enjoyed collaborations include Daniil Trifonov, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Gil Shaham, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Nikolai Lugansky, Christiane Karg, Alisa Weilerstein, Nikolaj Znaider, Piotr Anderszewski, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Sergey Khachatryan, Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman and Dorothea Röschmann.

As an opera conductor, he made his acclaimed debut at Glyndebourne Festival in 2019 conducting Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and has conducted *Madame Butterfly* and *La Bohème* for Royal Swedish Opera and a new production of *La Traviata* at Malmo Opera. In July 2012, he was personally invited by his mentor, the late Lorin Maazel, to conduct at his Castleton Festival in Virginia and in July 2015 he was appointed Principal Conductor and conducted performances of

Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* and a performance of Beethoven Symphony No. 9 in memory of Lorin Maazel.

Born in 1980 and a graduate of the celebrated El Sistema in Venezuela, Payare began his formal conducting studies in 2004 with José Antonio Abreu. He has conducted all the major orchestras in Venezuela, including the Simón Bolívar Orchestra. Having also served as Principal Horn of the Simón Bolívar Orchestra, he took part in many prestigious tours and recordings with conductors including Giuseppe Sinopoli, Claudio Abbado, Sir Simon Rattle and Lorin Maazel.

In May 2012, Payare was awarded first prize at the Malko International Conducting Competition.

This weekend's concerts are Payare's debut with the SLSO.





## BAIBA SKRIDE

Ann and Paul Lux Guest Artist

Baiba Skride's natural approach to her music-making has endeared her to some of today's most important conductors and orchestras worldwide. She is consistently invited for her refreshing interpretations, sensitivity, and delight in the music. The list of prestigious orchestras with whom she has worked includes the Berliner Philharmoniker, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Boston and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, New York Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Orchestre de Paris, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and NHK Symphony. Notable conductors she collaborates with include Marin Alsop, Christoph Eschenbach, Edward Gardner, Susanna Mälkki, Andris Nelsons, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Andris Poga, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Tugan Sokhiev, John Storgårds, and Juraj Valcuha.

In summer 2019, Baiba Skride appeared at Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal's Classical Spree festival in multiple concerts, followed by her return to the Grafenegg Festival with the Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich, as well as chamber music performances at the Schubertiade Schwarzenberg, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Gewandhaus Leipzig. Her 19/20 season began with a season opening concert with the Residentie Orkest as part of her residency, which sees her return to the orchestra with three different concertos throughout the season. She also looks forward to the world premiere of the Victoria Borisova-Ollas violin concerto with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra followed by premieres with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican. Further highlights include the Dutch premiere of Sebastian Currier's violin concerto at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, concerts with the hr-Sinfonieorchester Frankfurt, at the Philharmonie Cologne and Philharmonie Berlin on tour with the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Staatskapelle Weimar, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Swedish Chamber Orchestra, and Iceland Symphony Orchestra. In the US she gives her debut with The Pittsburgh Philharmonic and returns to the Oregon Symphony Orchestras.

Baiba Skride is a sought-after chamber musician internationally and commits to the long-established duo with her sister Lauma. As one of the founding members

of the Skride Quartet, she embarked on the quartet's first Australian tour in November 2019. In 2020, invitations continue to take the Skride Quartet to the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Sociedad Filarmónica de Bilbao, Harvard Musical Association Boston, and Schubert Club St. Paul. In 19/20, Baiba Skride also performs in duo with Martin Stadtfeld, in trio with Daniel Müller-Schott and Xaiver de Maistre, and in quintet with Alban Gerhardt, Brett Dean, Gergana Gergova, and Amihai Grosz.

Baiba Skride is anticipating the release of her Bartók recording with the WDR Sinfonieorchester and Eivind Aadland, adding to her prolific discography including her recently released American disc featuring Bernstein, Korngold, and Rózsa with the Gothenburg Symphony and Tampere Philharmonic Orchestras under the baton of Santtu-Matias Rouvali and the debut recording of the Skride Quartet, all under the Orfeo label.

Skride was born into a musical Latvian family in Riga where she began her studies, transferring in 1995 to the Conservatory of Music and Theatre in Rostock. In 2001 she won the 1st prize of the Queen Elisabeth Competition. Baiba Skride plays the Yfrah Neaman Stradivarius kindly loaned to her by the Neaman family through the Beare's International Violin Society.



## SOFIA GUBAIDULINA

Sofia Asgatovna Gubaidulina was born October 24, 1931, in Tschistopol, a small town on the Volga in the Tatar Republic of the USSR. Her father was Tatar, but her mother was Russian and Russian is her native language. When she was small, the family moved to Kazan. She graduated from the Kazan Conservatory in 1954, before transferring to the Moscow Conservatory, where she finished in 1961 as a post-graduate student of Vissarion Shebalin.

In the Soviet period she earned her living writing film-scores, while reserving part of every year for her own music. She was early attracted to the modernist enthusiasms of her contemporaries Schnittke and Denisov but emerged with a striking voice of her own with the chamber-orchestral *Concordanza* (1970). During this period she built up a close circle of performing friends with whom she would share long periods of improvisation and acoustic experiment. Out of these experiences came many works, such as the Concerto for Bassoon and Low Instruments (1975, for the bassoonist Valery Popov), *The Hour of the Soul* (1976, revised 1988, for the percussionist Mark Pekarsky with voice and orchestra) and ground-breaking pieces for the accordionist Friedrich Lips like the frequently played *De Profundis* (1978).

From the late 1970s onwards Gubaidulina's essentially religious temperament became more and more obvious in her work. Already in Soviet times, when the public expression of religious themes was severely repressed, she was writing pieces like the piano concerto, *Introitus* (1978), the violin concerto for Gidon Kremer, *Offertorium* (1980, revised 1986), and *Seven Words* for cello, accordion, and string orchestra (1982, published in the USSR under the non-religious title: *Partita*). Since the arrival of greater freedom under Gorbachev, religious themes have become her overwhelming preoccupation. Many of her religious works are on a large scale, including a cello concerto inspired by a poem about the Last Judgement (*The feast is in full progress*, 1993), *Alleluia* (1990), for chorus and orchestra, a concerto for cello and chorus for Mstislav Rostropovich, and the colossal *Passion* according to St. John (2000), a German commission to celebrate the Millennium, given its first performance by the soloists, chorus and orchestra of the Kirov Opera conducted by Valery Gergiev.

Much of Gubaidulina's more recent work also reflects her fascination with ancient principles of proportion such as the Golden Section. This is particularly clear in her chamber cantatas, *Perception* (1983) and *Now always snow* (1993) as

well as in orchestral pieces like *Stimmen... verstummen...* (1986), *Pro et Contra* (1989) and *Zeitgestalten* (1994), this last being written for Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gubaidulina has lived in a small village outside Hamburg, Germany, where she delights in the peace and quiet she needs to fulfil the huge number of commissions she has received from all round the world.

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