

**INTERVIEW WITH ANNA SUTYAGINA FOR MOVING CLASSICS TV
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1. What does music mean to you personally?

Art in general, and Music in particular are human enterprises of exploration, just as much as Science. The inner universe of man is very complex and paradoxical, and it requires constant clarification. Music, being abstract, is the art furthest removed from physical reality, and the best suited to explore, describe, clarify, and also heal and inspire the human soul.

Surely there is folk music, which is more directly related to everyday life, and there are the many utilitarian uses of music, but the ideal of the musical art is and always will be an expression of the soul and its place in the Universe.

A realization of the ultimate meaning of life is not something that can be fully expressed in words, however the very highest manifestations of Art Music can lead to and induce such a state of consciousness.

We could even say that the Art Music of the West is an existential system of theology, of meditation, parallel to the great philosophies of the East. Let us not forget that the Art Music of the West is a by-product of Christianity. The strong Hellenistic-philosophical background of Western Culture has had a decisive impact in the development of an Art Music that excels all others in its formal, intellectual complexity.

2. Do you agree that music is all about fantasy?

Here we are arguing semantics. Believing as I do, that Art-Music is an approach to the ultimate reality of Existence, I say, no, music is not about fantasy, it is about a Reality that is much more real than the ephemeral day-to-day in which we live. Now, from the point of view of the here and now reality, the ideal world portrayed by art may seem like a fantasy, but this view is only relative.

3. If you were not a professional musician, what would you have been?

I think I would have been a research scientist, or a philosopher/theologian of some sort.

4. The audience for Classical Music is getting old. Are you worried about your future?

Yes. My worry is that constant technological and social change creates a “brave new world” every ten years. I worry about being able to master the new technologies as they arise, so I am not left behind.

For example, I am old enough to remember a world without cell phones, computers or Internet. These inventions have radically altered our perception of reality, and also precipitated social and political change, not always for the better. On one hand, we have had new developments like “El Sistema”; and also the continuing growth of Classical Music in East Asia. One can only be happy about the vast numbers of young people in East Asia and in South America, who decide to study Classical Music.

5. What do you envision the role of Classical Music to be in the 21st century? Do you see a transformation of this role?

The role of Classical Music in the 21st century is to create a virtual sanctuary for people of all races, creeds and political persuasions, to come together and embrace their common humanity. This will be a reversal of the historical role that different styles of music played in their own time. Bach wrote just for the Church, Mozart wrote just for the Kaiser and his court, the romantics wrote for only themselves, and incidentally for their inner circle of friends.

The one artist from our historical past who anticipated this future role of music is Beethoven, especially in his Ninth Symphony.

6. When I say that Classical Music is searching for new ways, or that the Classical Music world is getting a new face, what would come to mind?

This statement has two meanings. Internally, composers and performers are constantly evolving in their understanding of their craft. Composers create new styles of music, and performers find new ways of interpreting their repertoire. Externally, the Classical Music community is awakening to the fact that our world is dramatically different from what it was, even twenty years ago; politically, socially, economically and psychologically; and that we must embrace the current reality, and somehow **find our place in it**, if we do not want to become irrelevant. Our survival depends on convincing the rest of society that **WE DO MATTER**. Of course, that includes an absolute refusal to ever **compromise our basic values**.

7. Do you think that the Classical Musician today needs to be more creative? What is the role of creativity in the musical process for you?

Absolutely. We cannot expect to continue to conduct our concerts the same way previous generations of artists did. This includes everything: What we wear on stage, the way programs are written, the way we speak to the audience, the repertoire selections we present, how do we relate to the press/social media. For example, the solemn formality of Classical Concerts during the first half of the

twentieth century is passé. Also, the concept of a narrowly defined Standard Repertoire, a list of pieces that everybody must play, if they want to be taken seriously by the (formerly) all-powerful music-critic-gurus at the newspapers. That is also passé. Let me qualify that. The notion of a Standard Repertoire has become more flexible, to include music by formerly neglected composers, who lived at the same time as the acknowledged masters of the Canon.

For performers, creativity in music can be a dangerous issue.

On one hand the performer has to interpret his repertoire creatively, but on the other hand, he has an artistic heritage to preserve, a legacy of many centuries, what we call the Historical Canon.

The wisdom is to know where to be creative, and where to be the preserver of the tradition. The rules of the style must be adhered to.

I would like to include an editorial here: Composers also are obligated to take into account the entire evolution of their art up to their time, no matter how much they wish to innovate. A composer does not live in a historical vacuum.

The greatest innovators in music history, people like Beethoven, Schumann, Debussy, Bartok, Schoenberg and Boulez, were also the most aware of the historical past. In this way, the collective artistic achievement of the generations becomes a repository of spiritual knowledge and faith, an immortal patrimony of the human race.

8. Do you think we musicians can do something to attract the younger generation to our concerts? How would you proceed?

There is much that we can do.

First of all, the guiding thought is to emphasize the human aspect of art, which is universal, and it is not subject to social or political change.

Second, there are aspects of youth culture that we should adopt in our approach, for example, a little more informality at the concert, the use of social media to advertise our product and build an audience, the use of computer-generated light shows in the background (why not?) the recitation of poetry in between Sonatas, the incorporation of dance and mime art, etc.

Let's face it, Classical Music is not for everybody, and it was never meant to be for everybody. That is OK. Plato and Shakespeare are not for everybody either. What we should aim for is that anyone on the planet, who desires to experience Classical Music should be able to do so, and that includes millions of people worldwide.

Again, when we start using new tools to reach the audience, we must make sure that our basic, fundamental values are never, ever compromised.

9. Tell us about your creative process. Do you have a favorite piece (written by yourself)? How did you start working on it?

My creative process may be a little different from that of most composers. I must confess that my compositions are not made deliberately, by a working process; the way a carpenter would make a table or a chair. My pieces come to me unexpectedly, and by the time I write that final double bar,

I am always surprised by how different was this experience from previous ones. Also, after a certain amount of editing and playing through the piece, somehow the music itself tells me not to add anything anymore because it is finished.

I do not decide when to stop editing, the music does.

Generally, I do not usually start with a melody or a motif. What happens is that a particular mood makes me think in a certain key, or mode, and for a period of time I improvise at the piano, or just hear an imaginary improvisation, while away from the piano.

For me, keys, or modes do have distinct meanings. Many different melodic fragments will come and go, till I settle on a meter, a tempo, a character.

Once I have a key or mode; with a time signature, a tempo, a character; then I can start to work, not before. The beginning of the work on any composition, whether large scale or miniature is always very slow and difficult for me. Little by little, the pace of the work speeds up, as if the composition itself now knows where it wants to go. Once there is a critical mass of musical ideas, let's say one or two pages of piano music at a medium tempo, the composition starts to compose itself.

You could say I am a composer who perceives the universe through Rhythm and Tonality. That means that I will express myself through Harmony and Rhythm, rather than through Melody. Large scale form, the fundamental structure, the *Ursatz*, is of paramount importance for me.

Of course, during the actual composition I still sing all the melodies to myself, to test them for naturalness: I prefer simple, direct melodic materials.

Your second question is difficult to answer, because I have been composing for several decades, and I really like most of my pieces.

Tentatively, my Piano Sonata # 1 from 1980, is my best work from my student years. It is a wild, virtuoso, turbulent neo-Romantic sonata, written by a 19-year old who still had dreams of an international pianistic career....

I started working on it after hearing the Piano Sonata # 1 by Alberto Ginastera, and I felt that I wanted to experience Ginastera's hard rhythms and Quartal Harmony, side by side with some other musical phenomena, such as a little neo-Romanticism, a few evocations of Jazz and Rock music.....

I played this Sonata to Vincent Persichetti, and the first thing he said was: "You are a composer. You have ideas".

My best work from my mature years is a setting of PSALM 133 for Soprano, Violin obbligato and Piano, which also exists in versions for String Orchestra and String Quartet.

I was already in my fifties, and at this stage of my life, I had given up trying to earn the approval of the arbiters of academic fashion, or caring about which musical styles were considered as the “authentic” voice of our time.

So, under the influence of Aaron Copland and Philip Glass (and, of course, J.S. Bach!) I wrote this piece in an incredibly conservative style.

But, like I said before, before those two milestones, I have composed hundreds of pieces, some really good, some just interesting, but I really like most of my material. If I don't like what I am composing, I certainly won't bother writing a whole piece!

10. We, Moving Classics TV love the combination of Classical Music with different disciplines: music and painting, music and cinematography, music and digital art, What do you think about these combinations?

I heartily approve of your procedures. In today's technological society, we must provide a stimulating experience; digital art and poetry can only help to make the message of the music come across better. Today's audience does not have the associations that previous generations had with the Classical Music Repertoire, they just come across a sound object, which has to be explained, illustrated for them. Painting, Poetry, or the reading from some Classic Essay on Aesthetics or Philosophy can only help clarify the historical context of the music.

Imagine if we could have a professional actor read some paragraphs from Emerson, Thoreau, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche between musical numbers....

For example, once we had a concert in which we read from Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus; there is a chapter there where Mann discusses Beethoven's Piano Sonata Opus 111 with great poetic and philosophical eloquence. After the reading, with short musical illustrations, I played the entire Sonata Opus 111.

11. Can you give some advice for young people who want to discover Classical Music for themselves?

This is a difficult question.. I believe that different people come to discover Music and Art for different reasons. One kind of advice that we could give is the scientific/medical one: Get involved in music and the arts, because scientific research has demonstrated that musical and artistic activity promote mental and physical health.

Another kind of advice, to the more psychologically inclined would be: Get involved in music and the arts because it will help you express yourself and grow as a person.

Finally, for those who are philosophically inclined we could say: Get involved in music and the arts because it will help you grow spiritually and even guide you in your search for the meaning of life.

12. These days it is common in the media to talk about Classical Music as a product that is consumed by the public, a business. Do you agree? We are speaking about the laws of supply and demand, and how to sell your “product” (in your case, your compositions) How do you see it?

The historical fact is that music, even Art Music, was always a product, made for the demands of the specific society in which it arose.

The ancient Greeks made music for their Olympic games, the Medieval Christian musician composed for the Church; the Renaissance, Baroque and Classical musician composed his music for the kings and the nobility: the Romantic musician, even if he professed to write for himself and his intimate circle of friends, always thought about the larger public out there, and about the publishers. Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert were all divinely inspired musical prophets, yet they had to think about money, and they did all they could to sell as much music as possible.

Of course, the artist has to have the integrity and the discipline to make sure that his Art fulfills the highest standards of perfection as he understands it, but once the work is done, he has to go out into the world and sell it. The musician, the artist should have an organic connection with the culture, the society he/she is a part of. The idea of the artist as living in his own world is nothing but a Romantic myth.

13. Do you have expectations regarding your listeners, your potential audience?

I do dream about making a spiritual connection with the audience, so that the inner meaning of the music will get through to them, and we will both transcend the specific time/space of the particular occasion.

My aspiration is to create music that will echo the thoughts and feelings of every member of the audience, an art that will be the voice of the people in our time, as filtered through my personality and my life history.

Of course, this is all too idealistic; so most of the time, I just hope the audience will be receptive and open minded.

I hope that if they perceive something unexpected in my work, they will take the

time to adjust to what is being offered, in good faith. The way to really know if the composition has reached the audience, is if they tell me that they want to hear it again. Once I wrote a String Quartet for amateur players, and they played it three times in a row!

14. What projects are coming up? Do you experiment in your projects?

I am planning to compose an album of short easy pieces for piano solo, that can be useful for students and older amateurs. Also, there are plans for choral pieces a Capella, and some chamber music for woodwind ensembles. Instead of composing new piano pieces, I am now revising so of my earlier works.

Moshe S. Knoll
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